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

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 three 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.

12-15-06
Date

[redacted]

Bernard L. Gibson

A product of the Baltimore Public School System, and a 1971 Graduate of Baltimore City College High School, where he played Varsity Football and Baseball. In 1975 he Graduate from Morgan State College and was commissioned a 2nd Lt., in the Army Medical Service Corps. During his military career he served as an Ambulance Platoon Leader, Motor Officer, Medical Supply Officer, as well as Executive Officer of a MASH unit. He later served as the Executive Officer for the Community Mental Health facility at Bassett Army Hospital, Fairbanks, AK. He's served in Alaska, Europe, Japan Panama, Grenada, Central America, and was called back to active duty for Desert Storm. He left the military as a Major with his Airborne Tab, Expert Field Medal Badge, Jungle School and Cold Weather Badges. He now works for the Balto. City Health Department as the Community Health Liaison Officer for the Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Bureau of Disease Prevention and Control. At this point in his 12-year career with the BCHD, he is responsible for the STD/HIV education in Baltimore City High Schools with School based Clinics, local Colleges, and Community Based Organizations, an Adjunct Instructor at the STD/HIV Prevention Training Center, and Liaison Officer for the BCHD Syphilis Elimination Program. He earned his Masters in Human Services in 2003 from Sojourner- Douglass College here in Baltimore, Md.

Transcript of first interview with Bernard Gibson
Friday, November 10, 2006

Lyle Stalter: I'd like to get an idea of just your boyhood memory really. Describe the neighborhood that you grew up in, as a boy in 1950's Baltimore. The social, economic dynamic. Anything that you can think of about the neighborhood. I, at first, just want to talk about the neighborhood as a young boy.

Bernard Gibson: Well, believe it or not it was a mixed neighborhood. And when I say mixed, until I got older, in junior high school was the first time I lived in a section a Baltimore or an area of Baltimore that was all African American families. When I ...my first impressions or first knowledge of self as a child, we lived in a mixed neighborhood where there were whites and blacks living side by side. I lived on 2001 Hargrove Street which was a street in between 20th &

21st street on one side and on the other side there was Calvert and Saint Paul Street so we had, like I said the community was mixed. The kids pretty much grew up playing ball, football, baseball together. We knew there were some differences. When I started school, I went to Saint Anne's, a parochial school of Saint Anne's Catholic Church which was on Greenmount and 22nd Street, which is still there today. I went there for a while and then I went to William H. Reinhart, which was PS136, which was at Howard and 24th Street, which is a church now. The unique thing about that school was that the bathrooms were outside. So even the 50's, when we had to go to the bathroom, it was one building that was broken down into female and male, and the bathrooms were outside. The closest school to me, other than the one that I went to was 53, which was Margaret, I can't think of what the .....I want say Margaret Hurt, but I may not be correct about that name. But that was right there on Saint Paul Street just above 25th Street. And that still exists as a school and that's where the majority of all of the white kids went, and of course it had indoor plumbing. The other unique thing about that is when quote-unquote white kids that maybe have been a discipline problem or something like that, they usually wound up at 136, my school. So, there were some differences. But as a kid you don't pick up on those things as much. My father was career Navy so he did six months at sea and then was home and ....so I guess pretty much my time was spent, you know waiting for him to get home on shore leave and, you know, spend that quality time. I remember my mother used to take me downtown. There was a large five and dime store right off of.....not Park Avenue, it must be Saratoga. And she used to always buy me lunch and sometimes I didn't want lunch. But she made a big deal out of me eating at the counter and I didn't realize that until much later that the reason why she did that was because that lunch counter had just integrated where blacks could set and eat. But I didn't know what was going on because I remember telling her sometimes I didn't want to eat, you

know “I’m not hungry!”...but she’d say “Here sit there and eat” so I’d either have a hot dog or grilled cheese sandwich or whatever I wanted at the time. But she would never set and I would say to her, they had the little round swivel chairs, “there’s a chair right here” and you know I never understood why she wouldn’t, but she made sure that I did. There were things like that going on that, you know as kid, you didn’t realize why they were that way but, you know, as you got older you began to see things and question or pretty much answer some of those questions to yourself. But growing up, I guess as an average lower middle class family for , you know, the time. I remember we shopped on Greenmount Avenue and every now and again when my father was home, we’d go to Wilson’s Restaurant, which was at Pennsylvania Avenue and North. That was like the premier three star, four star black restaurant in the city and it was diagonally across the street from the Met theater, which was the premier black theater in the city. Which, ironically, when I started working for the Health Department, my first site was at 1515 West North Avenue, which is right across the street from where the Met theater used to be and horizontal to where the Wilson’s Restaurant used to be, so things go around just like a circle. I remember going there , to Wilson’s, because my father taught cooking in the Navy, he was a chef and he knew some of the people that worked at Wilson’s and so like they would make a big deal out of when he came into town and stuff and we would go and wanting to bring things out for him to taste or invite us back to the kitchen or something like that. Although we weren’t a political family like the Murphy’s or the Mitchell’s or things like that , I guess because he was career military and that was considered a federal job like a teacher or post office or something like that we had garnered some...and my sisters went to Saint Francis Academy when it was an all girls school, the one down here by the jail. So, I guess we were considered pretty well-off and I basically grew up hearing stories from him about the war because he went in the service during

World War II and he worked at North Avenue Market before he went in the service. My father's family, the ones who went to college, graduated from Howard, my mother's family from Morgan. And my father, during his junior year at Howard, for some reason ....left. And to this day nobody in the family knows why, what happened. So he started working at North Avenue Market and it was ironic because he had three years of college and he was there working, managing a raw bar, shucking oysters and doing things like that. When the war broke out, he went along. You know it was a big thing because the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and everything like that and his first impressions were when he went.....he used to tell this story a lot.....that they asked why was he there, you know, they thought that was, you know, this black guy here wanting to join up and everything like that, and he said because he thought it was one of the greatest things in the world they were going to allow him to kill white people and not get in any trouble by it. Of course he wanted to go fight the Germans and he said that he thought that kept him from getting drafted for a whole year. He said he swears to this day that they put something in his record. So he didn't get drafted for a whole year after that and when he did get drafted they put him in the Navy and, of course, a black man in the Navy during those days could only be a cook or a steward or a orderly. So that's why he wound up being a cook. And before he retired, he had cooked for Nimitz and he last general officer or fleet officer was Zumalt, Admiral Zumwalt. So he had cooked for both of them. And, again, like I said he was appointed one of the cooks at Treasure Island , which was the Navy's cooking school.

Lyle Stalter: Along those lines, tell us about your family. You said you had some sisters as well. Describe what members, I don't know if you had anybody else living in you household, grandmother or anything, but your household as well as your father and sisters and mother.

Bernard Gibson: My father was one of sixteen children. And my mother's family was just really my mother, her mother and her father. My father's family, my grandmother's name was Missouri Savage and she was part Indian and I don't know what tribe or anything like that. But my great-grandfather and two of my great uncles on my father's side were in the Ninth Calvary. And on my mother's side, my grandfather, my grandmother's husband, was in the Tenth Calvary. So the family's been in I would say pretty much The Indian Wars all the way up to present day. I have two cousins that graduated from West Point in '68 and that's part of the reason why Stephen had asked me to speak because I ran into one of them during the riots. He was on patrol with the 82nd but I have, my godfather is a retired Air Force General. I have one uncle who was a Tuskegee Airman. So it's a military family. Everybody in the family has pretty much been in the military. And my sisters have just some uniqueness. My sisters also happen to be my .....They're my half-sisters but they're also my second cousins because when my ...their mother died she was mother's cousin and my father met my mother at their mother's funeral...so, that's a whole nother story right there worth probably doing an interview about. But anyway, I was the baby and I guess spoiled because I was the only boy. And again, you know, my father was the only enlisted man in the family during the...of the brothers...during the war. Everybody else was commissioned because everybody else finished school. So, that was always unique...to have family talks and arguments and so forth. But he always said that, you know, at that time, that was one of the few jobs that a black person could get that provided you with benefits and was stable and to a large degree you could move up on your own merit, you know, once Truman desegregated the military and stuff things did open up for him. As a matter of fact, when he left

he was a Chief Petty Officer, from just a steward so..start off as a steward ....he said that was a way to take care of his family and he didn't have any regrets behind it.

Lyle Stalter: And, if I'm right, that's the highest that an enlisted man can get, right?

Bernard Gibson: Yeah.

Lyle Stalter: Oh, as a boy, a young teenager, what were the social activities of the time? Just what you as kids did, what teenagers did, what your parents did, and even the elderly.

Bernard Gibson: It's funny, you know, when we were walking in with Stephen I was telling him I've been by this building so many times and this is the first time I've ever been in it. I've been to the Lyric numerous times and I've been over to Artscape, but to actually come into the University of Baltimore, this was a first. Where I grew up... when I grew up, Poly used to be on North Avenue. It's the Board of Education now. So, there was a lot across the street, they've redone it, but that lot used to be were they ....the baseball team used to practice. It was a hard surface lot so they just did fungo drills with the bats and stuff like that but their home field was at Herring Run. But that church there , Saint Michael's and All Angels at the corner of 20th and Saint Paul Street had the little league and I played little league ball for them. At that time we didn't have the Pop Warner football. That wasn't organized like it is now. Basically, I grew up playing football in the winter, street football, touch and flag. And in the summer, you know, baseball which was a whole lot more organized. I was in the Boy Scouts at the church. My elementary school, there's a church, Oak Street Church, right behind it on Howard and 24th

Street. It's a church for a vast time ...I can't think or pronounce.....MacKenzie I think was the bishop, first black bishop of A.M.E. church in Baltimore or something like that, but anyway, that...my elementary school they bought which was right next to it, so , like I said at the corner of 24th and Howard and ...I lost my train of thought there...So this area , I grew up around. I used to ride my bike and stuff down here and I things like that. It was certain places that we knew not to go, but you have to understand that this was the beginning of the civil rights era. Things were changing....so even though there was some subtle things...Again, as a kid ...you know, I firmly believe that you have to teach kids racism because , you know, we didn't really pay it any attention. We knew that ... the older I got, we grew further apart. But the kids I grew up with in elementary school level, white and black, there was no difference, you know. And when we got older we started hanging in different things because I guess the music changed, and then the equation of, when females came into the equation,. So that kind of separated us even more. So , but it was just certain places you knew you couldn't go but again, since I had grew up on some military posts and things like that and traveled, I never ....I could tell when somebody didn't.....I wasn't welcome so I didn't stay longer but I always felt like I had a right to go pretty much anywhere I wanted to go, you know, and so not that I was a crusader or anything like that ...stick my neck out but I was never a pacifist.

Lyle Stalter: Your father, being in the Navy, did you get a chance, like say, to travel and see a lot of different places than Baltimore? I mean, did you grow up on other bases or did you pretty much grow up in Baltimore?

Bernard Gibson: I pretty much grew up here, but...I was...Well, I was born in Hawaii. But my mother had high blood pressure so they shipped me back home so I grew up with my, well I didn't grow up, but like maybe the first three months until she was able to travel and come back home, I was with my aunt and uncle who are also my godparents. And my uncle, again, this is on my mother's side of the family, was a driver for the Red Ball Express, which was the black military unit that drove all the supplies and stuff in North Africa and Italy. So, like I said, the whole family is military and I think that had a lot to do with .....me feeling ...having a strong sense, I guess, of empowerment and having the right to be certain places and doing certain things. I remember seeing the kids fight in the alley ...the kids at Poly...when they integrated ..because I lived so close to it...on my way home. Black guys and white guys would , you know "I'll meet you after school" and they'd fight out in the alley, you know, and I would be privy to see that when I was in elementary and .....that caused a great distaste for me for Poly to this day, so I went to City.

Steven Dashiell: But you're going to be sitting on the Poly side tomorrow.

Bernard Gibson: Tomorrow, you know, generations. My youngest now goes to Poly. But....

Lyle Stalter: They play each other tomorrow?

Steven Dashiell: Uh-um...a bloodbath.

Bernard Gibson: Let me see what else....so, well places I've been....California, Hawaii, even though I don't remember Hawaii, ...Florida, Pensacola, Norfolk.....and the ...Brisbane...Naval yards up in I don't know if that's in Connecticut or Massachusetts.

Lyle Stalter: Did being in these...seeing, I guess the social dynamic of these other places, did that change your impression of Baltimore, for better or for worse?

Bernard Gibson: You know the majority of those times, I was still an infant and a toddler. My mother made my father promise that when I started school because my sisters went to Saint Francis and they stayed there even though we were native Marylanders. They went to the boarding school because, you know, their mother had died and everything like that and so forth and so on. So she made him promise that that wouldn't happen, per se, with me so we...when it's time for me to go to school we, I pretty much grew up here, you know, my impressions of...I remember going to those places to visit him but to be...this is like the summer vacation or a trip like that. So ....I thought the difference though in those places was seeing how life was different on the military base versus how it was in civilian life.....that, that comparison I can make more strongly. So...but living here in Baltimore at that time wasn't bad. The police walked the beat. You knew the police officer's name. Crime really wasn't that bad...nowhere near as bad as it is now. And pretty much everybody pretty much stayed in, you know, pretty much stayed in their...their respective places. I think things started changing in the sixties .....I remember freedom riders coming through Baltimore recruiting people. I was old enough to remember that. I was old enough to remember the sit-ins and things like that. You know, seeing that stuff on Eyewitness News. That's when they had Al Sanders and Wally Daniels....Channel 13, you know,

those old commentators. That's when the guy, Hurtz.....and.... that lady that works now on the cable channel, she used to do the weather. Now she does the PBS channel...They said "I'm Al and ..."

Steven Dashiell: Fican.

Bernard Gibson: Yeah, she was on and .....Colts, everybody closed down on Saturdays and Sundays when the Colts played and stuff like that. So that's pretty much, you know, Baltimore's kinda isolated. I mean we've always had a ..a large black population in Baltimore, even during slavery, you had a large free ...This is probably the largest free black population in a southern state. So , I guess people kinda, this was your part. We never went up to Remington, where they have all the Christmas lights and stuff...41st street. You just didn't go in that area if you black.

Lyle Stalter: Hampden?

Bernard Gibson: Yeah, Hampden. Some places you just didn't go. You didn't go up around the dell, to Wyman Park, up around John Hopkins, which I find funny now when they talk about the fraternity and stuff. So, certain places in Baltimore, as a black you knew you just didn't go. And those were two of the areas that I knew for sure that you didn't go to.

Lyle Stalter: You come from a military family. What were your family's expectations for you? You being the only boy, was it predestined to go into the military?

Bernard Gibson: Definitely go to college. Not so much to go into the military, but to go to college. Yeah, that was not an option, per se. My father died when I was in the seventh grade. He had gotten his lung punctured in Korea and eventually he got tuberculosis and so forth and so on. And he...to keep from going to the military hospital in Arizona, he opted to go to Mount Washington, Mount Wilson out here off of Reisterstown Road. It was a hospital for tuberculosis. And so he used his chances instead of going to a military hospital because he didn't want to be separated from us. But eventually, not right away, he came out of the hospital and so forth, but a couple of years later he died from complications of that. So they had to remove part, one lung. But , so yeah it was expected for me to go to college. I chose to go into the military. I think just hearing the stories from my uncles and things, it was quite, very... hearing from the ones that were in the Navy that could only be cooks and things like that, steamadors versus the ones that were in the Army, uncles with the 761st tank battalion with Patton, the Tuskegee airmen, versus the ones that were in the Army versus the ones that were in the Air Force, or the Army Air Force because they didn't have a separate air force then. So it was kinda interesting and if my eyes hadn't a went bad, I had decided that I was going to go in the Air Force ...I wasn't going to walk. I thought that that was the best opportunity and benefits was in the Air Force because you fly, and come back and go to sleep in a nice warm place, you know. But my eyesight, and....to me to go into the Air Force and not be a pilot was waste of time so...I went in the Army.

Lyle Stalter: You mentioned that your father died when you were very young. Did your family life change dramatically after that? Your responsibilities? Grow up a little bit quicker?

Bernard Gibson: Well, my grandmother lived down the street from me, She...I lived at 2001, she lived in 2009. So, my uncle was a custodian, her brother was a custodian out at Bryn Mawr School for Girls so by that time we had bought the house on 23rd Street, 307 East 23rd Street, which is in between Barclay and Guilford, and right around ....a little bit up the street around the corner from Saint Anne's Church, where I started school originally. So, he came in and took care of the maintenance and stuff like , of the house, my uncle. And I had the whole third floor to myself. This was when I was starting junior high school up through high school and college. And I had my own bathroom and everything up there so I was pretty much independent, but my father had made it a point that I work and again I think that this is another reason why Steven wanted me to talk about...asked me to speak was because I worked in one of the stores that got looted during the riots but I've always ...My parents took real good care of me but they insisted that, you know, I work. And the money was mine to do with whatever I wanted but just the sense of knowing that nothing came from nothing, you know, you didn't get anything for ...and so I was one of the fortunate kids because I didn't have....My sisters were so much older than me. They were grown while I was still in, you know, school. So that allowed me to pretty much have the run of everything and when we moved on 23rd Street was when I first moved into a totally all black neighborhood. And that area was basically school teachers, people worked in the Post Office, some of the men worked at the Point. But everybody worked. You know. I've never been in an environment where you had the quote-unquote "black matriarch" family. It wa salways both the mother and the father and both, at least one of the parents worked and if one of the parents worked, it was the father. And I know that the opposite existed but I didn't grow up in that type of environment. Our immediate supervisor's father was the pastor of the church across the street and my, another uncle was his assistant pastor, so I guess I grew up in a pretty upward

mobile family that expected, you know, me to do things...and to accomplish something. So..I went to Morgan only because they offered me an ROTC scholarship and I got accepted to a couple of other schools and Morgan had the best ROTC program so I went there. But I guess the most impressionable years, like I said, was the late, the mid and late sixties when the civil rights and things was going on.

Lyle Stalter: I wanted to ask ..When did you first become aware of the work that Dr. King was doing because most of it was really in the South? I don't know what kind of coverage it got how early. When did you first become aware and what were your first impressions of it?

Bernard Gibson: I think my grandmother, because my mother's family is Baptist, my father's family is Catholic so, you know, I used to make jokes. I don't think it was greatly appreciated. One side was the Ninth Calvary, the other side was the Tenth. The two black calvary units and they had to be one in the other .....anyway she had heard one of the .....I think Clarence Mitchell or something speak at Ebenezor Baptist Church about Dr. King or something like that and that's when I first heard about it. And that was when...I think I was maybe in the fifth grade, maybe fifth or sixth grade, something like that. But you have to understand that was also during the time when we started getting involved in Vietnam. We had just sent Marine advisors. So it was a lot of things going on, because of my background, that I was more involved in or more interested in...because coming from a military family, you know, because we didn't have that problem. Again, the movies started integrating but I never went downtown so I was quite satisfied with going to the Met on North Avenue. There was another movies alittle bit before you got to the

Met called the Riatta and then there was the Apollo over on Harford . These are the black theaters and they were all within walking distance of where I lived so, you know, I never felt .... I remember seeing, the big thing was seeing James Bond in *Goldfinger* talking about Pussy Galore, you know, that was a big thing for, you know, a pre-adolescent boy, you know. So..but I think things started changing then. You saw more people coming home complaining about certain slights and things like that. You know, that you'd never heard about. People...there was something going on. You know, and as a kid you could tell something was going on but you couldn't quite put your hand totally on it. Then we saw some of the things about .. I think what got us involved and upset was seein the ...sick the dogs and stuff on people on the news on TV. And I think most of the northern states or the border states, unless you actually lived in the south at that time or you had relatives down there, like a lot of kids went down south during the summer. They spent the South, spent the summer down south with relatives. I guess to stay out of trouble and nothing going on up in the city, and they would come back and say, you know, "I couldn't go to this store..or if we went in a store we'd have to stay together with our aunt." Where up here you could go in a store and, you know, pretty much do what you wanted to do. They saw the difference and they would come back and tell us, you know, the kids who didn't do that. But like I said, the few times that I ever went out of Baltimore was to be on the military posts and that didn't exist, you know, you could go anywhere you wanted ...on post. And even though some of those places were in the segregated south, so the post is like an oasis. Also the freedom riders were coming through recruiting people. I know some of the, a few of the teenagers that lived in the block that I kinda looked up to, they went with them on the freedom rides and things like that or went, you know, ...everybody was real excited about ...the first presidential election that I knew of anything about was John Kennedy...so, I was a history major,

I love history. So, you know, I knew a little bit, that World War II was like a turning point socially and ....again I , and it's not that I'd never been called a nigger or anything like that but, you know, like I said ...I'd either punch the guy out or we'd fight and...sometimes it wasn't even said that...It was said like kids say stuff to kids, you know. Even though it was a white kid saying it to me, that connotation that way because we grew up together. You saw the difference. Even though we went to....some of those guys went to City too. And I think, again, when you started dating was really when you started...you just stopped hanging together, you know. Interracial stuff back then was, you know, so...not that necessarily anybody wanted to, but that's when it really started hitting you. There were some differences and certain things wasn't going to stay the same, you know, like that. When you started doing more social things, youknow, going to dances and things like that. So, we ...and then the Black Panther movement...so, it's like I grew up right in that whole powder keg..Vietnam, civil rights, women's equality..you know, the pill was coming. That was a little bit later, but you know...women's equality, the ERA. And I remember Mahoney running for governor "Your home is your castle" and Wallace coming up when he ran and got shot up here. When he ran for president...that was very divisive for the city, you know, like "Your home is your castle", so ...remember when blacks wanted to move out from the inner city and so forth. And I have very mixed emotions about integration because I remember Pennsylvania Avenue right around...from North Avenue down to what is now Martin Luther King Boulevard being a very vibrant place. You had the Royal theater, which I saw James Brown, The Temptations, The Four Tops. The first riske' thing I ever did was see The Jewel Box Review, which was a show with female impersonators and there was only one guy and you had to guess who the guy was in the show. Everybody was a ....men dressed as women and one woman dressed as a guy, and that was the emcee at the end of the show, you'd find out. But I

mean, you know, so I snuck into to see that, but you know. You were supposed to be a certain age, you know, and that was a rites of passage ...when you went on your first date and stuff like that. For me the stadium was at 33rd Street, you know, the old stadium up there and...I remember going to safety patrol day. They used to have that every year. And the safety patrols could get into the ballpark for free. I was there the year that they...something happened with the escalators and a lot of kids got hurt and maimed...at 33rd Street ...and after that they closed the escalators and they cemented over the ramps so you just had the ramps to walk up...and took the escalators out....like the kids was crowding on the escalators...it was safety patrol day..and my mother lost her mind because they announced it on the news and she knew I had went, but, you know, it was alright. So, you know, those were the...and again, you heard about civil rights, you heard about some things, we heard about George Mahoney, we heard about Wallace and stuff like that but, again, you were looking at it on the news and I think more than anything the majority of the blacks my age here in Baltimore were mad. Because we didn't know about ....we'd say "Why did they put up with that?", you know, "Why didn't they fight these people back?" or things like that. So, it was ...it was a funny kind of time because a lot of us were saying, even though the civil rights movement was making an effect, having an effect and stuff like that, I think a lot of us was leaning more towards maybe the Black Panthers than the ...Dr. King and the nonviolent thing because we had never grown up in that ...that environment where we couldn't ...that we knew....we never faced those limitations, here in Baltimore...that, that greatly. But I'm sure there's other people because I remember them picketing Gwynn Oak Park, which was the amusement park here in the city because they didn't want blacks to ...couldn't. And I remember actually friends of mine going out there to picket after school and stuff like that. But it was never something serious or life threatening. If they didn't want us to go, it was kinda "alright, we'll go

out and picket". One of those type of things. Not that we didn't take it serious but it's like, like you know, you put money in the plate at church, you know what I mean " I'd rather go buy a soda or a hamburger or something but you know, I know I'm supposed to be doing something I'm doing". That type of thing, more than being really politically aware. People didn't become politically aware, I think, or really black-white issue until Dr. King got assassinated.

Lyle Stalter: In your family, did your parents or the adults when you were younger talk about politics openly...in front of the children, at the dinner table?

Bernard Gibson: They talked about it a lot. I remember Steven, Sheridan and another friend of ours , Kevin Robinson talking one day at work and I was saying that there's a movie U-51. It's about Americans that captured a German submarine. But it's a black guy who's the cook that's on the boat. But anyway, and he tells the white officer that doesn't get promoted "I knew you didn't get promoted, you know, and I'm sorry about it" and he says "You knew, and before I did?" He says "Because they say things around me because they don't feel like I exist, so they don't care." It's not like we're not gonna talk because Steven might tell'em. Because Steven doesn't, you know, he ain't important so we can say ...eh. I remember my father saying things like that ....That they would talk about the Jewish officers or they'd talk about some of the southern officers from some of the northern officers from Ivy League schools look down on them and things like that. He said that.....He told me not to go into the Navy. He said if you go in the service, I have no problems with that, you probably are, but remember one thing, there's only so many places you can hide on that ship before they find you. So if you're gonna go in the service, go in the Air Force, the Marines or something. So if you do go AWOL, at least you can

keep going, you know. He said everybody that was reported, that fell overboard in some storm, didn't fall. He told me that when he asked to learn how to shoot the guns, they taught him how to do it, the anti-aircraft, out of a joke. But when they got to some of these islands, because the people were dark, people of color, they really didn't know how they were gonna be received because the Japanese had occupied the islands for so long. And he said they would give them guns and some of them said "None of those guys know how to shoot". But they would send them out because their, you know...And he said the Polynesians had white hair, or hair, you know, your texture hair, they were just our...so it was like two cultures, you know, and they just assumed because they were all people of color that they would automatically get along. And so , he said that he would volunteer to take coffee up during general quarters because the guys would be down there, he said the black guys would be singing hymns and crying and ..and the Puerto Ricans , well he didn't know what they were saying 'cause they were talking and...he'd say "the hell with this, if the ship's gonna get hit, I want to be on top so when everybody else jumps off, I know when to jump off too, instead of cooking down there and the water rising." So, I think that's why he rose up so high 'cause they thought that was brave. He said "Hell no, I want to leave when everybody else leaves!". So, so yeah they talked about racism. They talked about how my uncle's unit was one of the ones that opened up one of the P.O.W. camps but they never gave them any credit for it, you know, it was one of the black tank units with Patton that found one of the P.O.W. camps but really ticked 'em off was Veteran's Days, and things like that because they never gave the black soldiers in World War II any credit. You know, you heard about the Red Ball Express and that was pretty much it, you heard about the Tuskegee Airmen, but everybody wasn't ....to relegate all the black soldiers during World War II were not truck drivers and steamadors and laborers. There were combat units who had good records. My

grandfathers were in World War I and they, before they died, I heard the same thing from them. You know, and so I remember my grandfather said that at the beginning of World War I, they disbanded the Ninth and Tenth Calvary and they were the best calvary units in the world, compared to European calvaries the were the best, because they had fought the American Indians and the American Indian was the best calvary. So, we beat them, you know. But they disbanded them because they didn't want...I guess in a end to round way, I found out about racism. My senior paper for my ROTC topic at Morgan was what to do with the black soldier after the Post Civil War and from some of the documents and things I read, because we had access to military libraries and things. The standing policy was to send 'em out west and we were expanding to the Pacific then, there was nothing to hold us back because the war had ended and they felt like one of two things would happen. There would be a wedge drawn between the free slave and the American Indian, which a lot of people feared. They didn't want them to hook up together. And either the Indians would kill off the free blacks or the free blacks would kill off the Indians. One way we resolve one problem. And that's when I got inducted in the National Honor Society and got all that kinda good stuff. The Daughters of the American Revolution gave me the award and .....you know, the papers was right there, I mean, in was clear black, you know, that they were so blatant behind it that they wrote it , you know, but ....That's when I began to, you know what I'm saying. That's when I began to truly really understand the civil rights movement because, like I said, I never grew up in that type of environment. I worked at ....the store that I worked at was a pharmacy on Saint Paul and 21st Street. And I used to carry the...people call in their prescriptions and stuff and I used to deliver 'em and stuff like that, clean the store. It was owned by a Jewish pharmacist who wanted me to go to pharmacy school as a matter of fact. Dr. Schumer. And, never had any, again, any problems or anything like that and I worked for ....I worked there for

like maybe the whole time I was in junior high school and ...But his store was one of the stores that was gutted and broken into during the riots. And I think a lot of that was ....anger. And I sometimes say even though there was a lot of property damage, as far as stores and things like that, the people were....those stores were a buffer. Because I think if those stores hadn't been there and the people couldn't take their frustration and anger out on that, and loot them, I think there would have been more personal violence between the races. So those stores kinda, you know, instead of "Let's go out to Remington" or places in Baltimore that were still predominantly white, let's ...by time we're tearing up this store and a lot of these stores had liquor in 'em and stuff like that. And free cigarettes, that kinda calmed people down, you know, I think if those stores hadn't been there, and been that buffer, it'd had been a lot more violent than what it was. And that's just my opinion.

Lyle Stalter: Right before Dr. King's assassination, you said it was a , you referred to it as a powder keg. Was that the general mood or was there any hope or was it despair?

Bernard Gibson: Not a powder keg in a sense that riots were gonna happen but you had gotten to a point with people, my generation, were kinda like " If we can get drafted and go to Vietnam, we were...". This was the first major wave of mass, a large majority of blacks going to college. So we were a little bit more ...We were starting to go to the...Before you could only go to Dunbar, Douglass, and Carver for high school. We could go now to Poly, City, the other schools and we were saying, you know, "Why are ...if we're gonna get drafted and have to do all this, and knowing our history, my parents

just happened to stay in the military but mostly everybody's father had been in the service, you know, even if they didn't go to war they got drafted during the war, and then Korea came right after World War II so it was a lot of people that had military experience and they were saying "No!", you know, the were less passive or less "let's just bide our time and things are gonna change" type people, So I think Dr. King in a sense, said "Okay". I think a lot of people said "Okay, we're gonna give it one more try". You know, as far as nonviolence, but my generation ...no, I don't think so. I don't think it would have been....I don't think we would have done it that way. And I'm not saying that... I think more things were accomplished after the riots than ever before. I think sometimes you push people back up against a wall and a lot of people woke up and said "whoa". You know, we've gone. We can't keep doing this cause at that time communism was saying "Why you fighting in Vietnam when , you know, you don't even have your own freedoms there?"and, you know, and America's saying they're coming over to free the iron, tear down the iron curtain and all that kind of stuff and blacks were listening to that. Malcom X became a world famous, instead of just a local leader, and younger blacks were saying "We've tried this", we...up until that time were the good minority, like the say about Asians now. You know, we did everything you want us to do and you still screwing over us and this next generation ain't gonna put up with that. So, I think the riots when they saw that we were willing to go that far, that things really started changing. And I think that was sad but America's a violent country so Violence is something that we recognize and can appreciate, unfortunately.

Lyle Stalter: And just to wrap up my segment, How did you first hear about the...everybody has that in their mind how they first heard about a traumatic event, how did you first hear about the assassination of Dr. King and what was your very first thought?

Bernard Gibson: I was coming home from work. You know, and I, again, I never thought about this until you just asked this question. During my lifetime, Malcom X got killed, John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, Dr. King, all that happened in my lifetime. So, that's interesting when you say that. When I heard it, I just ...I was sad and I was saying "You know, what else can we do?" I mean, I didn't know what was going to happen but, I mean, I just felt like, you know, here's a man trying to play the game your way and still, you know. So, for the first couple of days nothing happened, you know, immediately after his death. And then...I guess numb, I think everybody was. Either people were saying "I told you so" or "Nonviolence isn't gonna work". He was....even if you didn't agree with him, as a black person, you looked up tp him, or you respected him, even if you didn't agree with his philosophy. It was quite a few people who didn't agree with him, his philosophy. But the fact that he was the first, I guess maybe, second only to Frederick Douglass, black leader, it was a shock. And even as a kid, not really all the ramifications I guess, even to me it was a shock. I felt bad.

Lyle Stalter: But your first thought was that, that he was killed because of his political actions not ...Some assassinations we dismiss as kooks just ...John Lennon, Reagan....

Bernard Gibson: No! No black person at that time knew that this was not a....because he had been stabbed by that black lady in the movie theater, what was it, someplace in New York. She stabbed him with her fingernail file so it wasn't like this was the first time that he had been put in harm's way. We knew she was a kook, but when they said the situation when he was down there with the trash men. The again, television played a ...more so. So , we knew why he was killed. I mean it wasn't anything about this guy was a ...crazy like, I guess, the sniper or some of these other guys taht go around here killing people like Hinkley and stuff like that ...no. We knew that this was ...and ...was a conspiracy. We will probably never know all of the truth behind it. And, now taht part may not be true but that's how 99 and 9/10 of the black population
felt.

Lauren Colville

HIST 377-001

New South and Civil Rights

November 20, 2006

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Lauren Colville interviewing ***Mr. Bernard Gibson*** ,a Resident of Baltimore, Maryland during the riots after the assignation of ***Dr. Martin Luther King Jr***.

Lauren: Before I go into my questions, I wanted to go back to something that you said earlier, when you said that the school that you went to, the bathrooms were outside, and some of the white kids that I guess misbehave or whatever, got to go, they actually got to go to the school, or around there?

Mr. Gibson: You mean the same school that I went to? Yea these were kids that are like uh ha like bits of trouble makers, at 53 uh that was the, well black kids went to 53, the school that I went to 136 was predominantly black, we had white kids but those kids usually came from 53, because they got into trouble there.

Lauren: Uh ok so then you know I heard a lot of stories, about the signs, because since the freedom riders were still coming through, this is the time period where they were still trying to desegregate this and desegregate that, in the country, so then there were no signs up that says white only, you know blacks only, and stuff like that?

Mr. Gibson: There may have been but I don't remember because that is when I was in elementary school, you know um. You have to understand I grew up during all that, um in the 50's but um, because of the part of the city that I lived in a lot of things I didn't see, I knew that we couldn't go somewhat up and down, my sisters were at Morgan at that time, when I was in elementary school, and I knew they said that uh couldn't shop at Hecht company which

was right across the street from Morgan and Northwood and uh uh, you know uh um, and they eventually before they graduated they could do certain you know, but they still didn't feel uh comfortable eating at the counter even though they could, and so, I mean this big department store, here is a college with a coed college at that you know where you think they would be welcoming the business but you know,

Lauren: Right money is money!

Mr. Gibson: Yeah that took awhile to sink in.

Lauren: So let's go back, let's go to the day of the riot, and we are going to take it slow, so that I can try to picture that whole moment thing. And I believe if we talk about the weather, if you don't agree we don't have to. But what was the weather like on that day, and what exactly you know?

Mr. Gibson: It wasn't bad weather I mean like it wasn't raining or anything like that; uh I remember there was a lot of tension uh other cities had already started rioting, and uh people were on edge uh I think uh, Thereodore Mc killgun was mayor, I think he was mayor ah yeah.

Uh. And uh, people were just saying you know be calm be relax, a lot of people were still in shock. I found that you hear the news report, they kept showing uh, the scenes where every body were standing on the balconies saying they shot King and all that

kind of good stuff. Uh and uh again you know this; I grew up in a TV generation so every body was glued to the TV, uh and then all of a sudden you started hearing uh disturbances uh you know they flashing on the TV, and saying well you know there's been some trouble on this side of town and that part of town, and before the end of the night uh, you know things had started, it wasn't, it was sporadic and then it just escalated over the course of a couple hours, you know it wasn't something like all of a sudden everyone that was on the street went crazy, it was like maybe a couple people did something over here and you know depending how uh the news reported it, the more I think about it, if they had reported it different it may not have even spread as bad as it was, but they made it .

You know they were talking back and forth; they were doing this over here and doing this over here and people just got anxious I think that fed into. It's like how they do now with the elections, they say there not going to say who is winning, or predict because that makes people not go out and vote. You know the people say well that since he has already won, there is no need for me to go out and vote. People have cast there ballot and I think uh a lot of it had to do with the media, growing up to, there responsibility and how they reported things, how it got spreaded more, you know that uh add gas to the fire for lack of a better term.

Lauren: Yeah, kinda what they say, now but at the same time when you do have all the things that's going on, you want the media to report certain things and here it is they started reporting all this stuff and it's a yeah, so you, you're strong on the feeling that they helped to start that riot because it's two days afterwards right. So all is dead and quiet and all of a sudden.

Mr. Gibson: I mean in every reporting going on in other cities like Detroit, places like that, where there was much more serious uh property damage, and things like that than in Baltimore, and I think that helped fuel people, like you know uh you see people on TV, uh they interview people in the crowd and they say well you know all black people should be doing this that and help you know, there's fires in the background, so I think yeah that that did that did add to it. Because uh uh not saying that the people would have done it anyway, but am thinking uh maybe if the news media had handled it differently, it may not have escalated as bad as it did.

Lauren: Did you take part at all?

Mr. Gibson: Uh my parents wouldn't let me……laugh

Lauren: Laughs!

Mr. Gibson: Uh

Lauren: That military up bringing.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah! Uh that and the fact that uh you know I was in the eighth grade, eight or seventh grade some thing like that uh you

know uh college was looming and I realize that I probably have to get a scholarship, so you know criminal record wouldn't let me look that good. Uh it was one unique thing about it though I think the riots have, my parents had this thing about on uh trash can, when the trash man came we would wash the trash cans out, and uh I don't know why, that was before they had the plastic trash cans, they had the big metal ones. And um they just as you know um wash the trash cans out, so trash cans were always clean so uh people would um break into the stores and the police was trying to cover everything, and they would hide stuff in peoples trash cans and stuff.

Lauren: Laugh!

Mr. Gibson: So when they put stuff in our trash can I would hurry up and get it out the trash can and bring it into the house.

Lauren: Laugh!

Mr. Gibson: So I mean I guess if the police ever raided our house if they had raided then they would have known how we had all this contraband in there, yeah but they uh never did. You know, but my parents wouldn't let me uh go out and do that, that was. Yeah my father wouldn't let me go out tricker treating, he always felt that it was begging.

Lauren: But deep inside you wanted to?

Mr. Gibson: Uh!

Lauren: Did you actually want to though?

Mr. Gibson: I didn't want to loot! Uh, I was angry um and um maybe it was a good thing that uh they did uh, at that time my father was dead, but it was a good thing that my mother, my grandmother and my uncle uh, because I didn't see any sense, I was probably not one of a few who looked at it as uh anger, instead of uh sense of uh just to destroy property, to be doing something. And like I to this day uh and since Stephen asked me about participating in this project, I still feel that uh if those stores hadn't been there, there hadn't been a buffer of the uh retail district uh and people got side tracked, there anger was not directed at those stores and thing like stealing and stuff like that, there anger was directed at hurting people, then that would have been a race war, and I think if those stores hadn't been there, uh the way downtown was located ,like if you were to cross downtown, was right though the middle of the city and to keep the different areas, like the certain areas that were always white, certain areas that were always black, but downtown was right in the middle of it and I think if those places hadn't been there those little corner stores, were unfortunately where those people lost their businesses and things. But if they hadn't been there I think there would have been more physical violence directed to the people so in a sense that kind of side track people, hey I could get a case of this, or I could get free coats or I could get

you know and that kinda took away some of the peoples anger. Alright you understand.

Lauren: Yeah!

Mr. Gibson: It's like uh you wanna punch somebody out but somebody says we got free beer, you see what I mean.

Lauren: It's a television instead, laugh.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah! Imma get a couple of beers first, before I go, by the time you had a couple beers so aint so much want to punch somebody out you know. So I think um I don't think you ever going to talk to any merchant that lost his businesses would agree with that, but I think if uh if anything from this this project you may get more people who may see or who may think about say maybe put more thought into that cause the more you think about it that challenge a lot of rage, we knew where the white people lived, the white people knew were the black people lived. And uh uh a lot of white people uh took up arms they were scared you know they actually thought blacks were going to come in and pull them out of their houses and things like that uh uh a lot like the riots that they did for black people when they were going to uh um uh black towns and stuff like that, that you hear about uh I can't think of the names of any of them off the top of my head right now. But they were like certain places were blacks had prospered, race wise were

caught they were going and burnt everything and do that, so there was a lot of fear and I think in the uh.

I think white America even to some extent today still fears that uh black people wanna hurt them and uh that is not the case uh uh lord knows its been times history where we could have, or there could have been groups that we could of sided with uh uh Mexicans and Mexican American war the American Indians, were we could have side and things like that but I think we have always wanted to be Americans so therefore that animosity about well if they get to beef they are going to hurt us or do things the majority of blacks didn't want them or what they were looking for was uh better quality of life, you know so they they they never held that type of thing like when you get even that type of thing, even now when you hear about elections there is still a lot of whites would vote for a candidate because he is white and blacks would say well am not going to vote for this person because just because he is black I wanna vote for the most qualified person , so we we never taken that mentality now a lot of people thought we should a lot of people in the black community feels that way.

Uh I've talked to people or know people feel that way, but the majority of us feel that uh uh you know we are Americans whether we want to be or not and uh so there we don't take that nonsense but at that particular moment, I think that's the closest in

in this country except for maybe some of the race riot where they had following the word war I and some of the things that happened in world war II with the soldiers, uh that this country could have turned into a battle camp I mean you know everything that uh outside agitators at that time Russia was a super power and uh always predicted what happened at that moment for the first couple hours or maybe even first couple of days, America had the potential of becoming that giant racial war that you hear some of the people like the Klan and the panthers uh neo Nazis predicting this would happen, we were close it was like the human Cuban missile crisis uh that happen.

Lauren: You hear a lot about, I mean when they talk about the riots and they talk about the blacks, were they not any whites taking part in the riots to?

Mr. Gibson: Oh yeah! Um after a while it stopped being about Dr. King, I mean people lied and say oh yeah and it came just a chance to steal, uh I mean let's be perfectly honest, uh uh the black church uh was at it's peak then, probably the black church in America uh uh Anti Bellum black church and the reconstruction black church, were yet the strongest the civil rights. Man was the last great emphases of the black church, it hasn't been that strong since and the ministers are saying you know, and the older people were kinda

calming down the kids, and saying this is not what, even people who did not believe in Dr. King philosophy.

Older people were saying this is not what he would want, and even though they realize that this is not what he wanted ,you know, so after a while it just became vandalism, an excuse to like I said steal , so it didn't have you know uh and that in it sense maybe was a good thing. To that it turned into that you know just an excuse to do that, I mean people were angry don't get me wrong uh they tore up a lot of stores, and things that were black owned uh uh and unfortunately the black community still exist today. Uh there is a lot of division, so a lot of people felt that the blacks who had business and things weren't doing enough, you know to help out, so it was a lot uh that they felt that maybe they were over charging, more so because they knew this was the only place you could go, so uh uh the resentment with the Jewish community. They were the only whites, who would come into the black areas ad do business, and they kinda had a monopoly like uh some people feel like the Democratic Party has about blacks, you know well you got to do business so am always going to do business here because am the only one that's going to come, so you got to so there was a lot of resentment, but I think that resentment went away.

From uh Dr. King per say to uh uh him being killed to uh am just mad at the store owner, for uh whys my wife comes in she

is called by her first name instead of Mrs. This or, or why you know here is my grandfather comes into the store and you still calling him Charles, and he is old enough to be your father. And a lot of these stores they were generational stores, so the grandfather had the store, then the son and now his younger son were going to college to places like Towson University of Maryland and stuff like that, they were getting their money to pay for that college by working in the inner city store, and they were calling these people uh this man who came in was old enough to be his father, not Mr. Charles or his last name of Charles you know and he answer to this young boy, and a lot of the young blacks resented that right and some of the older blacks resented that .

And I think the frustration uh came out you know that way to, so uh I think as far as weapons were concern I think there were uh probably more weapons in the inner city now, but there were still a lot of weapons then, I mean people had guns you will be surprise, uh we've always had guns in our home uh and so it wasn't that blacks weren't armed, you know. Even though in the South I mean people had shot guns or something to keep uh animals, or do some small hinting and stuff like that, it's just we didn't have as many, but and it was always people wanted to die per say for cause whatever that was quote on quote, so I think uh I think those again stores and the fact that those people were getting

even for being over charged for things. Uh an going to run you a tab because I know you only get paid every two weeks or something, but am going to charge you extra 5 to 10 dollars for running your tab that type thing, and and uh a lot of it that bit of anger and frustration spilled over into uh into uh what was done to the stores, and so forth and then that thing about out soul brother in your window that was a big joke, uh some of the people wrote. They say if you put a sign in your window pane uh uh a lot of people came and put up ply wood over the glass so you know if it did get broke you still could get your glass, and they would write soul brother on it that was to let you think that you either had black people working there or it was black own, but they got it spelt wrong and a lot of people put up sol, so you know that was lake a target even if they weren't going to hit you put that up there, well we know you not,

Lauren: Laugh.

Mr. Gibson: So that kinda thing to didn't help all of a sudden uh uh you know uh people were trying to be kinda hip or pare of black culture. Uh uh now were I lived at I worked at a pharmacy that had a little soda fountain in it and everything, sandwiches and typical old time drug store and uh up the street was an aquarium, and up the street from it was a grocery store uh less than uh a block away like maybe the uh one block or two, a block

and a half was three stores and uh uh all three of those stores got uh hit, and I never understand why would you go into an Aquarium you know, I mean what would you carry the gold Fish in.

Lauren: Laugh!

Mr. Gibson: So I mean people were just mad you know and I think they used that instead of going and and hurting somebody, now I don't know. I can't speak for other states but I don't think that out of all the deaths and stuff of the riot, am almost sure it was more black people got killed than whites so again, its always been a joke in the black community that a white person can walk down any black neighborhood in the middle of the night and normally won't get hurt. The crime is black on black crime cause they gonna figure if a white person is in a black neighborhood late at night, they either an under cover cop or they are drug addict, so it they are a drug addict they don't have anything worth bothering about and if they are under cover cop, you definitely going to leave them alone, you know they five o or whatever, so white people are safe in America. They probably more safe uh than a black person, a black person walks in a white neighborhood and they would call the police, you know oh something you know what more so than a white person walking, even though it's unusual, but most people aren't going to mess

with them because they are going to figure something aint kosher.

Lauren: So did you actually, so did you didn't really you didn't see anybody got hurt or know of any one that actually got serious hurt or maybe even murdered or anything like that?

Mr. Gibson: I don't even think anybody in Baltimore got murdered, uh now I can't say that for sure, but I don't think if anybody got hurt it was probably the police, and and running them off form looting the stores or they got hurt uh cut by breaking in plate glass windows, or something from the store uh trampling each other getting out of the store because the police was coming, but uh uh actual what you would call related u uh it was a secondary injury from the looting. Not a uh uh racial thing I heard of anybody getting backed up anything, like they caught some white guy in Green mount Avenue and beat the hell out of him, or anything like that a guy got beat in California where it was video camera and everything not so long ago. For this to happened now a day would be the amorget that the white Supremes and the black militant really haven't predicted, now if this Would happen would have been the race wars back then.

Lauren: So the uh the freedom riders and the people that were involved in the sit ins and stuff like that; they went through more pain and suffering?

Mr.Gibson: Yes! Yes!

Lauren: Than during that riot?

Mr. Gibson: And that was during before and after the riots, the thing and the dogs being shuck on them and the water hoses, with the pressure and slamming people on walls and thing like that, yeah uh uh again black people suffered most from the riots economically uh uh and physically, more than the whites did whites lost money, they got frighten because they never saw blacks mad that wasn't a Mohamed Ali or Sugar Ray Robinson or a price fighter or a football player, tackles somebody for the first time. I think they said gee these people can get mad you know they had that attitude well you know, you call them boy or say derogatory things that would keep them quiet or go about there business you know or be humble. I think this was the turn about black people said no more, at the end uh uh and I think we got more from the riots because whites were scared they didn't change because they wanted to, they said you know we've pushed these people too far, and uh uh we can't do to them like we did to the American Indians uh because technology and the world media, is watching us and there better educated and so forth than the American Indians and so forth. And because Vietnam was going on and we are sending all these back home that we've trained in general and Urban Warfare si you know you have to take everything happens. I think history is a funny thing uh when things happen I don't think uh when

things happen I don't think things happen by accident, and at any other time and period this may have went around a whole different way, but here it is you had all these guys going to Vietnam saying yeah yeah you know when I go back to Alabama I can't vote, but yet they drafted me and said you know am over here fighting for these people freedom.

Even though the same thing existed during World War II uh we went over to free Europe, but we won't free uh so I think that the World War II suddenly say we put up with the game, and come back and be a good citizen we'll educate our kids, which they did. That was the generation of push for uh black education went up 30-40-50% after World War II uh gets our kids into colleges and this like that and dada da and try to do it that way, but the Vietnam changed things, this was the first time a lot of black kids, and I remember uh growing up and people said where is your father, uh and I say he's at sea yeah right, and when he would come home they would see him in uniform, you know I think more kids were impressed by my father that I was you know you know you know what's that Mr. Gibson what's that for you know and stuff like that you know they were talking to him, because they didn't know black solider black sailors and stuff like that because they never saw that, you know that part of our history was denied us and even if they did show black soldiers they were either

driving trucks or they we've digging ditches and things. Am not saying that that didn't happened that wasn't a large majority of what the black uh military was used for in those days, but they were other units that did other things and I think Vietnam uh showed you sitting there Walter Park height Ed Bradley who just passed away you saw these people interviewing these soldiers and they saw black sergeants, they saw black lieutenant and captains you know and they said wow, and they went back and they started reading and they found out about the 9th and 10th Calgary, the uh uh 54th Massachusetts the first black regiment. So these guys were coming home saying we not going to sit round and passive, like our fathers and our grandfathers were from those other to groups, we know how to shoot we we bought guns that we weren't supposed to you know, and anytime any New Years Eve listen to Baltimore you hear all automatic weapons fire, there is still a lot of M16'sand military weapons that were supposed to be turned in that people still bought home that and s still in working condition. So I think that kind a woke people up, and I think uh uh uh and a lot of good I don't think it was just fear I think a lot of uh uh whites said you know its time to change, we can't go around freeing uh uh South Korea and South Vietnam without even doing the same thing for our own people here. Uh but yet we expecting like they change the voting to eighteen, uh uh one time they changed the

drinking age to eighteen, they said you mean to tell me this guy could go over there and get his leg blown off but he can't even buy a beer and he can't vote that's not right. So the same thing we can't send this black guy over here and he is going to come home and he can't vote, he can't do this and he can't do that, now now in Mississippi well in some places even though he can't go even though he can't go even though he is well come at Hecht Company and Stores in Baltimore, he knows he sis not really you know they'll take your money and everything. And then the other thing to was our infrastructure in Baltimore City was decaying, uh uh Hippodrome the uh uh the Mayfair uh uh these big movies downtown uh they were falling apart and uh uh whites moved to the suburbs after the riots, uh uh they got scared and uh moved out and uh uh in order for these places to stay open the last years of these movies these movies downtown, like the Mayfair and Hippodrome were black patrons you know because that was the last dollar out of them before they closed them up, you know they became condemned. So things were changing then people began to think about hey it not So much black or white as it is green, who got the green and uh uh so uh again you know things changed uh I remember going to school and like I said the soldiers and thing were still hear, and I went to Booker T Washington, which was over the West side of town, uh and my girlfriend went to Fulton,

you know and I would walk her home because that was the nice thing to do. Seeing the soldiers and I think that frighten people to this is America, what soldiers you know and they were laying out in the street they were tired; uh I think they said uh I know it wasn't entire brigade it was probably one of the battalion 82nd so uh uh and you know they had been patrolling all night and everything like that and driving round with jeeps with M15's and stuff like that. And uh I was walking Caroline home and I ran into my cousin and then uh uh spring he had just graduated from West Point and it was so funny and I was just standing there talking to him and a City Cop comes up and says uh and not to be malicious or anything you know there is a problem with school kids, I guess he taught, I said no this is my cousin and he just stood and stared at us he was amazed but uh uh the irony of the whole situation, I think that part of what made people wake up and stand. This has got to change if this country is going to last this has got to changed, when this kid is walking his girlfriend home because he doesn't want anything to happen to her you know riots and sort like that, we have American Soldier laying out in the street and we can see rashly, this is an American city this isn't Vietnam this isn't Korea this isn't you know this is crazy. Again the police thinking that maybe something was wrong, so people just woke I think they finally just smelt the palm and things started changing and uh I

think some white people change, because they were just plain scared, they didn't do it all in a necessary out of kindness of there heart, but they realized that this was it. Where we were situated we controlled the cities and most of where the business were, so if you were out in the suburbs and no we are not going out there, the buses doesn't run out there, so we not going to go out there, but we can tear up down town and that was going to stop the country you know. And I think they finally you know this isn't to cool so we are going to have to change in some kinda way, and and its bad to say that this had to happen to make the country wake up, but in some sense I think that if some people had been quite and not done anything when Dr. King got killed, then it might not have changed as rapidly as uh as much as they did, as soon as they did.

And uh again you could talk to and we do this at the job, we stand around the water cooler and you know history is always something that everyone has got an opinion about, and when you talk about it am finding more and more blacks uh are beginning to it that way, and more and more blacks are saying integration messed us up, a lot of blacks feeling this. Because again we had in our neighborhoods uh you had school teachers, you had civil servants, you had uh people who made there living uh being chauffeurs and thing, but you had a mixture in that neighborhood you knew that neighborhood, a black neighborhood in the 60's uh

50’sand 60’s you had uh all levels economic levels in one neighborhood or surrounding neighborhood, you may have one block where people owned their homes, but they were basically teachers, that wasn’t where you made most money or a funeral home that kinda thing or a minister, and then you had the people who rented who that lived around. They might have been the people that worked around the point, I mean you know they had money but not the education or they were on there way up, but once you intrigued people just the neighborhood went down you know what you said you don’t have to go to other places beside Wilson and it went out of business.

Uh uh the stores where you could go because you couldn’t buy let’s say you couldn’t go to Talbot’s, which is a big fancy woman store uh but you could get the pattern and you could somewhere in Green Mount Avenue or Pennsylvania Avenue and have a black tailor who went to Carter who somebody in your family knew. Because that is just the way it was you know and uh that could make that suit or make that gown, I remember when my sisters came out, I went to a debutant ball, so when I got commissioned and went on active duty, we would sit around and I would it would always amazed me the look on other white lieutenant faces, see I have been to debutant ball; my sisters were presented to society. You know and my father wore his dress

whites and every thing, my sisters walking down the steps at uh uh Wilson restaurant, and so forth to be presented. We knew uh uh Quanita Mitchell, we knew Marchers, were the wealthiest black family in the city lived, so we rubbed arms and elbows and stuff with them. Because we only had us to deal with we won't allowed to go uh uh private places because at that time Morgan kicked Towson ass every football game, because that was the only place that black athletes could go were to historically black colleges, when it became a money thing, how much money you get from going to these bowl games and stuff, and whites would say hey we need to recruit, and that is when they started pulling black athletes from the black schools you know, so we had our own Morehouse uh uh our own medical schools and so forth you know because you couldn't go anywhere else so therefore you had to support these things.

These were the top notch institution; I remember when I was in Morgan and I started Morgan in September of 71; we had more PhD's than Towson and uh uh Loyola combined, and our teaching staff because they couldn't teach anyplace else but a black college. Now they could teach some places up North like Pennsylvania and Morgan State, so uh uh where did we send all of our judges Bell judge Hargrove those people? They couldn't go to law school at the University of Maryland so they had to go to

Waken and places up north, and the State of Maryland paid for them to go there because they had to gave them the opportunity to get a higher education, we'll not going to to let you go to the University of Maryland but we'll pay for you to go because we have to, because that's the way we pull the separate but equal stuff. So what people started saying we are crazy because we are loosing all his money, the State of Maryland is sending all these people you know down, these guys would come back uh uh my godfather uh uh who went with my uncle from the Tuskegee Airman, uh became a doctor when he came out of the service, uh Dr. Mccampbell who had his office on Curry Street, uh and he had to go he couldn't go to Maryland, you know he went to the University of Pennsylvania. I mean but they paid for him to go even though he had the GI bill, Maryland paid extra money for him to have room and board because he couldn't go to schools here.

And when people started seeing the money, this is stupid and I think when they burn's down these stress they did these type of stuff they started seeing this two countries a black America and a white America, even though that still exist but you know, purely by race then now its by economics and things like that was stupid and I think the riots did that I mean it was uh how did, when you look at Europe and you say how in America behind Europe during the war, so they had to rebuilt, so there stuff is new our stuff is old

we never rebuilt we just kept using the same , and now we get all our steel and stuff mostly from old steel, plants are closing down. Simple because our infrastructure was never damaged during the war so we never rebuilt, we could build it better. So the riots and maybe it was that society, tearing down that social thing that made us better citizens, made us better people that way.

Uh we had to tear down and rebuilt up and when you look at Europe and there infrastructure, following World War II and how they rebuilt down there industry, look at Japan you know they took all the new modern technology and went on and rebuilt, and we are still trying to hold on and keep the old things going and I think we've changed that mentality and but for the black community it hurt. A lot of kids know a guy who wants to play football now and want to go to Notre Dame, I want to go to Ohio State instead of going to Hampton, but the scouts would go to the black schools because they knew about the segregation and stuff you know, but now you can go the white schools has got the money to recruit you and the things that are hurting are the institutions , the black institution that were established, because that was the only thing that we had, so we had to depend on each other, and uh most black people now when they get money they want to move out of black neighborhoods. You know I have had people ask me why do you still live in Baltimore City, uh my

friends are all lining in Ft Washington. Except for the time that I have traveled in the service I have always lived in Baltimore. I really don't want to be any place else, I mean uh you make it what you what you want it to be, better for your kids, but it wasn't bad before and I think people kinda mistake, and I don't know if this is going to make sense, mistake segregation the myth was separate but equal it was never equal but if it had been equal blacks would have been satisfied , I don't think we necessary want to live next door to you we just want to have a block, like you have. Uh or a chance to have a detached house with grass and you know our own, and if you go out around CCB around that part where you see those houses which are black areas up around Garrison uh around Forest Park which are black areas, and you know you never I don't think we wanted much just a nice piece of the pie.

No matter what it is, it doesn't just have to be about race negative things kids just have to be taught because they don't come into the world that way uh sometimes you think that about it and you get mad and you day damn they did that to me. Now it's to late cause you know but when you sit down and think about some of the stuff that you wouldn't do you know. I remember going places that my mother a college educated woman, my mother was a nurse, and I would say why when we go up to the school the teacher talk to you they say Ms. Gibson stuff like that how come

you white white people call you Blanche, why do they get to call that then I knew something was wrong, I couldn't figure it out, now.

Was I mad at the riots I thought they were stupid I thought they should of went out to Dundalk they should of went out to Towson, I know we never would of won, we would of gotten slaughter but you know that was my opinion, just like I said I would not participate by stealing that was not the way I was, but would I of wanted, lets go to war, but uh there was a minority of blacks who felt that way.

And for whatever reason I don't know if it was our parents, I don't know the grace of god or whatever it was that they got things under control, because I know at that young age older guys were in high school, I was in Junior high school and guys that were in college were talking about war, you know we could do this and I think if the riots had continued they would have become more war fair than looting and the types of things.

You know this was just a giant uh uh crime spree but I think if they had lasted longer than what they did people hadn't gotten on the news, black leaders and so forth and said this is not what Dr. King lived for this is not what even people who did not like Dr. King and said yeah we should at least respect his memory although I don't agree with what he is saying I think that's stupid,

like uh Malcolm, we didn't land on Ply moth Rock, Ply moth Rock landed on us , there was a lot of black people who felt that way and I think if it had continued longer it would have been where the troops would have been shooting at citizens it would have been a war fair.

Lauren: So how long would you say it lasted?

Mr. Gibson: About a week it settle down, not actually a week of going through because it didn't take about two or three days going through the stores uh but the tension and stuff and one of the thing I remembered uh they still had street cars and uh it was the Baltimore Transit Union it wasn't the MTA and uh it was a privately owned company and uh they would talk about getting black bus drivers and uh and when you got on the bus there were still alot of black went to the back of the bus, and the bus driver was like the captain of the ship. Uh whole lot of others they were like oh good morning how are you, they never spoke to you before you know but these were black people that white people say had to come back onto the city and work, and I think this was there wake up call, wow we left the city they control it, even though they may not be able to run it as far as uh power plants we may not have had that technology then I think we did but we could destroy it and I think they said we've push them to far, and I think a lot of people just realized that J. Edgar always talked about communism in

American Civil Rights movement and I have no doubts it and I am a historian. Uh consider myself that and my two graduate degrees aren't even in history but that's my first love, uh I feel that uh they were communism they were trying to cause that uh uh fifth column you know but American blacks have always bought into the American dreams. And I never understood why whites couldn't see that, you know we've always bought into it I mean we fought in the revolutionary war against the British, the British said we would free you, but we choose you know, but of course some blacks did fight with the British but uh uh we have always believe in the American dreams and we have always answer the call and yet you know the same thing like the Japanese you know so I mean when you talk about Civil Rights I think you hear a lot of people say we need to open discussion about racial issued in America we do, and we need to be a little more honest. There is a commercial on t.v. uh when they talk about the proverbs we stole from the Indians and we rob there graves and you see that it's a new commercial and they talk about Comcast and the kids do the play and they talk about history you know being mare factual and that happens so tell the truth, you know I mean uh people say its revision is history but I think that when you tell history in a more open true dialogue you don't make the same mistakes you know when you candy coat you know uh uh so um, I think people like Wally Daniels with a wjz

put there careers on the line they came on t.v. u uh saying we need to stop this, these were local black celebrities the disc jockey of the radio stations you know wwtn, webb when that was still on the air, they stuck there necks and said you know uh uh this is not what Dr. King stood for this is not and people just calm down and stuff like that but I think people hadn't intervened, after the they all the liquor was drank and all the cigarettes were smoked, the next thing would have been violence on each other. The soldiers that were there instead of just being a deterrent you know, and I think that was kinda shame people to uh seeing the soldiers there, they didn't want to be there, the white soldiers, the black soldiers they did not want to be there. This is putting the country at risk, because am sure a lot of soldiers said I, I can't fire on these people you know and I don't want to be, I didn't join the army to shoot Americans, you know and even though we take an oat to defend uh foreign and domestic enemies, I don't I can't picture if that should ever come in this country uh I think it would be a legible turn, because I think a lot of soldiers would disobey those orders. Uh uh you know u soldiers don't start wars it's the politicians, you know soldier can't tell battle not only because we have to fight them but because you know people tend to forget the soldiers didn't get up and decide they were going to Bosnia, and go to Afghanistan and go this place some person sent them, some politician sent them,

and uh so uh u they put an backward situation on the uh uh on that part of the government to, we never had domestic violence like that, I mean we've always had incidents with boxing rebellion the whiskey rebellion, this was national this was California to New York and Maryland, this was from Texas up to Michigan, and Chicago you know this was a national event, and I think it woke the country up and the people said things need to be changed, whether we want it to or not we can't go on the same way we would of.

Lauren: So let me ask you something and not to hopefully not to get to personal or not for you to take this offensively, but do you think that even though you were not, your not white that the life that you lived back then was sort of a life that a white person lived, compare to how maybe a poorer black person may have lived at that time?

Mr. Gibson: Um no I don't think any black person no matter how rich they are in America doesn't know, they are black and the closet that ever came that might happens Oprah Winfrey when she went over there that store and in Paris and uh the wealthiest black women in America and they said no we aren't opening up this door we don't care who you are cause they did not know who she was or how much money she had, but they saw that she was black, and maybe if she had been a white women dress well, they may have

opened up the door and maybe said she was someone important. So no you never not know that you're not black in America, never I don't care how much money you have how much education you have, uh uh.

Lauren: So its like history is respecting itself. Continuously but its just not.

Mr. Gibson: Not in the same way but you know you uh when is it giving to come a time, when uh uh Avery Brooks that played uh uh Sisco in StarTrek deep space nine was ask a question one time you know we have uh two startreks the one with William Schatner and then the one with Patrick Stewart, both captains uh startrek voyager with the women she was a captain, but when you got your series you were just a commander, he eventually got promoted to captain. But whom the show started he wasn't a star fleet captain, the only black leader but he didn't start off as a captain. This women has lost a star ship cause the startrek voyage captain Jimmy lost a ship the ship was lost, and it was under her she was the captain the started off as just a commander of just a station you know. Even in that respect everything on I hear people talking about well this is what's wrong with Baltimore, it seem like everything was blamed on Kirk Smoke, that wrong with Baltimore, they forget about all the years of William Donald Schaeffer and forget about people who have come after smoke. But everything so

you know, I would like to see it changed, I honestly would sometime I wake up and hopefully that its going to change and I think what's keeps me going is the fact that my business opening different places because of my military background, and I realize America is probably the best country in the world, uh for opportunities for everybody living conditions, the education difference the medical facilities schools things like that is the best country in the world but could it be better yeah and I think its based on people, some people just need to feel superior to others, if its no others reason its because of race, something has to make me better you know than you.

Instead of some people are going to be better at something's and some people are going to be better at others. Can it happen, if its going to happen at all this is probably the country where it is going to happen first if it would happen?

Some times I wish there would be a little green men that would come from space and make the world unite that way, you know, we would united then because of the common enemy, well all human now.

I can see Hilary Clinton running for president with uh Obama as vice president, and might make it but not the other way around. And that is just the way it is in America I mean uh you hear black people say when you talk about the election, when you

talk about steel and Cardin, and people say well we should vote for Steele about time we had another Black Senator. These were people who were some didn't have high school education, but they could rationalize the best choice, and yet have heard while people say don't vote for him we cant put him in there. He is the better qualified candidate, this guy been indicated, this guy did this and did that so as long as that mentality schist unfortunately its still here in America, I mean have gone places in uniform and when I cane back from manila I went to a store in Peninsula Florida. Now Pensacola is a military town, and I was a captain and this guy kept referring to me as sergeant, you know this old white guy, you know here it is I first came back from getting shot at, so everyday I kinda pray that we never have a situation were we go into knots again because if it does the attitude of young black people now, verses when I was young, I say a few of us fell that way when I was growing up. They not going to burn stores and stuff like that. What the white Supremes and Neo Nazis are always predicting there is going to be a race war; there would be a race war. Just the frustration its just, people are mad, and you don't have to did down to deep to reach the anger, you know like sometime you say well you got to go down three floors to get to the anger.

So am thankful that that happened when it happen, and hopeful that it would never happen in this time period because

people mentality about life period, taking a life is different now a days than it was back then, life back then was a whole lot more scared you know, kids in school fought by hands, like I said. I remember kids in college fighting saying I would meet you after school and they would put their books down and they took their rings off and they fought bare knuckle, so no if something like that would happen now on a large scale like that . And we have had riots since then but it was during a blazed some thing totally different. But if it was a racial thing that caused the not. Prime example the thing that happen in California, when they pulled the white guy out the car and they beat him with the brick or something and they were just kicking him and stuff. I don't see them they didn't go into gas stations or stores like that, the anger now is totally different and people were feeling a little frustrated, black feel now that people are catering, I hear people say well see how come they Spanish on the bank machines and Spanish on the telephone and Spanish on the you know they made us learn English and that was a whole big thing out roots where they whipped koonta kinte made him say Toby. But yet they cater to Hispanics they came in illegally, you know so no I pray to god that we didn't have riots now, because young blacks weren't going to be contempt with just breaking into stores and stuff.

Lauren: Well in closing is there anything you can think of. That maybe I didn't ask you that maybe important for us to know about that happened during that time that we haven't talked about?

Mr. Gibson: The majority of black people were scared, I know in my neighborhood mostly everybody was in the house, doors locked the people who participated in the riots were, I shouldn't say quote on quote undesirables and stuff like that but the majority of black people were just as scared as the white people were. And they realized they said what's going to happen now because even though that guy may charge you 25 cent extra for that loaf of bread, at least there was a corner store of where I can go to. Because I couldn't drive alt to Giant out in the country, or things like that, so we realized the damage that we were doing you know to ourselves, I think that in why it ended so quickly, but the majority blacks they were embarrassed some whites think on that was just a holiday no the majority of black people were embarrassed behind it. And even though they did not want people to hurt other people, I think they were embarrassed because they turned it into like a free for all to get free stuff.

You know if you going to do this you know maybe burn city hall but why burn down the stone to steal stuff alt of it, you know that kinda way, so they were embarrassed they were scared they didn't know what the repercussion were going to be.

Because Dr. King had always said be non violent and you know now this has happen and it shock a lot if the older people lost their influence on the younger people, cause the younger people said yeah you have been telling us to be nonviolent, we did this and now look they got man power centers, civil rights bill things started charging, things started happening. Alot of things changed a lot of people say well maybe Malcolm wasn't as radical. He firmly said don't start off with violence but if you hit me am going to hit you back, instead of turning the other cheek. And I don't know who is right because it all ended the way things are, but have always remember in my family and this is from my grandfather he was artilaery always learn how to shoot because you never know when you are going to have to. So, I mean people said well you have always been in the military, and I said if I was a black Russian I would have been in the military uh and there are black Germans now and there was back then to but if I was a black German I would have been in the military, that's just my family make up history. So I happen to be American and this is the country that I was born and raised in. The Civil Rights movement happened when it should of happen and I don't know divine intervention, but you just have people like, the bad people was just as important the Lester Manx, the George Wallace's, the George Mahoney who is now running for here for Governor.

Your house is your castle you know you don't have to sell and move from your neighborhood, it's pure and all this kinda stuff so the bad people were just as influential and important to that period as people like Dr. King or A. Phillip Randolph, Roy Wilkins and thing like that. Because you needed both to make it work you know it all came together at that particular time, you know, Linden Johnson would always be remembered as the president who got us bog down in Vietnam, I remember Linden Johnson as the greatest president for social change, this country has ever had, head start, revitalizing the city, urban renewal man power service to et kids jobs, and stuff the job core. He'll never be remembered for all those positive things he did because Vietnam far out weighed it.

When you look at Civil Rights you have to look at Civil Rights from the Historian point of view, and look at all the different angles of it because if we didn't have Lester Manx and George Wallace's, standing and doing things that they did it never would of worked. The best thing that those white people could of did down South to keep things the same way is never, cut those hoses on those people and never shook the dogs on them, cause they would of shown it on T.V, and white people up North would of said look at those dumb fools what are they picket in for, the white people aren't bothering them.

If you hadn't beat them and hit them the people would not have been offended, so you needed them, they helped or moved it just as well as Dr. King did. If it had happen before the T.V generation how can you show a riot on the radio, think about it all this stuff happened right at the right time, Vietnam the draft you know people say when they talk about it, the draft they say well we need the draft back. This was the first time you got a rich kid whether he was a rich black a rich white kid, and you put the, in there with the poor kid, Puerto Rican whatever, they all were in there together, they all had to work together or else you didn't go on pass and you got penalty from the drill instructor.

Whether he was black or white he was the overseer, alright and you had to work together, I don't like you but I know I gotta to work with you, I don't want you marrying my sister, but I know you were going to cover my bask. So yeah you could live next door to me, I don't want to marry your sister I just want to live in a good house. And people started to begin to realized that yeah this guy aint to bad you know. The draft played a big important part in immigration more so than the Civil Rights movements.

I think the riots were the spice how's that guy Emerald when he putt's some spice he goes "BANG!" that was the bang in that soup what cause thing to change. Again this is my opinion and everyone's got one, but if you think about it if anyone of those

ingredient was missing we probably wouldn't be having this conversation, cause it would not of happen that way. If the white people had acted differently in the South no dogs, no sticks, then the church with those four little girls and that kinda stuff, the T.V cameras wasn't there to see it things happen for a reason.

Lauren: So that takes one to this strange question, if you were the prosecutor today to prosecute the person that shot Martin Luther King?

Mr. Gibson: Would I do what now?

Lauren: Would you prosecute him; or would you look at it as I mean yes it did play a part like you said ,and some good came out of it but?

Mr. Gibson: Well he committed a crime, yeah I would prosecute him. I mean his role in it and I don't think his role was the only role, you know not that am one of these guys that go around like a conspiracy theory and thing like that, but it's more involved than what happen.

Lauren: That is a strange question.

Mr. Gibson: Yeah because am sure there is more in detail and we'll probably never know, what any of those thing from princess Diane who didn't have any thing to do with race, or Perez when he got shot in Israel. Any time when there is an assassination there is political things involved there is more than the person that did it.

But yeah he should have been prosecuted, am a firm believer that nothing happen by accident.

Lauren: I just want to say thank you very much for your time.

Steven Dashiell
Transcription – Bernard Gibson

SD: You've talked to us about before the riots and during the riots, let's talk about after the riots. Immediately following the riots, how was it like in Baltimore?

BG: Tense. I think there was a lot of tension. I think people were getting over shock. And I really felt that a lot of Whites were literally overwhelmed. I don't think that they ever expected the black population to react that way. I think they were more shocked and surprised than anybody. I think a lot of Black people would have realized there was a lot of tension. You have to understand in Baltimore was a border state, so it still had a lot of Southern-ness in it. Like I said it was a border state so it had a lot of Southern traditions, but yet it wasn't the Deep South. So I think that Whites felt that they had a handle, that the situation among the races was better than what it was. I think it really shocked them, afterwards. There was a lot of media. I think they got out a lot of reporters like Daniels on Channel 13, Al Sanders and people like that. Anybody that they thought had any potential in the Black community. They put them on the air, ask them to ask people to calm down, and to keep their kids and things inside. I think these people who were window dressing came important to the community, important to the politicians, so this was another change that we saw. We saw a lot of people with the bus company. At that time the majority of the drivers were White. A lot of the postal people were White. The

mailmen. So you saw a lot of change, you saw a lot of Blacks in positions that they were not normally in. Not saying they weren't working for these companies, but they were doing basically maintenance. They were cleaning and washing the vehicles, repairing the vehicles, working inside the post office. Sorting mail. Blacks were put in more visible positions. And of course there was the damage from the riots. The neighborhood stores were literally gone. Which meant that the big chains, the supermarket chains… the situation that we have now where if you don't have a car, you have to drive five or six miles to a supermarket. Where before, you could go to a corner store and get the basics, so you could survive until you had time or energy enough to go to those other places. Black businesses suffered because people felt the riots brought out racial inequities. More things became open. And therefore, Blacks didn't have to rely on themselves, our businesses to get the services that we wanted. Things opened up so where you could go to more places, do more things. So therefore even though these stores weren't damaged during the riots, and most Black businesses weren't. And a lot of people don't realize that. People started going, they weren't limited to Pennsylvania Avenue and Greenmount Avenue. And when I say Greenmount Avenue, make very clear we're talking from 33rd street on down. When you go above 33rd Street that's a total 'nother area, and as matter of fact it changes from Greenmount to York Road. And of course it's always been Pennsylvania Avenue from North Avenue to what later became known as Martin Luther King Blvd. So those places suffered, because people started venturing out and going to businesses and social events like movies that were other places, downtown. Even though we could go to them, most Blacks didn't because they felt uncomfortable. As far as education, I think in my particular case, it helped because I played baseball for St.

Michael's Church and one guy wrote his doctorate on inner city kids or something like that. It allowed me to get more exposure to the counselors at school, even in junior high school. I went to Booker T. Washington. I had a White counselor who had total interest. I think they gave me more opportunities. When I went to high school even though that was after the riots I got scholarships. When I went to college I got a 3-year ROTC scholarship. I got a State Senatorial scholarship for college as well. I don't think a lot of those opportunities were opened up. I think a lot of Whites took more interest in the inner city, took more interest in working with kids. Not only because of black urban kids. Again, this is the beginning of the separation of when it came down to just money. The beginning of some black businesses. They started after the riots. They got government contracts that they normally wouldn't get. I guess the government was feeling like "well lets give them some contracts". More Blacks got into civil service and so forth behind these things. This was a change economically, and because of that change I think Blacks did well behind the riots. We had more programs to come in, to bring music into the inner city, urban renewal, Job Corps. I remember a program called Direct Search For Talent, which was a government sponsored program that took kids with high averages, high IQ's, to direct us, enroll us in private schools. I know friends of mine, one particular friend went to Gillman, a couple of my friends, my girlfriend went to Bryn Mahr. So those schools opened up, Friends, and places like that, because they started taking minority students based on their grades and offering scholarships and so forth to them. Things that probably would have happened, I would say it was like hush money more, guilt. Sometimes you have to wonder why it took the riots for all of this stuff to start all of a sudden opening up. But again it opened up doors that people had

been pounding on for so many years, and couldn't get open. Then, it just cracked, and now they were wide open. And a lot of people wisely and successfully took advantage of it.

SD Okay, you had talked before in one of your previous interviews about the fact that you were in kind of a mixed neighborhood. And that you worked for one of the Jewish shopkeepers. Did you notice a flight of people? Not only White people or Jewish people, but Black people after the riots, maybe? It just seemed to be too much of a threat of danger for any of them?

BG: That's a good question. Just to give you an idea I lived on 23rd Street, and actually before the riots I lived on Hargrove Street, which was right around the corner old Polytech that used to be on North Ave. We were surrounded, even though my particular block was all Black and homeowners, we were surrounded by Calvert Street, St Paul St that were still owned by Whites, Whites lived there in those townhouses, those row houses. So, I was never in an environment that you found on the west side where you had all these neighborhoods that were all Black. Living in Northeast Baltimore, which that part of town was considered, there was always….you had Black neighborhoods, but they were surrounded by White neighborhoods. And when you mentioned these stores that went out of business, you have to understand that this was a transitional period. I worked at a drug store at 20th and St. Paul Streets. And Surpic (sp), Dr Surpic was the pharmacist. Who, when I used to work there always drilled me on the tools, like the mortar, the pestle, and different things. He used to always try to talk me into going into

pharmacy, and it was a good relationship. But his son, even though his son was a pharmacist, his son did not want to be there. And the store was making good money. Don't get me wrong. Not only the pharmacy part was making money, but he had a soda fountain, and Whites and Blacks both came there. But he also delivered, and that was part of the job I did, so people would call there and get a sandwich made or get their medicine delivered if they were sick. So the store was very well known, very utilized. But his son didn't want to do that. And so, the riots gave him that excuse to close it down. And the same thing up the street was another store owned by Morris Pazonik, another Jewish owned store, and that was a grocery store. And the same thing, his sons did not want to do that. Matter of fact one is a big car dealer, sold a few cars now and then. Matter of fact he went to City, so he used to talk to me about City, about playing ball there, and things like that. That's one of the reasons I went to City College. Again, but you have to understand, people use that as an excuse. But I think a lot of the younger kids of these store owners, these were college educated kids , they didn't grow up… they didn't come from the Old Country, where they didn't grow up like pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, because their parents had made money off of these businesses, they could send them to college without a struggle. And they didn't want to … they looked kind of down on that, they wanted to do bigger and better things. There's nothing wrong with that. So, when the riots came along and the stores were broken into, that gave them the excuse to get the insurance money and get the Hell on out. You know, in a sense, it kind of freed them, too. Because they didn't want to get locked in to running the family business, being in that nickel and dime situation. But they felt obligated and I think that's a strong Jewish tradition to carry . So I think the riots helped them, too. It liberated

them. So, the neighborhood started changing because these people who owned these townhouses realized that you've got a three-story house with at least ten or twelve rooms in it, you could break it into apartments and make three apartments out of this three-story house. And that's what they did. So again, people wanted an excuse and I think they used that "well, it's not safe anymore, so let's go out into the suburbs" , and things like that. The theaters, the Hippodrome, the Town, the Mayflower, they were all in decline. So it was easy to say "okay, we won't be as restrictive or as exclusive". And lots of times the closings are left to the minorities. You see that now with the Hispanics as Blacks are leaving. So, they said "we're losing money, let's get this last couple of, we maybe got two or three good years before we have to do major renovation, and we don't want to do major renovation, so we'll get all the money out of the cash cow and let it die". And that's what happened to downtown Baltimore. And people left. And you're right, and Blacks started making more money and they left. But I don't blame that on the riots. The riots may have been the excuse and the catalyst, but the riots themselves did not make the people leave. People may have used that as the excuse to leave, but I think they were getting ready to leave anyway. And now when you have the Renaissance of the city, you built up all of these things downtown, now you see people coming back because all of the cultural things, you've got two stadiums downtown, you got the Inner Harbor, a downtown! So I think that people left because of the decay, it wasn't necessarily the riots…kind of emphasized it or pushed it but people were going to leave because there wasn't anything happening. And now that the city is coming back up, and its no longer Charles Village, you see the area downtown by Penn Station where they are building these townhouses…..

SD: Station North

BG: Station North. $300,000! And they cleared out all of the transvestites, they cleared out all of the prostitution down there because of the property values are going up and those people aren't going to buy $300,000 when they have commercial sex workers walking up and down the street. Again it was just a matter of putting time in and I have to give credit to people like Schaefer when he was mayor. And even, definitely Kurt Schmoke who saw this and had the money come in to redo the Lyric, redo the Meyerhoff all these things they put downtown, and people realizing now, it costs so much, especially gas prices, some of these houses, the foundations are extremely sound, they're not making houses like that anymore. Everything now is prefab. So if you want a strong brick and mortar home, you come back in, you buy a home, and you gut it out, and you redo it the way you want to do it. And these people, some of these communities are gated, some of them have private security firms to patrol, neighborhood watch and so forth. You see a renaissance of the city, and I think the riots just came on the heels of that. If you think of a dead, wounded animal, the riots were the jackals or something coming, but the animal was already dead or wounded. So now you see the resurgence of people say "the jackals and stuff", but you see it happened, but it wasn't the reason for all of that flight.

SD: Well, its interesting that you use that analogy as far as the dead, wounded animal and the jackals because some would argue that North Avenue, especially the Pennsylvania

and North area, is still very much a dead and wounded animal and people left. What filled that void was heightened drug use and an open air market. What do you think when you see, knowing what you know about how Pennsylvania and North used to be like?

BG: That's interesting because Penn and North was always a Black community. When you asked me before where I grew up was a mixed community. Northeast has always been. Even though you have these enclaves of black areas, there's always been... When you look at Charles Village. If you look at upper St. Paul Street from 25th St on up, it's predominantly White Hopkins students and things like that. So, where I grew up was a little bit different. Now what happened to Pennsylvania Avenue, the crime rate and so forth, I think a lot of that came about because the black intelligentsia that used live there, yeah, they moved, and they moved because of economics. I mean, they made more money. And the city wasn't taking care of the property. I think if we would have had the urban renewal projects and things going on that we have now, like you see going on around Pennsylvania Avenue where they are building these houses and having people buy into it so its like a long term lease instead of renting so they have some vested interest in their property. If they would have done that then, these people wouldn't have moved. So like I said it was a dying animal before the riots, so it just gave those people the excuses. Because in those neighborhoods there, it was not unusual for the doctor to be living next to the guy who was working down their at the point and the schoolteacher or principal to be living next to the custodian of the school. You had that cross-section and so you had people who were making money, maybe they were doing unskilled jobs

but some of these people working down at the point were making as much money as some of these doctors and principals of schools. Because the point was running 24 hours and they had three shifts and so forth and so on. Now, when you look at the industrial base, America is declining as a producer, a maker, we're a more a buyer now and more pencil working and more electronics and things like that. We're selling our brains instead of our brawn. I think a lot of Blacks when they saw the opportunity where you're not taking care of my neighborhood, your not sending the street sweepers to clean up, you're not planting trees, so I'll move to the suburbs. I don't think that had anything to do…. If you tie the riots into that any kind of way, I think it had to do with Blacks were given more power, you saw more Blacks becoming managers in different companies. Let's take the health department, I mean, you saw Blacks just rising across the board in different jobs. And these people saw their neighborhoods declining and they were like the catalyst. They were the ones who held the meetings and said "let's neighborhood block". And when these leaders left, the neighborhood's declined. It would be interesting to see how that played out if the city had the money to take care of those neighborhoods, but I think in the long run, I think they had a plan, they wanted to move certain people out, they wanted to retake neighborhoods, they wanted to tear down, they wanted to renovate, they wanted the renewal. So I think a lot of that, a lot of politics had a lot to do with that. And I think the riots played, as bad as they were, they played into a lot of people's plans as far as moving people out and making this mass odyssey so that the government could take over, buy things and do what they wanted to do as far as changing. And now we see people coming back, and why are they coming back? They say "well, two stadiums are here, all of the cultural events are here". When you really

think of Maryland, you think of Baltimore. And I….whether its good or bad. Maryland is not like Pennsylvania where you have Pittsburgh, you have Philadelphia, you have big cities, you know, Scranton. New York you have New York City, you have places other than a one-city town. And when you think of Maryland, a lot of people when you go out of town still think Baltimore is the capital of Maryland. They don't even know about Annapolis. And the only reason they know about Annapolis is because of the Naval Academy. So again, and when you have a situation like that not matter how much people talk about Baltimore the crime rates, Baltimore is the cultural center for the state of Maryland. And they're not going to let it die. And they're going to do everything they can to keep it that way, to bring people back into the city. What you see is that happening. A prime example is Giant moved back to 33rd St. , and that's in the heart of the inner city, but they realized when they moved out that they lost money. A lot of ..Mars moved up to Loch Raven and Northern Parkway. When big supermarket chains come back into a city, where they claim they left because they were losing so much to pilfering and to crime, that tells you something right there.

SD: Do you have any final comments, any final reflections you want to make as far as the riots or as far as life after the riots?

BG: I think…. my undergrad degree is in history, and I'm a firm believer that if you don't learn you will repeat. And it may not be necessarily the Black movement, I'll put it this way, the brown movement. I see the same thing that Blacks felt being restricted to certain areas happening in the Hispanic community. And I think we need to learn from

these past experiences, because this time, if this should ever happen again, it's not going to be looting and pilfering. I think it's going to be much more violent because people have more guns, more weapons, there's more anger. Music… rap music, and some rap music I love and listen to, is more violent. You have the White supremacists who were trained in paramilitary things, and they're looking for a war to support Nat Turner, or something like that, a trial, some book that they have like their Bible. I think we need to keep close tabs on what's happening so we don't get to that same situation, because this time I think it could really be detrimental and I think with all of the different political things outside. I forget what it was, some Russian general a long time ago had said when the Cold War was between the U.S. and Russia was "the only way can destroy the United States is from within", and I think that still exists. We have the potential to destroy ourselves. I think this country has always united when there's been an outside power. Even though large groups of people, look at the Japanese during World War II, the EC Division was the most decorated division the American Army had during World War II even though the Japanese were put in concentration camps. Blacks have fought in every war in this country, even when they were slaves. So we have always stuck together and come together from outside forces, but our biggest problem is ourselves. And I think if we don't learn, and we have to be very careful because these hot spots can pop up again and the situations could pop up again if we're not careful and become complacent. And that's my biggest fear. Like every great empire from Rome, Egyptian, Greek even Mayan, that the destruction the decline came from within. It wasn't an outside force that … And I think people become too complacent and they forget that we're seeing a pattern; it's a different group so we don't pay attention to them. But I think we're not doing

justice by the Hispanic population that's here. I think we're doing them an injustice by catering and I don't think it's racist to make them, or stress that they learn English. If you want to speak Spanish at home that's fine; the Jewish people did it, the Italian people did it, the Greek people do it. But to give them that option of having Spanish as a second language in America is wrong. It wasn't done with the Black population, and it was done that way so we couldn't communicate and do things where the majority of the population didn't know what we were doing. I think it's the same danger that exists in catering to the Hispanic community. If they are to become part of the American system then they have to become Americanized, whatever Americanized is. I think we know about terrorism, we know that…I'm not saying that all Muslims are terrorists. We know that this is an all-encompassing religion. That's what Malcolm X found out when he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. So if you have Asian Islamic, you have Hispanic Islamic people like the Moors from Spain. This is a religion that is universal that has red, black, and brown, white people in it. That's the problem with Bosnia and all the Serbians. These are European people who have blond hair and blue eyes. You don't want to cause a situation where you have a disenfranchised people that feel like the only way they can get any satisfaction, any justice is by becoming terrorists. It's why things like this are so easy. 9/11 is where we see that. So we have to be very careful not to destroy ourselves. We are the only real superpower in the world, and we have a responsibility. And maybe, we need to regroup our politicians and our leaders and do a little house cleaning and when I say housecleaning, get our house in order before jump into things to try to get the rest of the world on board. There's still a lot of things wrong in America: racially, economically, health-wise, educationally. We're so much becoming a country of not so much racial

discrimination as much as class discrimination. There's a lot of Blacks who don't want to associate with Blacks or with people who are called poor white trash, the Hispanic community, just as much as it is White. So we're becoming a class society, because nowadays if you have money, no matter how you make it, whether it be sports, entertainment, whatever, these people are becoming very exclusive. And I think we're coming into a society…there's people who can afford to send their kids to private schools, and not by scholarship, they can actually afford to send their kids to private school. They can pay for it. You see parochial schools even though they're the poor man's private schools. And you see a lot of kids going to parochial school who aren't Catholic. Their parents want them in that type of environment. So, we're slowly changing from it being a Black or White thing to a money thing and a class thing. And I think if we have a riot in that situation, it's going to be so much more. Where you can't tell the group that's mad at you because it's going to be across the board as far as the color's concerned. And it will be a lot more horrific. And there's a lot of people who are saying the jackals have changed, but they are still waiting for the wounded animal to step in. And I think they have to wake up and smell the coffee.

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