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 Terry White
Date of Interview: 23 July 2007; Baltimore, MD (Mr. White's place of work)
Interviewers: Nyasha Chikowore and Maria Paoletti
Transcriber: Duane Howard

Maria Paoletti: Okay, please state your full name.

Terry White: My name is Terry Allan White.

Paoletti: And you just told us that in 1968, you were sixteen years old?

White: I was about sixteen. I was born in 1952.

Paoletti: Where did you live, and where did you go to school?

White: At that time, we lived in the 2500 block of West North Avenue, which happens to be right across the street from Coppin College. Sixteen years old, I would've been what…a sophomore in high school?

Paoletti: Junior?

White: Junior. Forest Park High School is where I went to school.

Paoletti: You and your family, did you live with your parents and any siblings?

White: Yes, actually my mother would have been passed away by that time. So I lived with my father and two sisters. I have other siblings but they were gone by that time. At least three of us in the household.

Paoletti: And when your family went out to shop for groceries or clothes where did you go?

White: Several places; at that particular time the Mondawmin Shopping Center was a little less than ten years old, and a reasonably nice-scale shopping center. So we did a lot of

shopping there. As you are probably aware of—are you guys from Baltimore?

Paoletti: Neither of us is from Baltimore.

White: One of the unusual or unique things about Baltimore…Baltimore is the city of little communities, and when I was a kid every community had its own shopping area. Any five, eight, ten blocks in any one given direction you always ran across a little block where there was the grocery store, and the hardware store and things like that. So a lot of shopping was done in the neighborhood.

Paoletti: So what street...

White: Right on the 2500 block of North Avenue. In the 2100 block of North Avenue there was one of these little blocks where there was the hardware store and the like, and the dry cleaners. There was also the Mondawmin Shopping Center at the time which was relatively brand new. Which would have been about four city blocks sort of to the north of where I lived. It would be Gwynns Falls Parkway.

Paoletti: As you were growing up in the years before the riots, what sort of interactions did you have with people of other races?

White: Almost none. Some of the funny things about, and another thing about the little cultural neighborhoods…most of the time, until I got to high school, most of my teachers were black. I went to…not predominately; *totally* black schools. That was a little before, or maybe in the early stages of school integration. So I went to school with only other black kids in the black schools. Generally most of the schools were in the neighborhood. Forest Park was not in my immediate neighborhood; I just got chosen to go to that school. Forest Park High School, or actually, Garrison Junior High School was the first chance that I ever had classes with white kids, with kids of any other color.

Paoletti: And what about in high school?

White: Same with high school. By the time I got to high school, Forest Park had swung almost predominately black by that time, but there were still white kids there. Not as many.

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

White: Subtle. The racism in Baltimore always was sort of reputed to be kind of very subtle. Neighborhoods were clearly divided and self sufficient enough in that there were not a bunch of clashes in races. In that I didn't generally have to go out of the neighborhood. So it didn't create situations where, there was not a creation of situations that called for…in "clash", I don't mean clash in conflict manner, but interaction. Just not a lot of opportunity. But it was very subtle racism. It was certainly implied no doubt about it, but sort of subtle in its way. Always was.

Paoletti: What do you remember about Dr. King's assassination?

White: The first thoughts, of course, and I think anybody who was conscious of it, just the shock of it all. The unbelievable shock that someone would turn a gun on Martin King. It was just, just beyond your imagination, that someone who represented so much peace. Even for a sixteen-year-old kid in the street, it was a little hard to imagine that his life would end in that manner. It was extremely difficult to understand.

Paoletti: Do you remember how you heard about it?

White: No, I can't say the exact moment that I remember I heard about it. It was probably on the news. I can't say for sure, though. I remember my father and some neighbors discussing, I remember, because the neighbors all sort of came out, and this was a big deal. So I do remember some parts and bits and pieces of that. Lot of crying, lot of wailing and a lot of disappointment and a lot of anger, as the neighbors attempted to discuss this.

Paoletti: Do you remember anyone's reaction in particular?

White: Again, I can remember a lot of the women crying, a lot of praying done. Just in everybody, it was disappointment, it was disgust, it was horror, it was shock. I remember my father being quite upset about it, and again, just the neighbors collecting and attempting to talk about this. Those kind of things.

Paoletti: How did you hear about the riots starting?

White: *[Pauses]* Probably on the news, and maybe even…I'm trying to remember…the initial way, I'd say, would be on the news, and maybe warnings from the…I distinctly remember a news story coming across that was being shown, live broadcast from the Old Town Mall, which is actually not far from here. And they were—and I can't say I remember who it was—but there were some people who were relatively prominent in the black community, sort of talking to the TV and radio audiences, to "be cool, don't let this get out of hand, no need for violence" and things like that. Of course, by that time, it's falling on deaf ears. That may have been some of the initial exposure to riots going on someplace. 'Cause again, being in a predominately black neighborhood, until it grew to a larger scale, it really didn't affect us in the first couple of hours per se.

Paoletti: Did you hear about the riots in the other cities?

White: Yes, at some point in time, absolutely. Maybe even in early news reports, yes.

Paoletti: Did you think, when you heard those reports, that it would happen in Baltimore?

White: Yes, I did.

Paoletti: So you were watching TV to get your news?

White: Yeah, kinda pretty much, yeah.

Paoletti: What did you think about the TV coverage of the riots?

White: The TV coverage of the riots…I don't know, I guess I sort of took it at face value; my curiosity dominated my mood about what was going on. I'm trying to see what's going on and where and who. And of course, like any other black person, at the time, I'm watching the authorities reaction to the riots as well. The level and type of retaliation or reaction that they would have.

Paoletti: Was there rioting in your neighborhood?

White: Very minuscule. We had one or two white-owned or Jewish-owned stores. Not all of those stores were victimized. It was those merchants who did not have good social reputations in the community who probably were the most victimized.

Paoletti: What did you do when the riots were going on?

White: Not a heck of a lot, 'cause my father wouldn't let me go too far from home, actually. Really not too much. Again, my father wouldn't let me go too far away from home. Most people were sort of sheltering over their children and young children at the time. My oldest sister at home with us would have been working downtown. In one of the few incidences, we went to pick her up. Another thing is, I would have had a part-time job as well, if I was not in school. I remember they closed school down for a few days, as I remember. I probably had to go to my little part-time job at the country club.

Paoletti: Where was that?

White: The Baltimore Country Club.

Paoletti: Where was that located?

White: That's out in…Slade Avenue, what's that area called over there…Upper Parks Heights Avenue. That's way across town. Pretty good little hike from where I lived, but I rode the bus there.

Paoletti: What did you do there?

White: Like a porter, whatever a teenage kid does at a…you know, clean up and move tables or something.

Paoletti: So you still went to work?

White: Yeah, there were curfews in places. But if memory serves me, if you had reasoning to be out, you could get by the curfew. If you could demonstrate that you were coming from work, you were exempt from curfew. Yeah, and I remember going to work because of an incident related to work, Mondawmin, and the whole thing. So I remember going to work.

Paoletti: What incident?

White: In order to get to work, I had to ride the Number 5, which traveled out Park Heights Avenue. The easiest way to get to Park Heights Avenue was to walk from my home to three or four blocks up Warwick Avenue, cut across the Mondawmin parking lot, just to the other side of the street, and catch the Number 5. The other way would be is to go all the way downtown and intersect with the 5 and go all the way…it didn't make no sense; you just walk those couple of blocks.

So then, coming back home, you just did the same thing, you caught the 5 down and walked on back home. So we would have gotten off after dark—and I can't say how dark I think it was. It was probably eight, nine o'clock at night. And coming across the Mondawmin parking lot, and I distinctly remember I'm drinking a pint of milk. Me and one more kid I would've remembered…it might have been as many as two; I can't say. I tried to think about this the other day.

We don't know that the Mondawmin mall parking lot is a setup area for the National Guard. So when we get off of the bus, we see a few trucks over at the far end of the parking lot, and we really don't pay it that much attention. Because first of all, we're only a couple of kids and we don't mean any harm; we're only going home, so we don't much think about it. About halfway across Mondawmin parking lot, three or four armed National Guards approached us.

Scared as crap, ‘cause I’m a teenage kid, and I don’t know what’s going on. And of course, they were all white soldiers, and that added to the fear factor. So they confront us, and ask us what are we doing and where we are going. And we told them we were just getting off work and showed them our little pay stubs and this is where I’m going. They sorta implied that you’re not supposed to be cutting across this parking lot. We said well, man, we don’t know, this is the way we come every time. You’re in my neighborhood, you know? One of the guys, one of the soldiers, wants to know what I’m drinking. I said milk, here’s the carton right here—I show it to him. He takes it out of my hand, splits open the cap, and sticks his nose in it to smell it. Gives it back. “Okay, it’s okay,” gives it back. ‘Course, I’m not going to drink this; he just stuck his nose in it, so…I poured it out. And he took a little bit of offense—“What’s the problem?” I said, you know, “I’m not gonna drink this,” –*ew*, you know? He really didn’t make no big deal out of it, “you’ve wasted your buck,” or whatever it was. And they just sort of, okay, you guys gotta get off the parking lot, you gotta go straight home ‘cause there’s a curfew, and that type of thing. And we went on our little way.

Paoletti: Was that the only incident that happened?

White: Well the other…in one of those trips my father and my sister—my older sister at the time worked in one of the department stores downtown—I believe it was Hochschild-Kohn’s or one of those. And she called for us to pick her up from work. And of course they get to downtown which was cordoned off and everything blocked by National Guards. We literally had to pass between two or three roadblocks. So I sort of remembered those incidents. That was pretty uneventful, other than just getting downtown and getting back, you know, the roadblocks and things like that.

Paoletti: What neighborhoods do you remember being hit the hardest?

White: Well, as I remember from the little article that I read that you guys said, that the National Guard troops at Mondawmin had done such a great job that it literally went untouched. It seems like I remember Walbrook Junction getting a pretty good little whack—which is not very far from where I lived at. Some of the Park Heights Avenue neighborhoods—Park Heights

Avenue and Reisterstown Road—seems like I remember getting pretty good little whacks. And then Southwest Baltimore—Lombard Street, Pratt Street, lower Monroe Street corridors and down through there. Those, again, were predominately white businesses in predominately black neighborhoods. Those kind of businesses, some of those got hit pretty good.

Paoletti: Were you aware of any violence or arrests?

White: From the news. I can't…well, a couple of the stores in our neighborhood got hit, so…not so much as violence, but maybe a few arrests. I can't say who I think personally it was.

Paoletti: Did you know anybody who got arrested?

White: I can't say that I did. Not that I can recall.

Paoletti: And you already said you had an encounter with the National Guard—were there National Guard troops in your neighborhood as well?

White: Yes. Patrolling North Avenue.

Paoletti: How did that make the people in your neighborhood feel?

White: I think we sort of took it offensively. On several fronts: first off, there was no true rioting in my neighborhood—it was a predominately black neighborhood, so who did we need protection from? Who are you protecting us from? And it did sort of come out as more of a…*restriction* element than anything else. It seems like they may have been designed to keep us in our own neighborhoods, and disallow us to move about. That's what it appeared like; what it came across like. I think it may have been the attitude of a lot of people. They just had to keep an eye on us and make sure that we don't go nowhere.

Paoletti: What was the general mood in your neighborhood during the riots?

White: Again, very confused…disappointment, a lot of anger and things like that. And of course here is just one more strike, here is—and I think the black community, as a nation, as a whole took the blow against Martin King as a personal blow. Here was a man willing to try to do it your way, who brings a nonviolent message, and was not just trying to help black people…and this is the answer. It is from that maybe along those times I developed one of my most famous quotes. And I'll share that with you later on. But I think that people were disappointed that this level and this degree of violence would be used against him. A personal blow to every black American. You shot Martin Luther King, you shot us all. So there was hate and anger, and that feeling. Sure.

Paoletti: So did you or anybody you know feel that the riots were justified?

White: No, I can't say that anybody I know would say the actions of the community were justified. I think the attitude was that they were…should have been expected. It was an outcry, or lashing out, or a retort, if you will, to the shooting of Martin King. No, people didn't think it was justified…I think they interpreted it as a message being delivered from their actions.

Paoletti: Do you remember when you were allowed to go back to school?

White: It must have been a couple of days, it could have been over a weekend. I can't say, maybe we were out of school three or four days, I don't remember.

Paoletti: What was it like at school when you went back?

White: Again, pretty somber as well. We're talking about a news story that affected the whole nation—and you guys are far too young to remember this—the news coverage was equated to murdering a president; it was on that scale, it sure was. The investigation and things like that were all on that scale. So it was a prominent and huge news story to everybody, not only because of who he was, but the social impact that occurred…the big riots, of course. So when we get back to school a few days, it seems like that most people are still in some degree of shock. The first couple of days I remember we discussed it a lot in school, things like that. Not unlike this

[interview], we were asked to talk about our own experiences and things like that; that we did. And of course by the time I'm in high school, I go to a mixed high school with both black and white kids. And now my teacher base is predominately white. So part of this coming back to school was this reuniting, if you will…we were reminded that these were our classmates and our friends. That these people were here to help us, and that the white kid sitting next to you didn't hurt Martin Luther King, so you didn't have no beef with him. I remember discussions like that. It was a healing sort of a deal there, I guess.

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

White: Little. Subtly. That subtle racism at that time certainly did not go away. Subtle racism has not gone away today. Very little, actually, quite frankly. I guess if we looked at it, and we did a line-by-line chronology of the time, I guess we could see some small social changes. But on a big tangible scale, very little.

Chikowore: Do you recall any incidents today that would make you say that? Is there anything that sticks out that makes you say that?

White: That it hasn't changed? I mean, I guess you guys probably are as well aware as I that there are a couple of groups around town who keeps track of things like that. And unfortunately, we do all very well know that black people today, in 2007, can't live where they want to in Baltimore. And you can't go to the club where you want to in Baltimore. So no, there is…that institutional racism is certainly alive and well around here; there's no doubt about it.

I came to this particular agency—now, the tide is starting to swing a little bit—I've been in this agency for over twelve years. When I got in this agency twelve years ago there was not a single black manager or assistant director in the entire place. It just simply was nonexistent. One or two *now*…that still doesn't change very much. Some of the implied and non-sanctioned discrimination elements have died down, have diminished since then, but certainly not gone away.

When I was a kid there were certain parts of the city you couldn't move about safely after dark if you were black *or* white, if you were not part of that community. That probably has

changed a lot, but not completely gone away. I mean, coming with incidences wouldn't be too hard, I don't think.

Chikowore: Have you been to your old neighborhood recently?

White: Every now and then I go through there.

Chikowore: Have you seen anything that you can say the riots helped bring about, or helped change it or mold it—

Paoletti: Have you seen changes at all?

White: Again, subtle, and few and far apart. That very subtle, implied racism which worked in Baltimore for a long time, it still works; it's just embedded in a couple of institutional situations. I think it still works. On the surface a lot of things look differently. Under the underlying surface, I think they're still probably not much different from almost forty years ago.

Chikowore: Do you remember hearing about any conversations about the incident at the country club where you were working?

White: You mean about the riots and things like that? No, I can't say that I did. I was a kid then and I probably wasn't paying much attention. And secondly, I didn't do the kind of stuff at the country club where I was exposed to the guests that much. I was, like I said, the guy who moves the tables in the dining room; something that kids do, you know. Take out the trash, that kind of stuff, so I really didn't see them. So I'd have to say no, I can't say that I did.

Chikowore: And what was the quote that you wanted to share?

White: One of my most famous quotes is, "America's most well-nurtured child is violence, and its closest sibling is discrimination." No question about it. That is true today, this conversation, as it was the day that we talked about, this riot. It is true today as it was then.

Chikowore: And did your interactions with people of other races change?

White: Yes, and it actually had started to change a little before that because of my high school selection. It is—high school and junior high school—is the first time that I ever exposed to any length of time with people of other races. So yeah, by that time it had already started to form a little bit. A year *after* that, I went into the military, and it set my whole social scale back thirty years *[laughs]*. And in 1969, the military was still very, very, *very* prejudiced. Very prejudiced. There were white officers who wouldn't even speak to you. But the military is run under different sort of guidelines and things like that, and it is a place that discrimination can nurture very well.

Paoletti: What about after the military?

White: You know, that's funny, because the military sort of re-instituted in me some of my negative ideas about my interaction with other races, because it's so very, very prejudiced. Just so very bad, I mean, just openly discriminated against, and it really set me back. I might have been a little more racially angry when I got *out* of the service than I was when I went in. 'Cause I was just treated so extremely bad.

Paoletti: Did you have any experiences that undid the negativity that you had accumulated in the military?

White: That undoing was from within; was from within my own psychology and philosophy. There come a point in my life that I realized that…I think an old quote, and I don't remember it, is, "Are you part of the problem, or part of the solution?" If I'm harboring prejudicial ways about me, then I'm obviously part of the problem. If I can remove those from myself, and maybe find the bridge, create the bridge, help build the bridge between myself and others, maybe I can be part of the solution.

Also, not too long after I got out of the service, I went to work for the Federal Reserve Bank. I met a guy who turned out to be, to this day, still one of my closest, dearest friends in this

entire world, who also happens to be Japanese. Dealing with him and thinking about him—and we were such good buddies—I had to think about how I deal with any other ethnicities and things like that. So from there, I started to think again…what does Michael Jackson say? I'm gonna look at the man in the mirror. I'm gonna see what I'm doing wrong, and how I'm contributing to the demise of our society, and see if I can change that. So I tried to understand, and tried to be a little bit more tolerant of other people's ways. I did it on my own.

Paoletti: Do you think anything like this can happen again? In Baltimore, or anywhere?

White: Sadly enough, yes. I don't know if I think it could come at the scale that it was for those riots. I do not dismiss that it could get to that scale, but do I think that America has the potential for a race riot? The answer is emphatically *yes*. Absolutely.

Chikowore: Is there anything else about the riots that you remember that you'd like to share with us?

White: I think the death of Martin King and what happened immediately after may have…bonded black people a little teeny bit more, because now we were again reminded of a common cause, to overcome the prejudice and the violence and things like that. So I think it changed the attitude of the black community a little bit. People thought more about their neighbor—some people thought about their neighbor for the next hour a little bit more and forgot it, and some people continued on for the rest of their lives. But I think everybody thought about the value of the life of the guy next to them for a few minutes. And where we are going as a community, as a race, as a country—I think a lot of people thought about that. And I think a lot of people thought about their home front a little differently. Negative, positive, hard to determine. But definitely different. I think a lot of people did. White people as well.

One of the things I think that black people may have come to understand a little teeny bit better is the degree of sympathy from the other side. I was a kid; I was compelled to believe that every white person is against me. Is looking for my defeat or my demise. I think that when we saw people bond together for Martin's funeral, when they bonded together to talk to the community about learning, things like that, I think they truly understood that all white people are

not for the demise of all black people. I think that did maybe have a little influence on the community as a whole. I certainly recognize—and I remember some of my thinking during those times and immediately thereafter—there's a lot of white folks who'd really like to see this go away. It's not as bad as I think that is. There are some sympathizers. I remember thinking that. That may have occurred for a lot of people.