

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

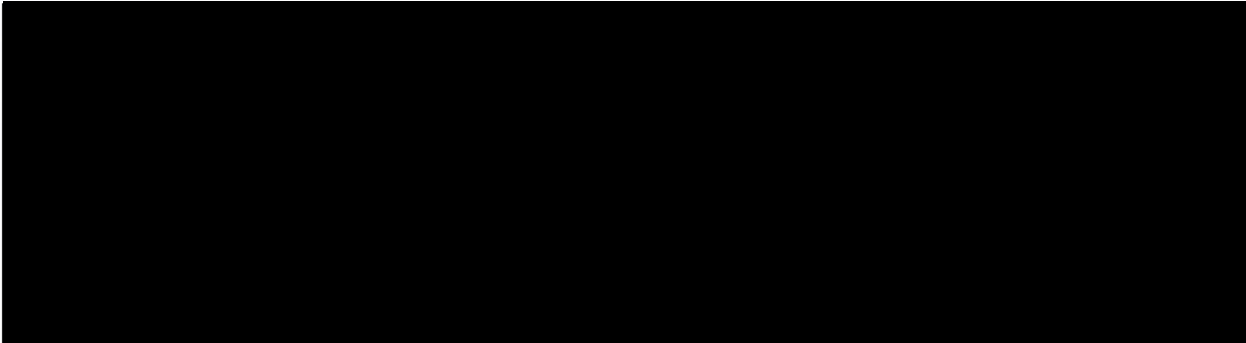
If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at 410-837-5296. Thank you for your participation.

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.



## *Interview of Pastor John Yost*

This interview is conducted by John J. Schwallenberg of the University of Baltimore

The transcription of this interview is provided by John J. Schwallenberg

**Schwallenberg:** Just for the record, could you state your full name and date of birth?

**Yost:** John Yost Jr., the Reverend Mr. John Yost Jr. I was born January 7<sup>th</sup> 1928.

**Schwallenberg:** And in the late 1960's what was your situation? How were you living?

**Yost:** I was called. The Lutheran Church extends a call for a pastor. The pastor answers a call. I accepted the call, in round figures: 1960. But I was the Pastor of St. Marks Lutheran Church for ten years.

**Schwallenberg:** About how old were you in 1968?

**Yost:** **Let's see.** I'll be eighty years old next year. That was 1968 that was thirty seven years ago. I was probably about forty some years of age, I think it was.

**Schwallenberg:** Where did you live at that time?

**Yost:** We lived at Springlake Way. That was a parsonage of the church. This is not unusual for churches to have parsonages. They allowed the pastor to live there as long as he was the pastor of that particular church.

**Schwallenberg:** What was the exact location of the church and the parsonage?

**Yost:** The church was located on St. Paul Street and it was right next to the corner of St. Paul and North Avenue. There was a Baptist Church; the Lutheran Church was right behind that, so roughly 1900 St. Paul Street.

**Schwallenberg:** During this time, in the late sixties, where did you do most of your shopping and business transactions, things of that nature?

**Yost:** Usually in the neighborhood where we lived. We lived on Springlake Way. So a lot of our shopping was done on York Road. And of course we had access to all the Downtown establishments that we frequented from time to time.

**Schwallenberg:** Before the riots what types of interactions did you have with people with other races?

**Yost:** Not many; because I was in a situation where I just didn't encounter it. I started in ministry in Lebanon Pennsylvania and I don't think I even remember seeing black people in

Lebanon. Moved to Baltimore and I was on Edmondson Avenue. And at that time things were starting to change as far as the neighborhoods were concerned: So more and more black people were moving in just after I left and there weren't too many blacks around there then. That was from nineteen, let's see I was starting the ministry from 53 to 55 I was in Lebanon that was from 55 to roughly 59 or 60. All Saints was the church.

**Schwallerberg:** And what about the people of color in the ministry of the Lutheran Church and the Seminary and things like that? How many was that? Were there a lot there?

**Yost:** No not at the time. I'd say there were none at the time I was there. By the time I left seminary... Now I was in the seminary for three years. Now they have a four year program. And since I left, the ministry, I mean graduated, there were just beginning you would see a few black people that were either in the church somewhere in the United States. And Gettysburg, I don't think Gettysburg even had any black students at that particular time. There may have been one or two and that's about it.

**Schwallerberg:** How would you describe the racial mood in Baltimore around and just before the riots?

**Yost:** I'd say it's one of those things, that in a sense, the white people accepted and I think the black people did also. There wasn't a lot of outspoken prejudice but there was the feeling of it. The blacks and whites didn't mingle too much. Except as things changed over the years and you sort of accepted the fact that every place you went now there were black persons, the stores in which you shopped, the places where you went to the theatre and things.

**Schwallerberg:** What about in your congregation? What was the racial makeup of the congregation?

**Yost:** All white, mostly elderly. Well eventually mostly elderly people. But being a downtown church like that. In a sense, downtown, Saint Paul and 20<sup>th</sup> Street the church was all white. There were no blacks near by. They were starting to get in and there were a number of black churches near by. And I'd say most of the blacks with whom we associated at all were members of like the Baptist Church or churches of that sort. And a few at the Roman Catholic Church but not many at that time.

**Schwallerberg:** If any, what kind of ecumenical type of things did you do with the black churches in the area?

**Yost:** We always had a monthly meeting of the groups that were active and sometimes... Eventually we started having interdenominational services or during like the Lenten Season we would visit other churches. While one time the Lutheran would have something, one time one of the Baptist Churches would present something, another time the Roman Catholic the Roman Catholics were starting to work with us cooperatively there too.

**Schwallerberg:** Did you ever have a black preacher preach in front of your congregation?

**Yost:** No, never knew of one to invite.

**Schwallerberg:** What do you remember about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, when it happened?

**Yost:** As I recall if this was Palm Sunday, if this was the one we were talking about. As I was preaching as the service continued. Just one service the eleven o'clock service: As the day wore on things we could hear noises outside the church and it was rather frightening to stand there preaching to a congregation wondering what might happen next. Fortunately nothing did happen right at the immediate area of Saint Paul and 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Schwallerberg:** When you heard that he got shot what did you think? How... What did you think: Who killed him what was going on there?

**Yost:** Yes I hadn't been following some of that news and then when I heard about that I thought this is ridiculous. To think that here a black man who seemed to be so kind in the way in which he was approaching the subject matter should have been treated this way.

**Schwallerberg:** How did you hear about the riots themselves getting started? You said that you heard noise outside. Was there anything else that you heard about the riots getting started?

**Yost:** No the only thing I had heard were rumors of the things. Persons that had been around the neighborhood and would report that they saw a number of automobiles with Washington Licenses. And it almost makes you wonder if some of this was somewhat not caused. We wonder if some way or another, persons from outside were coming in trying to organize the kind of disruption that would have made it clear that the blacks were trying to make themselves known.

**Schwallerberg:** Besides information from congregants, where did you find out about what was going on with the riots? T.V. radio things...

**Yost:** Primarily radio and T.V. Yes we saw that quite a bit of it.

**Schwallerberg:** What were... what were some of your impressions of the reporting of the riots when you saw it on T.V.?

**Yost:** Well at the time I thought it was very fair what they were trying to report. I didn't get the feeling that it was prejudiced on the part of any simply an indication of something that had upset a number of persons black and white.

**Schwallerberg:** Did you see any of the national news like CBS, NBC reporting on the Baltimore Riots.

**Yost:** Not too much that I recall now. Most of the material that we saw were from things from where Martin Luther King was killed and a lot seemed to be focused in the South. And then we

heard more and more about things that were erupting in various places; including the Baltimore area.

**Schwallenberg:** What was your impression of the neighborhoods that were affected from what you saw?

**Yost:** It was a frightening kind of feeling: You just didn't know what to do and where to go, how dangerous it might be for a few days until things settled down.

**Schwallenberg:** Did you see any type of violence occur during that time?

**Yost:** No. Interestingly enough I did not. The closest I can say I came to seeing violence. I had a funeral the day after this occurred that Palm Sunday. And in driving across North Avenue I saw toward the cemetery where we were going to bury the individual that died: I saw a number of probably National Guard people. And it was a strange feeling to walk along there and see hardly any movement of any traffic but there were these people armed standing on various corners.

**Schwallenberg:** Did you speak with any of the National Guard or anything?

**Yost:** No, had no reason to, to tell you the truth.

**Schwallenberg:** What was the mood in the area during the riots where you were at?

**Yost:** Mostly a feeling of what's coming next. There was no, I don't think there was any open attempt on the part of anyone to either join in or to call police or you know to demand various things to make us feel safe. I don't think any... I think the way it occurred so rapidly than the way it erupted. I think that was enough to make people feel that we were safe. You just had to be careful in what particular neighborhood you went because some neighborhoods were known for being more black than white. And I guess you didn't know how they were going to react to the situation that was starting to occur.

**Schwallenberg:** What areas do you recall that were particularly hard hit?

**Yost:** Mostly the West Baltimore area where more and more black people had begun to settle. I left about 1959 when I resigned from the church. I was on, which was on Edmondson Avenue and Lyndhurst Street that was in those particular neighborhoods and I noticed over there I think that things were a little more difficult and questionable than they were where I was on St. Paul and 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Schwallenberg:** What were...After the riots or after the death of Martin Luther King, did your church have any services for Dr. King or anything like that?

**Yost:** Not at that particular time. I think we were all wondering what was coming next. But we began celebrating once a year. All the churches got together on Martin Luther King's birthday it was approximately the third week in January and we had joint services, one congregation or one church body would have the service and all the others were invited to participate.

**Schwallerberg:** How do you think the city changed after the riots?

**Yost:** I think for a while there was some serious concern about how true all the problems were and I think a lot of people felt a little differently toward some of the blacks than they ever did before. Plus the fact that there was the opposite reaction: People thought they had no reason to act this way that it's a shame that this ever occurred.

**Schwallerberg:** How did the immediate neighborhood around the church and the parsonage change?

**Yost:** Interestingly enough, not much at all. Now around the church now I'm talking about St. Paul and 20<sup>th</sup> Street there was some feelings of what was coming next. But not having that many black people in at least some of the immediate neighborhoods I don't think we were too overly concerned. Of course where I lived Springlake Way which was the Homeland section of Baltimore there was no feeling whatsoever about things; because there weren't any black people around the neighborhoods there.

**Schwallerberg:** In your experience, were there any businesses, that you had personnel knowledge of, that were affected?

**Yost:** No, the one that we were wondering whether it might be affected it was the North Avenue Market. That was a fine place to go and get lunch and various things: fruit and all. And I'll tell you everyone in that market was concerned whether it would even open in the next week or so. Things began to settle down and came back to whatever you might consider normal for the area.

**Schwallerberg:** Do you recall the cross street was where the North Avenue was? What corner it was on?

**Yost:** What the North Avenue Market?

**Schwallerberg:** Yes

**Yost:** Yes we were at St. Paul and 20<sup>th</sup> Street and you went from St. Paul you went to Charles Street and then over to Howard Street and the Market was right there at... I don't remember the exact address. You'd could enter it from I believe 20<sup>th</sup> Street. You could definitely enter it from North Avenue.

**Schwallerberg:** Did your interaction with people of other races change?

**Yost:** No not really. I think I had some better feelings and more of a sense of willing to cooperate and recognition of the need to cooperate with others.

**Schwallerberg:** Is there anything that I haven't mentioned, that you'd like to add that you'd think would be important?

**Yost:** Not really the difficulty is trying to think back to 1960 from 2007. So no there no more I could add.

**Schwallenberg:** Ok well I thank you for this time.

**Yost:** You're very welcome. It was a pleasure.

**Schwallenberg:** Have a good day.