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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

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

Harold L. Knight                      1/15/08  
Participant Signature                      Date

HAROLD L. KNIGHT  
Participant Printed Name

*Interview with Rev. Dr. Harold L. Knight  
January 15, 2008; New Shiloh Baptist Church, Turners Station, Pastor's Office  
Interviewer: Duane Howard  
Transcribers: Duane Howard and Nora Feinstein*

**Howard:** Could you state your full name please?

**Knight:** I'm Dr. Harold L. Knight, Pastor of the New Shiloh Baptist Church of Turners Station.

**Howard:** Dr. Knight, Rev. Knight, Pastor Knight - What was your situation in 1967—'68? How old were you?

**Knight:** In 1968, I was 16 years old. I was a student at Baltimore City College High School.

**Howard:** Where did you live?

**Knight:** I lived in East Baltimore and East Baltimore was the heart of the lot of the riots.

**Howard:** Do you have an address?

**Knight:** Yes. The address at that time was 1228 North Spring Street.

**Howard:** That's East Baltimore?

**Knight:** East Baltimore, yes.

**Howard:** And you went to school at...?

**Knight:** Baltimore City College High School, I was a junior at that particular time.

**Howard:** Your parents, where did they shop? The places where they went to shop for groceries

and that type of thing?

**Knight:** The community grocery stores basically are where my parents would go to do their marketing. Bel Air Market was the fresh produce...that was also struck by the riots. That area was struck by the riots. There was a grocery store on Harford...Harford Road and Preston Street that we received many of our canned goods from. We shopped for much of our clothing from Sears...It was called Sears Roebuck at that time. Sears & Roebuck was located on North Avenue and Harford Road. During that particular time...the walls of Sears & Roebuck was a fortress for the Maryland National Guard during that time.

**Howard:** Now, before the riots, what kinds of interactions did you have with people of other races?

**Knight:** Well, because of my parents...I have a brother that's married interracially and we've somewhat have always embraced other races. In fact all of my mother's sisters at least one of their sons married interracially, so it's within the family, so that was not a big thing. Mixing of the races was not a real problem for me. Speak of City College at that time was an integrated school.

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

**Knight:** Well before the riots, Baltimore City was very much a segregated city. It's somewhat still the same way. It was ethnic communities set up in Baltimore City. There were East Baltimore Highlandtown area where the Polish Americans and Little Italy along Baltimore Lombard Street. There was the Italian community. Also in the Baltimore community somewhat in the proximity of Little Italy also was what we called "Jew Town," where the Jewish people did not live there but their stores were still located in the community. West Baltimore, Park Heights area still had many Jewish Americans living in the community as well as Pikesville, they were starting to go into Pikesville, but they were basically still in Park Heights. Baltimore City was very much a segregated city and somewhat still like that now.

**Howard:** What do you remember about the assassination of Martin Luther King that day?

**Knight:** Well I remember it very well. James Earl Ray was cited as the person who was the assassin and he shot him on the balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. It just seemed like it shattered my world.

There was a connection with me with Dr. King in that I'm a graduate of Morehouse College and that's the alumnus also of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King in the year before, in 1967, he came to Baltimore City to meet with the Rev. Dr. Vernon Dobson and Rev. Marion Curtis Bascom to basically talk about his Civil Rights Movement with these gentlemen who were very, very important in Baltimore City. During the time the Morehouse College Glee Club came to Baltimore and they performed at the Douglas Memorial Community Church, which was pastored then by Dr. Bascom. As Dr. King was there, he was the halftime speaker, being that he was in Baltimore at that time. I was very impressed with him, I was moved by the singing of the Glee Club. I knew from that time forth that I was going to attend Morehouse College. I had such high regard for Martin Luther King, I said I want to be like that man, never really knowing that being like that man was not only going to Morehouse, but being a preacher because I had never aspired to be a preacher. To be actively involved in civil rights and civil injustices to people anywhere they are and currently now that's what my ministry is about. Any injustices to the people of God has caused me to be involved in those things.

**Howard:** How did you hear about the riots starting?

**Knight:** Oh, it wasn't difficult to know that the riots were starting. Once the riots really started and Dr. King— it was publicly known through the news media that he was assassinated— instantly many within the community started to burn and loot. It just spread like wildfire. However, I came from a structured family and my parents would not allow me to go out during the time of the riot. If I went out she or he had to know my whereabouts. I was nowhere near many of the things that happened. Though it happened in the community, I was nowhere near those looters nor the ones who burned the properties of the proprietors.

**Howard:** During the riots, what information did you get and where did you get it from— the information about the riots?

**Knight:** Well, much of it came across the screen from the local news media, then there was the grapevine within the community. The grapevine within the community was very, very strong and people would connect with others— the oral tradition within the black community is still to this day is very important. And through the oral tradition word of mouth passed down and kept going down the line. People would tell you what they heard, what they found out and so forth, in addition to what the news media had reported. But that's basically how I found out about his assassination.

**Howard:** Did you watch TV coverage of the riots?

**Knight:** Yes I did.

**Howard:** What are your impressions of the reporting? Do you feel as though it was biased or it was straightforward or how do you feel?

**Knight:** Well I think it was straightforward. I didn't see any corners turned, in that they reported it as an assassination of Dr. King by a person who they felt was a segregationist. They didn't hide that he was a segregationist in the manner which it was done. However, there were many who believed there was a conspiracy involved....in that James Earl was not the only assassin but that the FBI or the CIA—other governmental agencies might have been involved in his assassination.

**Howard:** How do you think the national news portrayed the situation in Baltimore—do you remember?

**Knight:** I do remember, the national media portrayed Baltimore, and not only Baltimore but

major urban metropolitans, as cities on fire. Detroit, Washington D.C., Harlem [New York, NY], Watts [Los Angeles, CA], various communities of the nation that were basically Afro-centric were on fire because people were upset in the assassination of Dr. King.

**Howard:** What were your impressions of the neighborhoods that were affected by the rioting?

**Knight:** Well, the neighborhoods that were affected were our neighborhoods. They were the stores in our neighborhoods. Now I don't condone what was done as far as rioting and the looting and the burning. But if they...I'll say our people, were going to loot and riot it shouldn't have been in your own community. It destroyed our community and our community has not gone back to what it used to be as a consequence of 1968. Now I've seen that nationwide. I've been to Watts, I've been to Harlem, I've been to Washington D.C., I've been to Detroit, I've seen this in Chicago, I've seen the major cities. And, what used to be in black communities... where the businesses that we had, they're no longer there; the riots destroyed them.

**Howard:** What about the types of violence that was occurring, what was your impression of that?

**Knight:** Well, the violence that they chose to use, Dr. King was one of non - violence. But there was violence involved in much --if a white person was caught in the community, that person was beaten. Their stores were burned. Again, their stores were burned but the stores were in our community. Their stores were the sources of where we had to go to get our commodities for our daily living.

**Howard:** What about the extent of the arrests, how do you feel about your impressions of the arrests?

**Knight:** I won't say that the arrests were unjust because they gave a curfew, told us not to be out. And there were many people who were out for mischievous activity and the consequence were arrests.



**Howard:** Did you see the National Guard troops in your neighborhood?

**Knight:** Yes I did.

**Howard:** How did their presence make you and your neighbors feel?

**Knight:** Well, I felt that there would be some peace and some calm because it was apparent that the Baltimore City Police Department could not handle that situation by themselves. Within the National Guard I saw many people I knew from the community who were Guardsmen. And, it was a little odd that they would be mixed in with the white soldiers who apparently were trying to arrest our community and to obtain order within our community. So, many would think, looking at the brothers—as I would say—that they were turning on us and doing what the white man would want to be done. But I saw it as restoring peace and not differentiating color because we were out of hand and the riot needed to be [s]quelched and peace needed to be restored back in our community.

**Howard:** What was the mood in your area during the riots?

**Knight:** There was a very, very low and dismal sadness because of Dr. King's death and many people were pondering, "Where do we go from here?" and who would be the next leader. As I remember Dr. Ralph David Abernathy at that particular time was still alive. He was the lieutenant to Dr. King and many people were wondering, "Could he take the mantle?" Where do we go, all the accomplishments that he had gone forth... and the things that he had seen to accomplish for us as a people, would we lose them? Would the advancements that he had approached—would they be stagnated? What would happen after his death was a major concern for many people in the community. Would there be another Martin Luther King? In the black community we are a religious people and we always believe that God always raises up another leader but we could not determine who the leader would be because many people were trying to be the voice in his absence. That was the concern, and to this day we have not resurged to a

person to be the likes of a Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Howard:** How did your life and activities change during the days of the riots?

**Knight:** It made me a little more conscious of being a—at that time the term was an African American. So much that when I was seeking to go to college not only was Morehouse on my list but there were other colleges that pursued me - UCLA, Yale, Princeton, some of the Ivy League white institutions were in pursuit of me - but I wanted to go to a black institution, a historically black college or university. To identify with my people at that particular time for the strength and unity of “United we stand, divided we fall.” That was a heavy concept during those particular times.

**Howard:** Could you speak about the turmoil and tensions that were going on in the neighborhood as far as the rioting and the protesting of that era in 1968?

**Knight:** That era also happened to be the era during the time of the Vietnam War. There were national protests against the war. And then, it also happened to be the era during the time of the Black Panthers. The onsurgence of the Black Muslims, Elijah Muhammad...during that time basically it was truly a time of identity for black people. It was so many schisms, I would say, as a result of, who do you identify with, the Black Panthers, do you identify with the Black Muslims, do you identify with Dr. King and his non-violent approach? What was your stance? And, though I could embrace some of all of them, my stance truly stood with the non-violence approach with Dr. King.

It also made me think to the biblical mandate to turn one's cheek when you were afflicted by someone. But it was very difficult to turn your cheek to somebody who's of a different color who would spit in your face, who would call you the “n-word,” who would not receive you in a restaurant because of the color of your skin and not the content of your character. It's quite difficult to embrace the non-violent movement but yet it was effective. It was effective in that we knew that God was on our side and that God would see us through it. That was the premise and the basis for which the non-violent movement was about.

**Howard:** Could you tell me a little bit more about being sixteen at City College during that time, of the riots and the assassination?

**Knight:** Fortunately, we didn't have any difficulties in school. School was integrated but more of the, I'll say the Caucasian students, were Jewish. During the 60's, or late 60's many of the Jews would be the lawyers who would represent African Americans and somewhat identifying with being second-class citizens. They having experienced the Holocaust and coming to America and not being accepted because of their entrepreneurial skills—even to this day many do still have conflicts with the Jew based upon his entrepreneurial skills and economics. But in our community, the Jewish entrepreneur was the one who advanced credit to our families. When we did not have the currency, we did have what was known as “a little book,” that you could borrow through credit and you could still receive those same commodities and the merchandise that you need. But the stores were burned out of our community and it removed that kind of credit and that kind of...it was economical benevolence, but that benevolence was still not there because of the riots.

**Howard:** How do you think Baltimore has changed after the riots or has it changed?

**Knight:** Well, it's still a segregated city. It's not as bad in that we are able to live anywhere we want to live. But when I noticed also because of the Civil Rights Movement when we were able to come into many of their neighborhoods there would be the flight method—we would come in, they would move out. The housing would be sometimes triple, double to triple what it costs them. And I know that everybody needs to make a profit, but I saw that many times as exploitation because truly we wanted to have quality of life like anyone else. But the means by which we got the quality of life sometimes was an unjust way of doing it.

**Howard:** Have you been back to your neighborhood since the riot and have you seen any change there?

**Knight:** Yes I have. I think probably the last time I was in the community where I grew up was probably 2003. My mother in that year between 2002 and 2003 moved from our family home, where most of us grew up and were reared, to Stadium Place, the new senior citizens complex that's on the site of the old Memorial Stadium. And when I would visit my mother in the old community, it was not the old community that I knew.

The old community that I knew had neighbors who knew about each other. The neighbors were able to spank me, discipline me. I knew them, they knew me, they knew my parents. The community was not a drug-infested community, the community was community-oriented and there was a spirit of love and concern for each other—to the point that we could borrow from each other and replenish each other. It was truly what we could call a communal situation. The community that I revisited is now drug infested, people do not know each other, more people are renters than they are owners and there is a difference in the community. I would have to attribute a lot of that to the riots having done that. The riots I would say did do something as far as opening up the city of Baltimore to us as a people where we can live anywhere but when that happened, it vacated that family concept in the community. The people that came in did not have that same like-mindedness.

**Howard:** In your experience, what businesses were affected by the riots?

**Knight:** Just about every business that was in the community then was owned by a white proprietor was affected. What seemed to be maintained were the liquor stores and that bothered me. Because we would care more about a liquor store than about a grocery store where you need to get your groceries. Drugstores were looted a lot. We would care more about a liquor store than a drug store when you would still get sick and you would still need prescriptions to be filled, you would still need the medications across the counter. Many times it would cause us to have to go out of our community to areas that we would have to when we didn't have a car – bus or a taxicab was our only means of transportation to get there.

**Howard:** Did your interactions with people of other races change after the riots?

**Knight:** No it did not. Again I was close to the students that were Caucasian at Baltimore City College High School. I was on the school newspaper and many of them were on the school newspaper. We would travel to various cities for adjudications for your newspaper for awards. Most of the time we were on the train, we would sit next to each other, we would communicate with each other, we would eat lunch together, we would be in our school newspaper office and even the students who were on the basketball team or the football—we still interacted with them and it did not affect us as far as them because we did not charge them for what had happened to Dr. King.

**Howard:** Is there anything that you would like to pass on as a general statement or an overall wrap up for someone who may look at this riot and wonder and have questions about it?

**Knight:** Well, “What good did the riot do for us?” That’s the major question one can ask. One of the things that did come out of it that’s good was that it enabled community-based organizations to be fortified. I saw that many people who came together who would not have done so maybe if the riots had not occurred. To be more conscious of the injustices that African Americans would receive from white Americans. Tough there were organizations prior to that it took Dr. King’s death to take us to the next level, to try to pass the torch on to the next generation, to make that legacy of Dr. King transferable to generations to come. At his time—at that time his birthday was not a national holiday, so that was one of the things we were in pursuit of. Now that we do have it that his birthday is not just a day off but a day to remember what he did for us as a people. And to extend the legacy by doing those things that he pursued for all persons—black, white, Hispanic, whatever—where injustices anywhere may be found.

**Howard:** Is there anything that you would like to say in closing that I might have forgotten that you would like to add?

**Knight:** I think you covered it well. I’m appreciative of this opportunity you have afforded me.

**Howard:** Thank you for your time.

**Knight:** Thank you.