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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

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

Interview with Herman Katkow April 6, 2007

Nyasha: So, Herman Katkow.

Herman: That is I.

Nyasha: And you're from Baltimore?

Herman: I am.

Nyasha: What was your situation in the 1960s? Like, how old were you, what were you doing—?

Herman: Well, are you talking about 1968 specifically?

Nyasha: Just in the '60s. Well, in '68, if—

Herman: Well, I was born in 1918, so in 1968 I was not quite 50 years old. And at that time I had a retail business at 1723 Pennsylvania Avenue called the Beverly Shop.

Nyasha: The Beverly Shop?

Herman: Yeah, it was a ladies' retail shop, directly across the street from Lafayette Market.

Nyasha: So, you owned that shop?

Herman: I did.

Nyasha: So, during the ‘60s, where did *you* shop? Like, for groceries, and clothes, and stuff like that?

Herman: Where did I shop? For myself, for my own clothes, I shopped downtown. A friend of mine had a men’s shop, so I went to his shop, and my wife went to whatever discounters there were around at the time. And food…maybe the Giant, I’m not sure. In the neighborhood.

Maria: Did you live near your store, or did you live elsewhere?

Herman: No, we lived here.

Maria: You lived here, in Mt. Washington?

Herman: Yeah, since 1960.

Nyasha: I’m assuming your customers were mainly Caucasian women.

Herman: No, my customers were 99 percent African Americans.

Nyasha: Oh, okay. So what kinds of interactions did you have with people of other races, I guess, since your customers were African American?

Herman: We had excellent relationships. Got time to listen to a story? One day, a lady walks in—this is fairly typical, although *this* is very unusual—a lady walks into the shop one day, clean but raggedy:

“My name is Eldora Christopher. I’ve been on welfare for years. I just got a job at Social Security. I need clothes, but I don’t have any money. Will you trust me until I get my check in two weeks?”

In those days—you won’t believe this—we were selling blouses for $1.99, $2.99, $3.99. Skirts were $2.99, $3.99, $5.99. Dresses were $5.99, $8.99, $10.99, top of the line, maybe $19.99. So I said, “Okay,”—I don’t know her from Adam—“Pick out fifty dollars’ worth of clothes.” And she did. And in two weeks she came in, she didn’t pay me in full, but she paid a substantial amount. And she kept taking merchandise and paying me every few weeks, and it wasn’t 100 percent to count, but I’d say maybe 60 to 75 percent okay.

By this time I had gotten a job downtown; my wife was running the business. One day, the store calls. She *[Mrs. Christopher]* had to talk to me very desperately. So I’m talking to her from my office downtown. She called me “Mr. K.”

“Mr. K, I don’t know what to do. My daughter has got her heart set on going to Drexel University to study architecture. And you know we don’t have any money, and I really don’t know what to do.”

And my wife was doing social work, and she was advising, you know, little minor things to some of the customers when they came in—had a good relationship. So I said, “Well, how’s your daughter doing in school?”

“Oh, excellent! Dean’s list, top grades.”

I said, “Well, tell your daughter to get a transcript of her grades, then get a couple letters from maybe the principal, maybe a teacher, maybe the minister and so forth, and then in her own words, not anybody else’s, write a letter to the Dean of Admissions at Drexel University, and explain to him why she particularly wants to go to Drexel, and why she particularly wants to be an architect.”

And I said, “The climate of the times is changing, and some of the colleges are looking to create some diversity in their student body, and you don’t know. The worst you can do is spend a postage stamp.”

So she thanked me. A few months later she called me back all excited—her daughter was accepted at Drexel University. And she was so excited! Anyway, a few years go by, and on Saturdays I worked in the store, you know, and downtown during the week. And one day I’m sitting behind my desk, and this very attractive, well-dressed young lady in a business suit walks up, and she says, “You’re Mr. K?”

And I say, “Yeah.”

She says, “You recognize me?”

And I say, “No, I don’t.”

She says, “I’m Mrs. Christopher’s daughter.”

I say, “Well, last time I saw you, I was buying a special dress for you for your junior high school graduation!” And we were selling children’s dresses for $5.99, $8.99, but for

her, on one of my trips I got one for *$17.99*, and she was so, so happy, because she looked so good in it, you know?

I said, “What are you doing these days?”

She says, “I’m an architect with the US Navy in Washington.”

So I choked up. I still choke up. So she wanted to thank me, and I said, well, don’t thank me, I just pointed you in the right direction, you’re entitled to all of the credit for getting that. But no, she wanted to thank me, and I wished her good luck and all that.

Anyway, about two or three weeks ago, I get a phone call:

“This is Mrs. Eldora Christopher, do you remember me?”

I say, “Of course I remember you!”

She says, “Well, I was just thinking about you.” And you know, just chatting away. And her daughter now has a big, big job, in, I think it might be Atlanta, Georgia, or some place, but a big job! And this is a girl from the ghetto. She lived on Stricker Street. And here she is in the corporate world, way up here, so I felt so good…anyway, to get back to your question—that’s a long, long way of answering a question, but it’s a good story, and it’s a true story. And you can check with Mrs. Christopher.

We had excellent relationships with our customers.

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

Herman: Before the riots? Well, there were three places in Baltimore where Afro-Americans could shop openly: Gay Street, West Baltimore Street, Pennsylvania Avenue. Downtown, they saw an Afro-American as probably invisible, she walked in the store, "Can I help you, can I help you?" *[Gesturing as though deliberately overlooking someone]* You know, and she's standing right there. Or they wouldn't let them try on clothes, and the only contact Afro-Americans had with the department stores was like, as elevator operators or cleaners or something like that, but not clientele. So it was a pretty segregated community as far as the city was concerned. And the regional shopping malls hadn't opened yet.

Maria: So would you say you had any interaction with African Americans *outside* of your business setting?

Herman: Yes, very much. We had a business association.

[Had to end interview, interviewee had to leave, will continue later].

Interview with Herman Katkow and Ethel Katkow continued April 9, 2007

Herman: One of the things that we did, I told you I was president of the association.

Maria: I'm sorry?

Herman: I was president of our business association. It was called PALMA, which was an acronym for Pennsylvania Avenue Lafayette Market Association and of the things we did each year, appropriately this time of the year, we had what we called an Easter

promenade, they called it Easter parade and we had thousands of people come out from all over the city. 99% were Afro-American, and we gave cash prizes to best dressed woman, best dressed man, best dressed child, best dressed family you know things of that nature. The judges were all Afro-American, we didn't start the festivities until after church services had concluded and we gave duplicate awards, the cash prize we give to the winners, we gave a duplicate prize to the church of their choice, this was all to instill goodwill for the businesses. So I can't really say that it's true without thought of gain because we thought of you know goodwill. This particular one I got because in those days African-Americans didn't have many registered voters and their vote was not really significant. So I worked with the Board of elections to set up a…

Ethel: Registration booth, I remember that.

Herman: A mobile registration facility and I told them it had to be on a Saturday because people worked during the week. They said 'oh we can't do it on a Saturday, you know we're closed' and I said well this time you're gonna do it on Saturday cause that's the only day that people can register, you know most of them. So he set up a registration booth across the street from my business, right outside the Lafayette market and we set a record, I guess then and since for the number of Afro-Americans that registered to vote and in fact they ran over time beyond what they had scheduled and I insisted that they stay because people were coming home from work even though on Saturday and we had to use the emergency power inside the Lafayette market to project some light and power, and everybody that registered, if they came in with proof that they had registered we gave them a special discount if they shopped in any PALMA store. So it wasn't entirely

without thought of gain, it was…so for that Juanita Jackson-Mitchell presented me with this at the Shrobb Street Memorial Church in 1960.

Ethel: Her mother had her picture in the paper for some reason in the last few days, what was it?

Herman: Lillie Jackson?

Ethel: Lillie Jackson

Herman: These ladies never heard of Lillie Jackson, Juanita Jackson-Mitchell

Ethel: You don't know who Lillie Jackson is? Oh, they were a very prominent family

Herman: She was a matriarch of the African-American community

Ethel: Juanita Jackson-Mitchell was the daughter of Lillie Jackson, and Juanita's husband

Herman: Was Clarence Mitchell

Ethel: Clarence Mitchell, you heard of him? That was her husband.

Herman: Well you probably heard of the current Clarence Mitchell, not the Clarence Mitchell who…

Ethel: Oh his grandfather?

Herman: Yeah he was very, very famous nationally.

Maria: The one who they named the courthouse after downtown

Herman: Yeah that's him.

Ethel: And the airport too…

Herman: No the airport's after Thurgood Marshall

Ethel: Thurgood Marshall, oh yeah. Getting the Marshall's mixed up.

Nyasha: I guess since you're both here we could interview you at the same time, just so that maybe you could help each other remember things.

Ethel: He doesn't like me to steal his steam

Maria: Would you prefer that we interviewed you separately?

Herman: We can do it together. Continuing our relationship, all of our employees were Afro-American and we trusted them implicitly. And we learned a long time ago that you're more often right than wrong trusting a person than not trusting a person. They had the keys to our business and we in 1968, we had long time planned a trip, a 4week trip to Europe and Israel and we left our employees in charge of everything, they were responsible for opening, closing, taking the cash, depositing the cash, displays, all that stuff and we didn't pay 'em a lot of money although it was equitable; it was a small business, we weren't making much money but we treated them with dignity…

Ethel: I'm gonna interrupt, it was a good relationship but we were a little idealistic too because we found out one of them was not so honest.

Herman: Yeah, yeah but by and large if you talked to any of our employees today I think you would find that they'd have fond memories of working at the Beverly shop because there was a mutual dignity and respect and that was very, very important.

Nyasha: And can I just ask your full name

Ethel: Pardon? Ethel

Nyasha: Ethel Katkow. Ok. And where were you in the 1960's.

Ethel: Pardon?

Nyasha: Where were you, how old were you?

Ethel: I'm not gonna tell you how old I was! [laughter]

Maria: You could say a round about age if you like. Are you roughly the same age as your husband?

Ethel: Pardon?

Maria: You're roughly the same age as your husband?

Herman: No, she's much younger.

Ethel: Oh he's much older.

Maria: Oh ok.

Nyasha: Maybe you were in your teens, early twenties?

Ethel: Middle-aged. Middle-aged is efficient.

Herman: Young middle-aged, how bout that?

Nyasha: So where did you live?

Ethel: Where did I live?

Nyasha: Oh you were together right? When did you guys get married?

Ethel: In '42.

Maria: In 1942, ok.

Nyasha: So you worked at the Beverly shop?

Ethel: Pardon

Nyasha: You worked at the Beverly shop?

Ethel: Much of the time but I had another job.

Nyasha: Ok, and what was that?

Ethel: I was a social worker for the Department of Public Welfare

Nyasha: So before the riots what kinds of interactions did you have with people of other races?

Ethel: Oh I come from New York and the social climate was a lot different there because I attended high school in New York with Blacks and it was a shock to me to find here that in the public library, blacks couldn't use the toilets, that they couldn't be waited on in the department stores, there were many other such everyday instances that I could cite but the climate was very different from what I was used to.

Herman: Incidentally, now you know who Lillie Jackson is, she never liked the word Black.

Ethel: Oh. 'We're not Black!'

Herman: We had lunch one day and she was telling me that we are and in those days Afro-American wasn't being used, the black was used to designate Afro-Americans and she says 'we're not black, we are colored' and she gave me a litany of all of the incidents during slavery, sexual relationships between the owners and female slaves and out of that came the colored. So she says we are really colored. Now black implies straight black, Afro-American would imply people that came from Africa, and so she never you know, that was her feeling.

Ethel: She was a very outspoken woman.

Herman: Oh God she was. We once went to the Morgan State College refectory, I think we were the only two white people there. We were invited.

Ethel: Oh we were invited to a family wedding.

Herman: No that was at the Carl Murphy estates, that was something else, I'll tell you about that in a minute. I'm still answering your question about our relationships. When we went to this affair and the people got up and spoke, sort of very dignified. This was

you know college, and people applauded that Lillie Jackson get up. Not the best grammar, not the best

Ethel: Oh she was very well spoken.

Herman: Yeah I know I'm saying in relationship, but she spoke [stomping fists on table], she called

Ethel: A spade a spade

Herman: Yeah, and people stood up and were applauding her because she fired the emotions, she was that kind of a person. The other thing my wife's referring to was when we had a relationship with a fellow by the name of Ed Smith who was the teacher of distributive education at Carver high school…

Ethel: He was married to one of the daughters of, Carl Murphy's daughter.

Herman: Carl Murphy was the owner and editor of the Baltimore Afro-American and Ed was married to Ida Smith who was one of Carl Murphy's daughters and we would take some of the students of Ed Smith and let them work in the store and a couple of them worked out very, very well. Anyway, when their daughter got married and it was Vashti after the biblical name Avashti

Ethel: Well her name you might be familiar with, she was a high dignitary in the church. Vashti Murphy…

Nyasha: Vashti Murphy?

Herman: No, no it's McKenzie now.

Ethel: McKenzie.

Herman: She went to Africa, she became a high ranking official in the…we went to her wedding at the Carl Murphy estate, again I think we may have been the only white people

Ethel: You're wrong, we were not

Herman: Well there may have been a few others but we were distinctly the minority but we were rubbing elbows with you know, the top level in the Afro-American community. So anyway that's by way of background answering your question, so you can still fire away.

Maria: Just to clarify, so there were certainly many African-Americans you considered to be your friends. You had friends who were African-American.

Ethel: No they were not social friends, they were business relationships, or community relationships. He tried to involve himself in the affairs of the community and in that regard there was a relationship but we were not friends.

Herman: We tried to be with everybody, as I said, mutual respect, mutual dignity

Ethel: That would describe it.

Maria: Professional relationships

Herman: Yeah I would say more so. But then deep down I guess, I'm going far astray I know, my relationship with the Black community goes back before I was born. My mother was an immigrant with my father from Russia, came over about 100 years ago. And they had never seen a black person and all the Russian immigrants in their ignorance feared the black people…they were violent and one particular woman they were convinced was a witch. Anyway she didn't show up in the neighborhood for a couple of days and somebody said they heard her coughing or something, she was sick and she lived like on the third floor back some place. My mother brewed up some chicken soup, she's gonna take it to this lady and her friend says 'no, no we'll never see you again you know she's a witch.' And she says 'she's sick, she's a human being and I'm gonna take

her this chicken soup.' She took her life in her hands and went and gave her the chicken soup. [laughter] So that story you know I found out years later but you know we've been very active even today for the last 20 years or so I've been an active member on the board of directors of the..

Ethel: Blues

Herman: Blues. This is the Black Jewish Forum of Baltimore but that's after 1968 that goes back just about 20 years. So anyway, our relationships were as I say good relationships.

Ethel: It was mutual respect both directions.

Herman: Yeah, yeah. I'll tell you another story if you've got time for it. We had one young man. He was a young black man, we called him the screwdriver kid cause he walked along up and down Pennsylvania Ave with a screwdriver in his back pocket and look in cars to see who had packages that he could, you know, appropriate. He had a girlfriend who was in women's prison at Jessup so he would come in periodically and buy something for her and the girls would wrap it for him, address it so all he had to do was take it to the post office. So one day while he's waiting for the girls to wrap the gifts he turns to me, he says 'you know I've been watching you for a long, long time,' he says 'you treat everybody the same that comes in here whether it's a white person, black person, old, young, woman, man, but you treat everybody the same.' And I said well, I says as long, until I know more about 'em I respect everybody for what they are. Whether he's a fine person or he's a bad person. I say he's a fine white person, fine, he's a fine black person, fine. If he's a no good son of a bitch, whether he's a white son of a bitch or a black son of a bitch. So he looks at me when I said black son, he sits up…[gesturing

with hand in the air] I like that, yeah I like that. [laughter] Well first he stiffened when I used the term, but yeah I like that he says, you know that being fair to everybody. Ok, we're taking up a lot of your time with a lot of extraneous stuff.

Ethel: We?

Herman: Me. [laughter]

Nyasha: So what do you guys remember about the assassination of Martin Luther King?

Herman: Well, it was very distressing. I remember I was taking a class, where was it? Was it at Hopkins? I remember the professor's name, Summers, who was an ultra-conservative guy and I had many arguments with him. Even though he was the instructor, I was the student and at that time the wife of George, you know the name George Wallace?

Ethel: The governor of Georgia?

Herman: No, Alabama.

Ethel: Oh Alabama.

Herman: …had died, same day that Martin Luther King died. He says I have no question in my mind which of the greater Americans died today. And I challenged him and we had an argument and it was a very distressing thing about, and it became obviously much more distressing when the riots began, not in Baltimore but in other cities. But I remember it was a very distressing thing because I remember the famous March on Washington you know speech that he made, and you know I just felt that he was right you know, that he dreams of the day when the great-grandchildren of slave owners will sit down with the great-grandchildren of the slaves, you know and just my concept of

acceptance and reality, and we were coming into that period but there was still segregation back then.

Ethel: My assessment of the news of King's assassination was that it was a critical point in the history of race relationships. It was frightening, but it was very momentous, it was historic. I remember where I was, I was in the car at the Greenspring Shopping Centre, I remember that hearing the news, and anybody had to realize things were going to go in a different direction. It was big news, and it was. We were at a turning point in history when that happened. Not only in race relationships but in the situation of blacks in American Society. You weren't alive then? Everything changed.

Herman: Different time.

Ethel: Placement in schools, it affected every aspect of life. His passing created a new stage for development in education, in race relationships, in housing…

Herman: He posed a threat to the status quo and people like J. Edgar Hoover, who was head of the FBI, had a file on him, a very extensive file…

Ethel: On his paramours

Herman: Yeah and you know to bring him, they wanted to bring him down

Ethel: Belittle him.

Herman: I'd say he…what's the old saying about comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable? You know. He was that kind of a person and

Ethel: He was a fire burner

Herman: You couldn't have but amount a great respecting for this man's courage and ability to speak out what was obvious but a lot of people weren't acknowledging it.

Ethel: It wasn't courage, he had ability. He was a good speaker, he was a good actor…

Herman: But the fact was that this was a period when you the freedom riders in Mississippi. In fact I've got a book, big fat book about that period. And these were people that had high ideals and completely agreed with his theory and went into Mississippi and tried to get the vote for Black people. They couldn't vote, imagine that. Denying citizens to vote and what happened to them with the dogs that were unleashed upon them and we had several people from Baltimore that went down and then the 4 girls were burn up in the church, you knew that incident? So you had a very tense period and people were on tenterhooks about speaking out about this but he came forth and he…

Ethel: Yeah, but then the Kennedy family, Jack Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, that was the attorney general?, they took very bold actions to align themselves with King and of course there were other people like that and increasingly he gained credence in the white community.

Nyasha: And how did you hear about the riots starting?

Herman: How did I know about it? As I told you I was president of my business association and that morning I got a phone call…

Ethel: Tommy D' Alesandro?

Herman: No, no, no, no.

Ethel: But he did call you I remember.

Herman: Yeah but that was later with the Black Panthers when we got involved with that but that's another whole story, but that wasn't in this period that you're talking about that was afterwards. I got a phone call, I've never heard such venom and hatred in a voice. Was a black male, and every other word was…I can't

Maria: Profanity.

Herman: The F-word, the 'honkey' word, and you know all the…and he went on and on and on and finally he said how they're gonna come up and they're gonna ransack all the stores, they're gonna do physical damage to all us and we better get out of there right away before you know we suffer physical harm to ourselves and after he stopped for a breath I said very calmly, I says 'who is this calling please?'. Bang! [laughter] went the phone. Anyway…

Ethel: It happened really fast, immediately before the riots began. I remember a policeman, he must've been a somebody because he had a white cap on, in the middle of the street with a bullhorn, telling everybody to get out, close up and get out because they realized that all hell was going to break loose afterwards and it did. Everybody did close.

Herman: Well, let me

Ethel: And that was what happened immediately before the riots.

Herman: No it didn't happen immediately Ethel. If you remember, I was in close contact the entire day with Colonel Frank Batagglia, who was the chief of patrol and later became police commissioner. And he told me and I told the, we had a telephone system, I would call say three people, those three would call others, you know…so within 5 or 10 minutes every store would have communication. And he says keep the stores open as long as you can, that's what he told me. 'As long as the stores are open' he says, 'nothing's going to happen', but then the riots started in other neighborhoods, Gay Street…

Ethel: That's right, yes.

Herman: West Baltimore Street, and finally late in the afternoon he calls me and says, 'Herman, I'm not going to be able to promise you that we can protect you any further and I would recommend that you close the stores', that's when you probably saw the..

Ethel: No, but there was a policeman out in the middle of the street…

Herman: Yeah. But that was when we, well first of all every single store wasn't a member of PALMA, most of them were but not everyone was but we called all of our members, so we closed late in the afternoon that day. Meanwhile, one of our members had a security agency, his name was Bob Marshall, he was a city councilman and he ran a security agency, and his employees were all Afro-American and we hired them and they patrolled our block on Pennsylvania Ave armed so nobody broke in through the front. But in our own case somebody broke in through the rear alley, went into an air conditioner, I don't know how but they got the air conditioner off its fittings, and went and looted one whole side of our store, it's the week before Easter, but we were able to replenish our merchandise in time for to you know conduct business.

Ethel: It's unimaginable.

Herman: Huh?

Ethel: The whole thing is unimaginable.

Herman: Well the thing that I sensed, I mean that was the physical part of it, but what I sensed was people giving into frustration. You know having…as I told you there was rampant segregation back in those days and the death of Martin Luther King, hatred, you know, anti-white feeling but also there was a sense of opportunism, people that didn't

Ethel: Absolutely!

Herman: People that didn't maybe, weren't even vaguely concerned about Martin Luther King but here's an opportunity for free shopping. So they came, they also joined the crowd, so anyway that was the day of the riots and we opened up a couple days later.

Maria: And prior to that day had you heard tell of any of the riots in the other cities?

Herman: Oh yeah, yeah. The riots in Los Angeles, and I think in Washington

Ethel: In Watts, wasn't it in Watts?

Herman: Yeah, yeah.

Ethel: In Los Angeles.

Herman: So we knew the air was thick, you know it was tense, but you know we did, as I described to you, what we could, you we tried to prepare we hired these policemen, not policemen, guards. Bob Marshall told me afterwards when some of these guys came up to break into the stores, they took out their shotguns and said 'look I'm as black as you are and if you try and break into that store you're gonna have to deal with me first.' So, there were these stores, except for that one you know breaking in and knocking out of the air conditioner and getting into the store and looting out one whole side of the store. That particular block didn't suffer any damage which was the main block right across the street from the Lafayette Market.

Maria: And were you or were either of you, or any of your employees in the store at the time?

Herman and Ethel: No.

Ethel: It was not during business hours, and we had not reopened yet.

Herman: Yeah but I remember we had opened up the following several days later, this happened on a weekend and the riots Friday. Anyway, we opened Monday and I remember one of our employees Agnes Marshall, a little [gestures her size with hands]...she was a wonderful girl, a wonderful young woman and I remember when she died, her family asked me to be one of her pallbearers, which I was at her funeral, the only white one incidentally. And she came in and she hands me a little package and she

says ‘keep this back here Mr. K’, I was Mr. K, and what was it, a gun. I hadn’t handled a gun since I was

Ethel: She gave you a gun, I didn’t know that.

Herman: Yeah. She had a little gun back there and I hadn’t handled one since I was in the army. I hadn’t handled a gun before since. So I says ‘if it comes to that Agnes, we’re not gonna use it’ so to answer your question, no none of us were there.

Nyasha: So the fact that most of your customers were African-American and most of your employees were African-American

Herman: All of them, all of our employees were…

Nyasha: Ok. It didn’t make a difference

Herman: No, no. Absolutely not.

Ethel: Difference in what regard?

Nyasha: As far as your store being ransacked or targeted.

Ethel: No because you mentioned, what was the term you used?

Maria: Opportunism. Was that it? Opportunism.

Ethel: Opportunism. This was in a poor neighborhood and they had the opportunity to get something and that was a big part of it.

Herman: You know free Easter shopping. What could we find [laughs]

Maria: Now you mentioned you had a network of store owners and folks to keep you informed, now did you get the new about the riots in any other way, did you watch the coverage on television?

Herman: Television, newspapers, you know you couldn’t…

Ethel: And there were a lot of calls coming in from people in the know

Herman: Radio, I don't think we had a television back then, I think we used radio and newspapers

Ethel: It wasn't that far back, I think we just had a television

Herman: Maybe so, but anyway, we got the news through

Ethel: He's making us seem like 150

Herman: We got it through the media

Maria: I see, so television coverage didn't make much of an impression on you though.

Herman: What's that?

Maria: Well if you don't recall that you had a television, or if you had a television

Ethel: I mean we had a television when we lived in our other house.

Herman: Alright, ok. Well we got it through the media, television, newspapers, radio.

Maria: Well my next question was going to be did you think the television coverage was adequate or accurate of the riots?

Ethel: Oh yeah.

Maria: Or that enough attention was given to Baltimore.

Ethel: Oh yes. It blanketed the news. And there were a lot of calls coming here because he was involved with the business association. There were a lot of calls from city people. I remember thinking you were really somebody when the mayor called here.

Herman: [laughs] Well at that time, I was working…my wife was pretty much running the store and I was working downtown with mayor D'Alesandro was the mayor at the time, the younger D'Alesandro, Nancy Pelosi's brother, you knew that. And the guy I was close with was Don Schaefer, president of the city council, he later became governor and…so I was close with him. I got a lot of pictures downstairs but that has nothing to do

with the riots. So you know, we, as far as to answer your question, I would say, anything graphic and sensational they would show on TV.

Maria: And did you know of any violence that occurred up on Pennsylvania Avenue?

Herman: Well, I remember at that time the police commissioner was a fellow named Donald Pomerleau, he was a tough tough nut, former marine, strictly by the…wouldn't talk to anybody, nobody. In addition to being president of PALMA, I was also president of a citywide, all the neighborhoods banded together and formed a group called the Affiliated Merchants, this could've been as much as a thousand around that time, I was president of that group. I met with Pomerleau, I was the only one that he agreed to meet with; I don't know why but he did.

Ethel: Who Pomerleau?

Herman: Yeah. I told him I would only take 10 minutes of his time because the merchants wanted him fired because the police didn't shoot anybody, arrested a lot of people but… and he kept me an hour. He was the one that did most of the talking and he bragged that there…nobody was killed because of the restraint that his police showed and not shooting any of the looters, they arrested them, so I don't remember as far as violence is concerned, just the looting, I don't remember any physical.

Ethel: I don't remember any physical violence either but I do remember that the National Guard was called out and they were patrolling the streets also and they were certainly a deterrent. So it wasn't all Pomerleau.

Maria: And was the National Guard there on Pennsylvania Avenue?

Herman: They were all over the city, they may have been. Were they on Pennsylvania Avenue, the National Guard?

Ethel: Absolutely.

Herman: They were? Ok.

Ethel: For several days.

Herman: Yeah.

Ethel: A long time. More than several days

Herman: After I think

Ethel: Immediately afterwards

Herman: Yeah, not during the riots.

Ethel: It was a critical situation and they had to protect the city and they called the National Guard.

Herman: Yeah but the riots didn't continue for days you know

Ethel: Oh no.

Herman: Just that one day really that

Ethel: Day and night

Herman: Probably a 24 hour period…but as far as violence is concerned I don't recall that.

Ethel: I don't recall either, there may have been some

Herman: A lot of arrests but I don't recall people getting killed or beat up or things of that nature.

Maria: And so you mentioned that the National Guard were a necessity…

Ethel: I think so.

Maria: You think so. Do you think that their presence, what kind of effect did their presence have in the neighborhood?

Ethel: It was a deterrent certainly.

Maria: And you mentioned earlier that the other neighborhoods that were affected, from your impression were the business areas, Gay St, West Baltimore St…

Ethel: All of those were affected.

Maria: Anywhere else that sticks in your mind?

Herman: Were they affected downtown? I don't remember.

Ethel: I would assume. I don't remember either. But all the small businesses

Herman: These were the concentration of where the Afro-Americans lived; Pennsylvania Ave, Gay St, West Baltimore St, that's the reason why those three areas were particular…but there may have been in other areas too, I don't know.

Ethel: Do you have access? Do you have access or do they exist newspaper records?

Maria: Yeah, I'm sure.

Ethel: That old?

Maria: Yeah, I'm sure. They have them on reserve I think in the archives.

Nyasha: Probably.

Ethel: Well there would be news accounts certainly.

Maria: Right, but we're looking specifically to hear what people remember about, yeah, that's the point of the oral history project. Not to find the first

Ethel: It was 40 years

Maria: Yeah. That is 40 years, that's why we're doing it. Cause it's going to be 40 years next year for the anniversary. So how do you think Baltimore changed after the riots?

Ethel: Slowly by degrees I think every aspect of life changed. Schools, department stores, it was difficult if not impossible for Black shoppers to get waited on in the

downtown department stores but now it's been a complete change. All of the people on the selling side of the counter are Black. A large proportion.

Herman: Well I think what has happened over a ling haul from 1968-2007, Blacks have increasingly become into the middle class.

Ethel: That's it.

Herman: Our next door neighbor is Black; wonderful neighbor for many years. Better than the previous neighbor who was Jewish. [laughs] Anyway, the, I think what happened on a national scene too, we had an election in1960, and we got a very liberal president by the name of John F. Kennedy, and we had a vice president by the name of Lyndon Johnson who was a southerner, Texan and after Kennedy proposed all kinds of legislation, which would've helped ameliorate the economic situation, the employment situation, and so forth, but it wasn't until Lyndon Johnson came and after Kennedy's assassination that implemented a lot of these, the voter registration, you know I told you about, well you don't remember but you read about, the treatment of the group that went to Mississippi in protest of the …denying the vote

Ethel: You mean Schwerner

Herman: Yeah these were the…you ever heard of Schwerner, Goodman you know that story, well that was typical, and Johnson came in and he was the one responsible for getting a lot of the civil rights legislation through to congress. So the whole climate, and it may not have, I don't know whether the riots were a wake up call or just a natural social progression but, you still have today, today, I'm talking about whatever day it is April the 9th, 2007 you still have segregation.

Ethel: Of course you do but you have a Black candidate who wants to run for President

Herman: Well we have a Black mayor, we had a Black mayor before…

Ethel: Du Burns

Herman: Du and then Kurt Schmoke, but the whole climate was changed and it may have been not directly due to the riots but certainly they were one of the factors that came in, in what happened.

Maria: And as a business owner, what is your impression of how businesses changed, how they were affected afterwards.

Herman: Well I think what may have happened after that, I think was that about the time that the suburbs started opening up the shopping malls?

Ethel: There were other social changes, the whole nature of business changed. It was the beginning of the demise of neighborhood businesses, shopping centers. Mondawmin was the first of the shopping centers and business habits changed, shopping habits changed, people changed. Black families had more disposable income for shopping, we didn't have shopping centers before, Mondawmin was the first and I thought it was a revolutionary move in business growth.

Herman: James Rouse.

Ethel: James Rouse?

Herman: Yeah but when they showed the route

Ethel: Did he build Mondawmin?

Herman: Yeah

Ethel: I didn't remember that.

Herman: Yeah, yeah. But when they showed all the roads that go to Mondawmin none of them…

Ethel: Went below North Avenue

Herman: Right.

Ethel: Right.

Herman: Yeah it was designed to be a White shopping center, you wouldn't believe that but it was. But what really happened I think, at one time you had businesses on Pennsylvania Ave that spread from the 900 block through the 18 or 1900 block. Today the businesses are essentially 17/1800 block on Pennsylvania Ave, all those stores are now residential, recreational, religious, you know, all that was changed. And of the reasons for the change was that department stores made a major discovery; that the black dollar was as good as the white dollar. And economic, not altruistic reasons, but economic reasons, they began, all of a sudden to see the black shopper. So you began a gradual spreading of the shoppers, Edmondson Village opened up, and they were taking black dollars. Socially it was a good thing, economically, stores on Gay St, Pennsylvania Ave, West Baltimore St, which had had a monopoly on the black dollar, they suffered some economically.

Ethel: That was only partially true.

Herman: Yeah I'm saying…

Ethel: Gay St. was a very viable business block for many, many, many years after.

Herman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You had the Bel Air market there, we had the Lafayette Market, West Baltimore St. had the Hollins St. Market and all these were busy markets for the…but that's what happened, you know economically, as far as our business is concerned after the riots.

Ethel: It's a complicated development because there was a period when white business people began to leave the area and many of the businesses, the small businesses were taken over by Black entrepreneurs. So you know there was that opportunity, and I dare say, I don't know I'm not down there very much but I'm sure they still are in business

Herman: Well the opportunity for Blacks to take over wasn't fulfilled. Tommy D'Alesandro put me on a commission

Ethel: Weren't there, excuse me, weren't there several Black businesses on Lexington St.

Herman: There may have been here and there but it was rare, Black owned businesses were rare but Tommy D'Alesandro appointed something called the Equal Opportunities Commission, I sat on it. Sam Daniels, I don't know whether you know that name or not, he was high in the ranks of the Black community, head of the Prince Masons and you know he was on it. Anyway we did a survey to get how many businesses were willing to sell, the list was that long [gestures]. Then we wanted to see who were available for buyers, the list was that short.

Ethel: Yeah but that would've changed because…

Herman: Yeah, no but what happened was, what came into a lot of these businesses was not the Blacks but the Koreans, they took advantage of it

Ethel: Oh yeah, I remember that

Herman: But subsequently, on their own without this artificial thing that we had created, you know Blacks, we had more and more Black owned businesses

Maria: And what became of your shop?

Ethel: We sold it

Herman: Well in 1977 I think it was, was it 1977?

Ethel: I don't remember

Herman: We were building the subway system and of the stops was at the Lafayette Market. And once upon the midnight, one of the workers, they were working at night, had a live, what do you call one of those things that

Ethel: A driller

Herman: Yeah

Ethel: Chop up the street

Herman: He hit a live gas line, and we were in business for 27 years, and we were out of business in 27 minutes [laughs].

Ethel: The whole block

Herman: No, it was 3 stores essentially, us, Kelly's and Cookie's that suffered the fires so we…

Ethel: But it did eventually get repaired…

Herman: Oh yeah, we got some insurance, we sold the ground

Ethel: We were covered, but I mean the properties that were devastated were repaired and are occupied now

Herman: Yeah, yeah.

Ethel: We drove through that area recently and from down there, up Park Heights, to Belvedere, are you familiar with the area?

Maria: I am.

Ethel: You are. It's shocking and if the city doesn't do something to clean up that strip, it's 7 miles long.

Herman: You're talking about lower Park Heights

Ethel: Lower Park Heights and it starts down on Pennsylvania Avenue, below the library, it has to get the city's attention. I don't know what will be of that area. The houses are boarded up.

Herman: They have plans for it.

Ethel: They do?

Herman: Yeah. But again you were referring to our business. We continued in business, but the area itself went down hill, not so much and I think it was unrelated to the riots, it was more because the opening of one shopping mall after another in counties, that was the economics of it and the smaller businesses….at one time we may have had as many as a thousand retail stores in different neighborhoods and then it shrunk way, way down, way down.

Maria: And you of course have emphasized your equitable relations with people of other races, but do you feel that your interactions with people of other races changed at all? Or how you were treated by people of other races, did that change?

Ethel: Well not maybe because of the riots, he's centrally involved in that group he mentioned earlier, Blues, the Black Jews. I think it's an ineffective organization, they're getting no where fast.

Herman: That's not true

Ethel: But that's your feeling and that's mine.

Herman: Yeah but I'm a member of the Board and I know what's going on and you don't. Go ahead [laughs]

Ethel: I don't think it's the most effective organization but what was your question again?

Maria: Have your relations changed after the riots, the race relations in your personal experience. Your personal relations with Blacks or how you felt you were perceived by Blacks.

Ethel: You know I never gave it thought, the relationships we have are comfortable. I think for the others and for us. I'm speaking for myself, for me.

Herman: I remember walking down Pennsylvania Avenue one day, obviously intoxicated, looks at me and says 'I don't like you,' I says really, I says why not, 'because you got more money than I got' [laughs], so it had nothing to do with race but economics. But no we never experienced…I don't know if you got time for other stories but subsequent to that, we had the Black Panthers come on the scene. Do you wanna hear that story, but that's several years after this…

Maria: I think we'll just stick to the riots I think, or we could turn off the…

Herman: Ok, let's stick to the riots. But our relationships with our Black associates remained good and I told you we had built up a reservoir of dignity and respect and that survived.

Ethel: But we always had it.

Herman: Yeah I'm saying so. Yeah.

Maria: It carried over.

Ethel: Yeah… we had more opportunity. There were several social functions with this BLUES group, where it's a very comfortable time we spend, integrated.

Herman: We had more Black businesses on Pennsylvania Avenue, we had Victoria Adams

Ethel: Do you know who she is?

Herman: Have you ever heard of Willie Adams?

Ethel: She had a better reputation than he

Herman: He was one of the first Black millionaires in Baltimore

Ethel: He was the number guy and she had

Maria: Oh lil' Willie

Ethel: She had talents that took her in another direction, she was in city government

Herman: She was a city councilwoman

Ethel: City councilwoman, she died recently

Herman: Last year…

Ethel: A wealthy woman

Herman: But she had a shop on Pennsylvania Ave, called the Charm shop, where she catered to the silk stocking Black women, you know, and then George S. was the manager there.

Ethel: He was for the Afro isn't he?

Herman: He was a treasurer for PALMA, all the money that came in he handled, even though I was the president and I had authorized any distribution, and then we had, what was the guy that had the shoe shop on the corner of…

Ethel: Stan Ferd…

Herman: No…was it Butler? Oh, Alan! Gilbert Alan.

Ethel: Oh I didn't remember him

Herman: Yeah. When we went to visit Carl Murphy at his office at the Afro, when we started our business association in 1953, he was one of the guys I brought with me but it

didn't…and I remember we had meetings going on at that time. You know the name, Lena Boone, well she was…

Ethel: A neighborhood activist

Herman: We had meeting after meeting and one of the Black militants, were talking about integrating city schools, and I was sitting in a meeting and somebody says 'what if they don't cooperate' so this guy grins and lights a match and holds it up, and I said 'that's nonsense', I says 'you don't help a situation from damaging, you might get personal satisfact'…anyway, and I remember some, one of the guys, asking Gilbert Alan, what's with this guy Katkow, cause I had said I wanted to leave Pennsylvania a better place than what I'd found it, he says 'so what's with this guy', so Gilbert says with tongue in cheek, 'he has some Black blood in him.'[laughs] The guy believed him. [laughter] But our relationships continued well.

Maria: I think that's it.