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Langsdale Library
Special Collections Department
1420 Maryland Avenue
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Devon Wilford-Said

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

Dear MRS. WILFORD SAID

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.

Elizabeth M. Nix

From: LadyD S [ladyd_2007@hotmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, December 19, 2006 12:03 PM
To: Elizabeth M. Nix
Subject: Interview Transcripts

Dear Professor Nix:

My name is, Mrs. Devon Wilford-Said, I'm writing to inform you that I received the transcript from the Riots of 1968 interview conducted by Tashawn Barnes. I truly enjoyed being a part of the project and was honored to be able to contribute my thoughts and memories from back during that historical time period.

Peace,

Devon

12/19/2006

Riots of 1968 Interview [Revised Version]

Interviewer: Bashi Rose
Interviewee: Devon Wilford-Said
October 25, 2006

What was your age at the time of the 68 riots?
I believe I was about 14. It was a month before my birthday. Um I would have been 15 the following month in May in my teens.

Were you working at the time of the riots, and if so what was your occupation?
No, I was just being my regular teenage self, not working just having fun in the neighborhood with the rest of, um my peers.

Where did you live during this time?
I lived ah; it was the 1000 block of East Preston St. right here in Baltimore
Pause no not Preston, I'm sorry, Biddle St... Why am I thinking Preston? I use to live on Preston, ok. But it's Biddle, 1000 block of E. Biddle St. I'm sorry.

How would you describe your neighborhood?
We lived right at the corner of Biddle near um, Harford, ok like when you're going towards um, I think when you're going towards Preston St. because the next street over is Preston, yeah, East Side of Baltimore not too far from the Oliver Street where it use to be, yeah um, just a regular ghetto neighborhood with the marble steps marble steps & everything yaw know

Close knit?
Yeah, yeah on one block, yep we had a lot of ah; we had sort of a mix population as far as residents were concerned. We had seniors on the block. We had single families. We had married families on the block, and ah elderly; sort of a combination on our block, yeah.

How did you feel about the Riots?
Uh, well at the time I was little. I was a little saddened, because uh, when we were in school ya know, we took pride in Martin Luther King. We were learning a lot about what he was trying to do for the black people, and by him being non-violent and talking about the non-violent message, um I was a little disappointed in our people carrying on the way they did ya know with the whites because I, well by me growing up I was never prejudice when I was growing up, so I had a thing about people mistreating other people because of the color of their skin, so I had some issues with that.

Were you personally affected in any way by riots?
Well somewhat, yeah, somewhat because um, it happened like uh a few months after my grandmother had passed, my grandmother passed in uh, January of that year, yeah in January.
In fact, it was January the fourth' 1968 when my grandmother passed, and then here comes April 4, 1968 Martin Luther King. So it was kind of detrimental to me because I was so close to my grandmother and um, she was a role model to me as well.

Martin Luther King was a role model to me and lots of students at that time when I was in high school. So, um I was very sad because I was still grieving for my grandmother at that time. When that happened I think the whole nation, everybody ya know, blacks from all over the country was ya know, really upset ya know, my mother was and my sisters and brothers, my older sisters and brothers--everybody was real touched by it ya know. So it sort of stirred up a whole lot of different emotions in me at during that time.

Can you think back to the day when King was assassinated and how it made you feel?
Umm, when we first heard about it, it was like on the news ya know, when it first happened, uh we were somewhat in shock when it first happened. Um, I remember my mother was telling me and my, sisters about it, and she was crying and some of my sisters was crying. Everybody just got real emotional because I had the opportunity to meet him back when I was in elementary school, when he um, Martin Luther King had visited our church right across the street from where we lived on East Bond St., the 800 block of East Bond St. So I had an opportunity to meet him as he was speaking outside to some of the residents out there. It was a very happy time because everybody was so excited, and to me, as a child ya know, seeing such a historical figure in the community was like ya know, sort like real exciting for me and also for my sisters and brothers. And just to be there ya know, to be able to meet him and shake his hand, and get to know somebody such as him and with his caliber ya know, it was like overwhelming, a very emotional time. So when it happened um, most of us were, ya know, after the shock, we sort of got kinda numb ya know. Because I started having flash backs of seeing him ya know, when they had the parade of motorcycles and police cars coming up the street, and all of the people gathering around cheering and everything. I just started having flashbacks ya know, of that time ya know, when he was alive and his speech, the last speech that he made which was very uh, emotional and um. So it just sorta like…impacted us ya know in a very sad way.

What did the civil rights movement mean to you?
FREEDOM. Really because it seemed like during that time the black race was really coming together ya know. People were unifying, ya know. Unifying, we didn't have as much violence in our neighborhood where we lived at that time, cause we come out and sit on our steps without anybody bothering us; stay out all night if we want ya know, leave our doors unlocked and what have you. And then when all of this blow up with the uh, racial thing ya know, they had to bar us in our homes and put us on curfew, and we wasn't use to that ya know. So it was a whole ya know, conglomerate of emotions we didn't, we had to deal with ya know, at that time.

You mentioned the curfews, how did you have to deal with the curfews, were you always on time?
Yeah…Well um since I was a teen my mom had ya know, she would let us…like during Spring months and school days we were allowed to come in maybe um 9: 0'clock at night. Ya know she would let us sit out on the front or whatever till about nine ya know on days where we had to go to school, but uh during the summer months we had a little more ya know, free time out. But this was the spring and it was getting warm and all and ya know, we were excited because we were like neighborhood kids, and most of our girlfriends um, that used to live down the street from us, we'd come together and to a store together and just do things or go to the restaurant and hang out on the corners and just ya know, have fun ya know?

And uh when, when that happened and came about with the curfew um, they was telling us that first we had to come in around 7 o' clock at night. That's when everything was so disorganized and um, when they had the um, the national guard to come out ya know, to try to keep the order because people were just going chaotic. They were like uh looting the stores. They were uh beating white people up. White people that they would just see walking down the street, or if they were in their cars, they'd throw rocks at 'em. And ya know it was like the only way that they could really stop the violence was to keep the people in the house. So when the um, when they put the curfew on if you wasn't in your house and they saw those guns or those troops standing out there ya know, manning those corners and those blocks, everybody ya know was frightened. Because ya know, as a ya know, young person you are afraid, you never seen no machine guns and that type of thing, and they had actual machine gun type things ya know out there ya know. And they had their little jeeps ya know paroling up down up down the streets and everything. We never seen nothing like that, we thought it was going to be a war or something ya know. So you ya know, your young, and ya know, but um we obeyed the curfew cause my mom was very strict, so we did what we was supposed to do during that time.

When you found out that he was shot uh as a youth were you angered at all by him being shot, and what was your understanding of who shot him?
Um, I had a feeling that um something was gonna hap. . . well see when I was younger my girlfriends use to always tease me because I had this sorta sixth sense about things and I use to always predict stuff when I was little um, and I had a feeling something was gonna happen to him because they was threatening. We was watching the news and uh when he was doing the march the Selma march and how people were threatening to kill him and all and um, bombing his house and his family ya know, sending him threatening letters and calling him. I had a feeling that somebody was gonna try to kill him, and I was just hoping and praying that they didn't, that he would make it ya know, but after that last speech that he made, that last speech when he uh made in Washington, DC I believe I think, I sensed that he knew that he was going to die ya know. And I was thinking I use to tell mother I said, I don't think he is going to make it too long, I used to tell my mother that when I was smaller. She used to always say girl you don't know, you don't know, you don't know, but that's how parents ya know, you don't want to hear that, but it really, really saddened me. It was real sad and I was hurt and I was angry too ya know. The way they did it ya know. I said well how come they didn't have enough security for him knowing that his life was in danger ya know, constantly ya know, why didn't they have somebody around him constantly even when he was standing out there on that balcony ya know? So it was like devastating to me at the time.

When he got shot on that balcony from what I understand he was down there to help out some sanitation workers?
Yeah

B: And I didn't know that until I was an adult, were you aware of that while he was down there, and his reason for being down there, did it make sense?
DS: That's what he does, that's what he did. It makes sense to me because he was always for the causes of the people that were down trotting ya know. Anybody that asks him to come to speak or whatever, if he could make it he would come ya know cause with our church um, the time that he had came up to visit our church we were having a thing where we was trying to get the people together for programs for youth, and he came to speak to inspire the youth to do good things in the church ya know. So um, when they had called to ask they didn't think he was going to come, in fact the whole community didn't think he was going to come, but when he came ya know, and to support something like that ya know, just children going to the church, uh they had like a uh summer school, uh church at Faith Baptist Church.
They had a summer school program or something like that for youth and uh the deacon or the minister, I forget the name of the minister at that church, but um they were trying to promote the program, the summer school program for the youth over at church, and he came as an honored speaker so he could encourage the youth to stay in school to get their education, and that type of thing. So he took time out of his busy schedule doing all the things that he did just to come up to Faith Baptist church in Baltimore City. So I mean ya know, helping the trash, uh workers, uh was something just ya know, something that he would do automatically cause that's the type of character he was ya know, so he would do that.

Now, obviously you were young, but you had a mature understanding of what was going on. Was that the case for a lot of other youth in that area? Did they understand King on the same level you did?
Yeah, most of my girlfriends did. They understood in fact, um a girlfriend next door, 10 20-1027, her name was Mae, she was around the same age that I was, and we were like um ya know, most of the time with girls. We use to have uh times when we would come out on our stoops and um scrub floors and stuff, I mean the steps, and uh we use to have all different types of bracelets ya know, just doing our steps and what have you, and we always talked about different things that we liked and disliked, and we talked about politics and everything else ya know. Most kids at our age probably wouldn't talk about stuff like that but we were a little bit mature minded, I guess so. But uh, she was close to um Martin Luther King as far as his views and what have you too, because she was the type of person. She was a non-violent person too, and she was trying to promote peace in our neighborhood, and she was trying to keep the bad boys off our block and stuff like that; and since he was promoting non-violence we were trying to do the same thing in our neighborhood, so it really impacted us a lot, yeah as kids.

Now did you encounter any family and friends with opposite opinions of you during the riots? Did you ever find yourself having to mediate?
No, no I don't recall.

How did your parents react to it?
Well um, my mom, we lived with my mom singly raised us ya know, but um my mom she use to always, uh talk about Martin Luther King ya know and things that he was doing, and everything. And um, my aunt I had a few aunts that was really geared towards non violence, the subject and what have you, too, and respected his views about interracial people, cause when he did that speech about bringing all the people together they were like ya know, keying in to that because my mom she used to have to work at a Jewish white persons home ya know, to help to make ends meet, and um the type of um prejudices that they received ya know, cause sometimes they have these rooms where they have to have the blacks to sleep when they're doing cleaning up for the white persons house or the Jewish person's house or whatever. They have a certain room if they have to stay over at night in the back, ya know how they would come in ya know how some of those houses were made, and uh cause she used to have to stay sometimes when she used to clean up these Jewish people's homes out in the county somewhere, where she used to work and um and listening to what Martin Luther King was saying about bringing people together and getting rid of the stigma of black and white ya know with races and the violence between the races because of skin color and everything. She was sorta geared towards that, her and my aunt. So they used to sit back in the kitchen on Sundays and talk about it ya know, and the politics and everything about Martin Luther King, about John F. Kennedy when he was slain and everything and all of those different things about politics. She was sorta tuned into it, yeah my mom was.

Community Businesses During the Riots?
They would give some of the black kids a hard time when we would go to the store cause mom was always sending us to the store for this or that and the other. We had a market right down the street from where we lived right there at Preston and um, uh I think that's Harford, when Harford turns into yeah, it's Preston and Harford, it was a little uh grocery store called Crowns, and my mother always sent us down there to get little extra food to make ends meet, and they would hack up the prices and overcharge us a lot ya know. And white people owned the store so a lot of people were complaining about the store because they would switch their prices and sometimes they'd sell us bad meats because we were young.

We didn't know ya know, and my mother had to send us back to make changes; and um, the racist remarks sometimes ya know, that we received when we would go into this store ya know, sorta of like we had a fixation on getting these people that owned this store out of our community ya know, because they were mistreating the blacks. So when the riot part started and the looting and everything, the first spot that they wanted to hit was Crowns Market.

So when that happened my mother, even though she was afraid for us and she didn't want us to go out, but we wanted to go out cause we didn't want to be staying just cooped up in no house ya know. We knew our neighborhood. We knew our block and we weren't afraid to go out. We knew our people because we had the black, the black uh cloth on our door and everything, so the people that passed by our houses, because you had to put these black cloths on our doors to make sure you were an African American instead of a white person right. So um I would tell my mother, I'd say we gonna be alright, we know this is our neighborhood ya know. We knew the people in the neighborhood, but uh, our buddies, some of the guys that hanged on our block, they were ready to get even with the guy at Crown's store for the way they treated us for going there cause we were black ya know. And um so, that was the first store that they looted. They looted, they broke into the store, and we didn't do that. Now I did participate, but I didn't break into anything right, because we wanted to get even with Crowns because of what they did to us right, so my sister and I my mother was uh telling us we could go out for a little while, and she knew what we were going to do ya know, she knew it, and all the parents knew. So we went to the store. We went shopping in Crowns, and we got all the food that they would turn, cheating us on, and we just put in the cart and just rolled it down the street and just brought it home ya know. So I said we know we don't have to worry about these high prices anymore we can get it for free. Well we were kids ya know, and ya know we thought we were getting even. That was our way of thinking at the time, but um, and my mom she looked at all this food right, at first she was getting mad *'ya'll have no business going up there,'* but when she saw that food! (pause). She was alright with that. She wanted us to get even too, but she tried to play it off…but yeah…it was negative and positive…I would say for the most part.

Okay, what was I going to ask you? How did the media portray the riots in Baltimore? I would think negatively as they do everything else. Uh, huh, ya know, they focused in on the uh, the riot, the looting part, and I could say that during my time I could look at the looting part as sorta of negative and positive because some of those store fronts, uh stores, some of them that were owned by some of the Jewish people they would hike up their prices and everything. They didn't focus on nothing like that, but they focused on ya know…the looting and violent part when they was actually throwing the rocks, but not the good things that the blacks was trying to do to help the whites. So I think the media was really negative in portraying the um, the riots at that time.

Okay
In fact the only part I really, really didn't like was what they did with the white people. Because we were looking at the news and the media was just focusing in on the blacks and how they were carrying on out in the street in the different states like in California and over in DC. They were like . . . in DC they were really bad over there. They were showing on the news how they were just really carrying on with the folks. I didn't like the part of them um throwing the people's cars and people crashing and stuff like, and they had kids in their cars ya know; some were little babies and what have you, and that part was really ya know, I, I'm not a violent person and I didn't like to see anybody get hurt. So that was my thing against that, and they just sorta, like the media, just ate that up. They just focused on all the negatives but they didn't focus on some of the positives where some of the black families were coming out and trying to help the white people that were in accidents, that were bleeding and hurting, how they was trying to come out and help some of the people instead of them beating them. They were trying to help them get the ambulances for they can ya know, take them to the hospital and stuff like that.

Do you feel that the police and federal troops lessoned or added to the tension?
When they first got there I think they added to the tension, because people were being mistreated ya know. They were shoving people ya know cause some of the people were running with televisions, cause they had went to the malls and the um, I think down at Old town mall, they were coming out with televisions and everything ya know. And the way they just knocked the stuff out of their hands and started locking them up and started hitting them with the uh, their uh, what they call those things

Billy clubs
Yeah, yeah they was just beating 'em ya know, instead of just locking 'em up, they were just ya know beat, treating them real mean. The white police were because they were already angry for having to come out ya know, and in fact and I think that's why they had to get more like, patrol paratroopers, and um, then um I think it was during the time Spiro Agnew was our governor I think, or not governor yeah, yes he was governor, Spiro Agnew, cause he had to uh summon up the troops from the uh national guard, and um he had to get Lyndon B. Johnson to give him additional federal troops, because it had gotten so bad in the Baltimore/Washington area. So, but when the troops came in their jeeps and everything and those machine guns, they had those guns on their jeeps things ya know just like in a war. So the guys, the fellows, ya know, starting getting paranoid so they just dropped stuff when they saw the national guard ya know, bam! They out of there before they get locked up, and um, but they wasn't real mean to the children, but it was just the idea, it was like, it was like you was in a war basically. That's how it was ya know.

Were there any organizations or groups of people that decided to come together at that time that you remember?
Umm, let me see well we wasn't, we wasn't involved in a group, but they had uh, it was a what's the name of that group, the Black Panther Group um, was out during that time. I believe the Black Panthers where they were trying to uh, support some of the blacks in the neighborhood, and trying to re-focus them on black power and all of that. They had some of them, they would like uh, they had some of the people handing out literature about the Black Panther Group, and that's when they started doing things with the colors, the green and the red and the black and what have you, and stuff like that ya know.

And they was trying to educate the blacks on the African American, African American heritage and everything, and how blacks needed to ban together so that we can fight for our rights and what have you, and stop being mistreated and all, but that group was out. I remember the Black Panthers that's what I remember.

Were you intimidated by them?
Somewhat, we were scared because we see those leather jackets and everything ya know. We were like, we were little ya know, we didn't know they were coming round in the neighborhood, their little bandana things on and everything, and they were a little militant. They looked like military too, right. So we didn't know, ya know, but that was the group out during that time. Um, that's the only group that I remember and we used to like act like we were black panthers too. We used to play on our front though

What, ya'll had Black Panther games?
No, we would get, we would get our jackets right, we would get our leather coats and all ya know, and stuff ya know, and just pretend we just pretended mostly and stuff. Like me and some of our buddies that lived down the street, but we wasn't into it too deep because we just stayed on out the block. We watched the news and some of the people at the headquarters for the black panthers, because they used to have different headquarters in different locations during that time and they were recruiting.

Was anyone that you knew injured, arrested or killed?
My cousin almost got arrested cause he, uh he was looting one of the bars. He got some. He comes out there with one of those big boxes of Smirnoff vodka. He had vodka; he had all kinds of booze. He almost got caught but he managed to get away before the police got him though, but he had a big box of booze, um hum, yup.

Why is that?
I don't know, I don't know um, because we were like just stuck on our little part of the town. We just right there on Biddle street. The farthest we would go like was, uh Preston and maybe, uh let me se, let me see, was it uh Preston ,Harford, Ensor, cause Ensor street as Ensor St. turned into Harford right, that's what it was, and that little area around there. We didn't go outside of that immediate territory we just stayed close to home cause my mother was afraid for us going like, ya know, in the shopping areas or something like that. She didn't want us to go without protection or with an adult unless ya know so. . .

Thank You Devon
You're quite welcome!

Kirsten Lee: Can you please state your name and the date.
Devon Wilford-Said: My name is Devon Wilford-Said. Today's date is Friday, November 11, 2006.

KL: Did you have any interaction with white people before the start of the riots?

DWS: Yes. In fact a few years back. I am originally from North Carolina and that's where I was born, but I was raised in Baltimore. When I was a little toddler back in North Carolina and in my earlier child hood days I would go back in forth to Baltimore to visit my grandmother and back there on the farm my best friend was a white girl. We were relocated from North Carolina when I was about two. My mother would take us back to spend summers when I was about 5,6, or 7 and I had a white girl as a friend and we would play together because my grandmother worked for her father and we didn't have and any distinguish between the color of our skin. We didn't even know anything about racial prejudice at that time. When we relocated back to the city during my child hood was thinking that everybody was everybody no matter the color of their skin. I hadn't experienced anything about racial prejudice until I got a little older and we had to deal with the situation of the blacks and the white's separation in reference to the schools. They were trying to segregate the schools that are when I first experienced it in Baltimore.

KL: Did you have any interaction with any white people during the riots?

DWS: Not directly, that I can recall.

KL: Then what about after?

DWS: After the riots, yes. We, meaning some of my friends, interacted with white people going to different locations with the church, because we had a multiracial experience with the church that used to be right across from out block. And they would take us back and forth from New York. And New York of course is the melting pot, so we got a chance to meet a lot of white people in New York. But I never experienced the prejudice part of it.

KL: During the riots was your church or school vandalized in any way, and if not were any schools or churches vandalized that you know of?

DWS: No, my church or school wasn't vandalized.

KL: What was the name of the church?

DWS: During the riots, I can't remember the name of the church. But, it was right across the street from our block on Biddle Street. I think it was a Baptist church, but I can't remember the name of it.

KL: What was the name of your school?

DWS: I used to go to Lombard Junior High School. At that time it was a junior high school, but now it's a middle school.

KL: Can you recall any political conversation that you had with your friends, that might have changed you views on anything, or anything that just stuck in your memory?

DWS: The only thing I can think of was my girlfriend's. Before or after the riots?

KL: Before and after.

DWS: We would watch the news sometimes and we would talk about the non-violence part. We would sit out on the front and talk about non-violence, because we were so geared towards peace most of the time because we like to get together and have fun. We used to talk about how it seemed like after the riot Martin Luther King's work was so much in vain because he was struggling so hard to keep the black people from doing violent things like fighting each other and fighting the whites. So we would talk about it and seemed like wow, everybody that was coming up in society and trying to bring society together as a whole it seemed like they always died young. They would always either get killed and it's always violence. We would just see what happened to Martin Luther King and then later on what happened to Robert F. Kennedy, a little while after that, and the experience we had with John F. Kennedy, it just made us sad and frustrated. Right in our immediate circle we didn't have too much violence, other than people trying to break in people's homes, but it wasn't a lot of violence we experienced directly, just what we saw from the media.

KL: When you met Martin Luther King, did he say anything to you that really stuck with you?

DWS: As I can recall there were a lot of people out there that day. In fact he was outside of the church on a podium and he was talking to a lot of the young people that were surrounding him, and I just wanted to shake his hand. So, the main thing I did was I pushed my way up so that I could get to touch him. I shook his hand and he looked down at me and smiled and said hello, but I can't remember anything else he said to me. Just the idea of being able to touch him, of being the close to him, cause I only saw him on television, I didn't believe he was actually coming to our neighbor hood until that day. All of the kids were so happy because with the project they had. They were opening up this new project with a summer camp for the kids at the church, and that's what they were trying to promote, and Martin Luther King was supporting the church. I think it was Faith Baptist Church. It was located on Bond and Ashland Ave.

KL: Can you go a little more in depth about, earlier you talked about the black cloths that were put on the doors to signify that people were African American. Can you recall and trouble that you had with that or what would happen to people who did not have the black cloth on their door?

DWS: Not directly on my block but, we were hearing on the news from different areas and other parts of the city near the downtown area that people who didn't have the black cloth they were breaking into their houses and throwing bombs in their houses. But, not on our block directly, we didn't have any problems on our block.

KL: Did you know of any whites who lived in a majority black neighborhood?

DWS: I don't recall any at that time

KL: Besides Crowns, were you involved in any other looting.

DWS: No, that was the only place. We wanted to get that spot. That was the only spot we had in mind because of the way we were treated. Other then that, there was no other location around. Most of the other neighborhood stores, there were a lot of black business on our block at that time. A lot of store fronts were owned by blacks, so it wasn't a major problem with whites in our neighborhood, other then the supermarkets.

KL: Do you know if any of your friends were involved in any looting?

DWS: Yeah, some of my friends were. Some of my friend that hung in other areas of the community was involved.

KL: Do you know the names of the places they looted?

DWS: They told me that some of the stores they hit were on Gay Street. It was Gay Street Shopping Center. It wasn't a mall but they had shopping stores. They were telling how some of the Jewish stores were hit. This one store on Gay Street called Epstein's, they broke in there. And Goldstein's down the street. They had a five and dime store, McCoy's, they broke into that and stole a lot of stuff out of there. I don't recall if they broke into the market part, I'm not sure. But I know they got a lot of the department stores.

KL: What would you say was your mother's role during the riots? Did she try to keep you protected, try to keep you away, or did she let you do your own thing.

DWS: Mostly tried to keep us protected. She didn't want us to go out, especially when the guards came. She wanted to make sure we were safely in the house because she didn't know if they were gonna be shooting people if they caught them breaking in or looting the stores, she didn't want us to be around that. It was only one time that she let us out and that was when we hit the Crowns store. After that she just put down the law. She was afraid. She thought we might get hurt out there.

KL: When the nationally guard came you said you felt that they were starting a war.

DWS: Yeah. I remember when they were coming up Ensor Street going towards Harford Road; it was a whole line of trucks. And they had machine guns on the trucks, and the guards were sitting on the trucks. A whole bunch of them were inside and they had those guns, so we thought they were gonna come in and kill us or something. We didn't know we were young. But we were terrified when we first saw them. And they were lining up all of the streets and they were coming out and standing on all the corners. We were looking around like what's going on. We thought it was gonna be world war 2 or 3. But I was terrified when we first seen them coming.

KL: You also said that when they Black Panthers came in it seemed like they were prepared for war, but…

DWS: They were somewhat different. Even though, when we saw them on TV it seemed like they were trying to recruit young African males at a certain age, and females too. We were kind of young, too young to be recruited, but we would watch them come in out area sometimes and hand out pamphlets and flyers on our blocks.

KL: Would you consider them to be heroes of the black community?

DWS: Yeah somewhat, because they were looking out for the black and they were trying to do programs to educate us, and they were giving out food to some of the families. We didn't understand too much of the political aspect of it at that time, because that was back when Angela Davis was speaking out. We didn't know all about that part of it. Only thing we were sort of geared in was how they were helping the black families. And all the political issue they were discussing we were not in to.

KL: Were there any local leaders or national leaders that you looked up to besides Martin Luther King?

DWS: Yes, I looked up to Robert F. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy. We heard a lot about H. "Rat" Brown. He was a radical, looked out for black families. The whites didn't like him too much. I can't recall anyone else, but back in that time that was who I looked up to a lot.

KL: What was your take on racism during the riots?

DWS: I didn't agree with it. To me people were people no matter what color skin they were in and most of my friends were not racist. My girlfriends and I got along with practically everybody. If we went into a neighborhood where white people were, where blacks were, we could just hang out we wasn't discriminatory towards anybody. I didn't really like racism; I thought it was a negative that didn't make sense to me. By me growing up with a white person in a white family that was very close to my family that always treated us with respect, I didn't understand why people couldn't get along. And even with the school systems they were segregating the schools and I was still trying to figure that out. I just didn't agree with it at all.

KL: And you still feel the same?

DWS: I still feel the same. To me people are people. We are all human beings. We are all a part of humanity. And I think we come to realize that no one is better then anyone else no matter what their skin, their character, their religion, or what have you. We are all human beings living on this planet called Earth, and we should be able to get along. Racism I think I geared towards one race wanting to be superior over another race, and there should be no superiorities over anyone. That is my personal view.

KL: Did you know anyone who had any interaction with the National Guard or the police?

DWS: My friends, used to try to flirt with them when they were guarding on the corner of Biddle and Preston. We used to go to the stores, and they used to try to get the guards to, just say hello to them. Just try to flirt, test them out. We were teenagers and you know how teenagers do. But, I don't know anybody directly that had communications with them.

KL: Do you feel the National Guard reacted in the right way to protect the people?

DWS: I think they did pretty good. Because in out neighborhood they didn't man handle us. If we were out when it was getting close to the curfew, they would tell us we gotta go in a certain time if we were out there. The first curfew that they had was an earlier curfew because that was when all the violence was happening. They wanted to try to get people off the streets before it got to dark. It was around 7:30 or 8:00 PM. But, they were nice to us, I guess because we were just kids. I remember this one guy, he was a white soldier, standing on the corner of and he would just smile at us and we just thought everybody was friendly, but we didn't encounter any real violent soldiers. But, I know the police at the time were being very extra brutal to some of the young boys that were being caught stealing. They were hitting them with clubs.

KL: How do you think whites in Baltimore viewed blacks before during and after the riots?

DWS: I think a lot of them were afraid of blacks. I remember my mother's landlord; I think he was a Jewish person. He used to come by at certain times to pick up the rent money, and when he would come to our house he would always have another black gentlemen with him. He was sought of like a guard or protector. He was afraid, because it was mostly blacks on our block. He would always have somebody there with him to protect him when he would come to our homes. I think most of the whites were afraid of the blacks because they didn't know what was gonna set them off at any given moment, especially the Jewish whites because it seemed like the blacks focused on their stores and business mostly, then just regular whites. By him being Jewish, he was afraid coming in out neighborhood.

KL: Did you know why black mainly focused on Jewish owned businesses?

DWS: I don't know. But, they did! I have no idea. Maybe because of the charges they charged on their products.

KL: Were most business in the city owned by Jewish people at that time?

DWS: Yeah, most were.

KL: Were there any leaders in your community that maybe helped with the riots or tried to keep people in your community from rioting?

DWS: Yeah, some of the seniors on our block would try to keep the kids from going out there. We had a lot of elderly people. We had a mix of elderly families, and middle aged families. They would always keep us in check when mom was at work. It was sought of like it takes a village to raise the children type thing, on the block. A lot of them would, if we were out there doing something wrong, they would let our mothers know when they got home from work. They would always try to protect us when our mothers weren't around. They were very nice people.

KL: What was your view on Baltimore as a whole, after the riots?

DWS: After the riots, that's a good question. Well, after the riots when everything calmed down, and was getting back to normal when the business and stores started opening again. They stopped attacking the white people. I was thinking things were coming back to normal. I felt that there was hope. At one point we thought it was gonna be the end of the world, because when we saw those National Guard we thought, this is it. We didn't think the stores were gonna open back up. We thought we would have to live a sheltered life, not being able to go out and get food. And have to be told when to come in and when to go out. So, when everything started coming, we were feeling a little bit more relieved and felt that the community as a whole had a better hope for survival. That's what we were feeling. Being young people we were thinking, wow! This is the end of our world a we knew it.

After the riots I felt more hopeful for the black community and for the white community because by so many whites getting hurt, a lot of the blacks had a lot of compassion for some of the whites. They were trying to help them, even helping them to build some of their business back up. Even though down in Jew town I know some of those stores were hit too, on Corn beef Row, because they were right there on a public housing site, Flag House Projects. There was a lot of interracial atmosphere down there, and for those people to try and come together to help the businesses get back together, I guess they learned a lot. So, it was period of feeling we weren't hopeless, that things were gonna get better. So, I would say that I felt more hope.

KL: Was Crowns still around after the riots?

DWS: Yeah, they rebuilt.

KL: Did you continue to shop there?

DWS: My mother did. In fact they went down on some of their prices. They tried to treat the black with a little more respect I noticed afterwards. It was a change, because there were more people who came on board after it reopened. It was a different type people, and they even hired more blacks.

KL: What was your view of your own neighborhood on Biddle Street after the riots? Did you feel that people were dramatically changed or did it go back to being what it was like before?

DWS: It just went back to the way it was before. We started doing the same things we were doing, hanging out, listening to music, going to hops. That's what we called dances at that time. Giving parties and listening to our oldies but goodies out front. It went back to the norm.

KL: What were people like during the riots? Would you say that people were constantly filled with anger or what were they like?

DWS: From my perspective, we didn't have a lot of anger on our block. Our people were just like regular people. After the riots everybody just chilled out. The only thing I would say is based on what we saw on television of other areas. But on my block it was back to the normal. Everybody was everybody. We were still sad about what happened to Martin Luther King, a lot of people were still grieving. We were trying to figure out where the blacks would be going next, based on the Republicans in office because I think at that time Nixon was about to be president he was trying to get another Republican in. And we had problems with our governor because he was racist. And then he went on to be vice president. We were thinking is it going to get bad to worse, or what. But, on our block it was just back to normal.

KL: After the riots, and after JFK and Martin Luther King, what did you think was the next step for black people?

DWS: Well I was having hope because. After they killed Robert, when they killed him, it just seems like everything went down. We were just getting over the hurt of Martin Luther King then we were having hope that he would lead the people to a better quality of life because of what his views were on his platform for everybody, blacks and whites. He was supportive of Martin Luther King and what Martin Luther King was doing for non-violence. It seemed like right after that they killed him with violence, so we were beginning to feel who's going to be next. I was raised in a spiritual family and my grandmother prayed a lot, so she encouraged my family and my mom and the rest of us to not give up hope, no matter how bad it got, just have a positive view of life. Even though we were having bad things happening I always felt that something good was bound to happen.

KL: You said that you always had hope and something good was going to happen. What would you say that good was?

DWS: We moved off the block. The one thing was the landlord we had; he was sought of a slum landlord. He would fix the property as much as he should. My mom was getting frustrated and he kept going up on the rent, so she was trying to move off of the block so she could get affordable housing. What good happen was, even though we moved from that house into a low income public housing site, it was good for my family because at that time it was a mixture of white and blacks in public housing. We were figuring that we wouldn't have to struggle as much because moving into public housing was based on your income. My mother would have more money to spend at the end of the month, so that made us excited. My aunt had already moved into public housing and they were doing well, saving more money. They had on site recreation at most of the public housing sites at the time, so we were looking forward to that. I was excited because when we moved from, we moved from our house on Biddle Street to public housing, Latrobe homes in February of '69.

KL: Did you have a good experience living in public housing since you were living with white people also?

DWS: Yeah. It was pretty good because we had white people right in out court.

KL: What was your first instinct when you heard about the riots? Did you want to go out and fight too, or were you more like what's going on?

DWS: I was trying to figure it out basically. I was a little paranoid because I was watching it on the news I was listening to people's reactions. They were trying to say white people were devils and this and that, and I was still trying to figure that out because the people that I knew that were white always treated me nice. I didn't have anybody to show racism to me, so I was still to figure it out. Some of the people on the block didn't like whites because they would go to the store and they would show racism towards them. But, I never experienced it myself.

KL: After MLK was assassinated and while the riots were going on, did you believe the non-violent movement was completely over?

DWS: Somewhat, because it got worse.

KL: Do you have anything else you would like to add or say?

DWS: I'm hoping from this interview and learning more about what happened back then and how we can relate it to now, with the issues of racism. Racial prejudice is still rearing its head up; you have all of these racial motivated crimes that are happening in the county, coming back up with the violence in the street and the gangs. I'm hoping this interview and project that you're doing will be a positive in trying to get peoples views back to the norm. Back to trying to reach out for a better world, a change in this world to make people realize that you cannot learn and grow in a world or society through killing one another because of the color of your skin. So, I'm hoping that the people who watch this video or this presentation learn that we must learn to get along together and that we must try to put aside our views and our negativities, and come together as one as a people as humanity, so that we can live on this planet. If we continue to kill ourselves, we got wars and rumors of wars. Everything that is going on in society right now, how are we gonna make it as a people? As people as a whole, I'm talking multicultural, everybody as a whole on this planet. I'm hoping this will make a positive impact.

KL: Thank you.

DWS: You're Welcome.