

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.

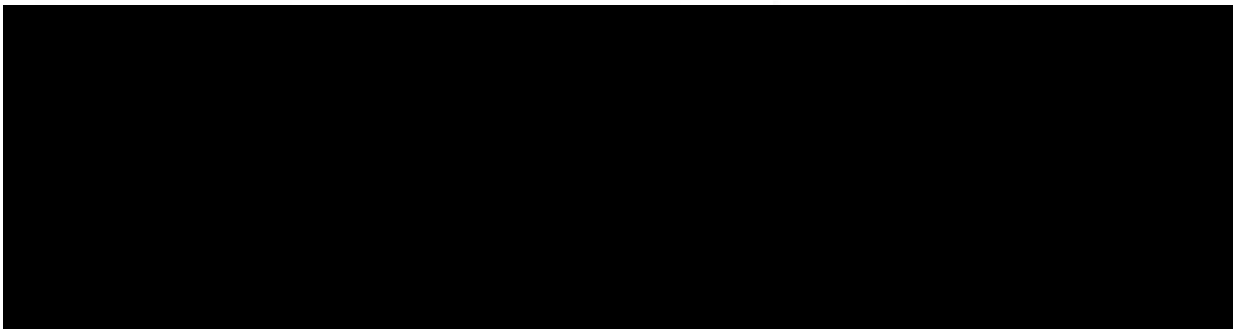
If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name 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 Lee Parsons
October 13, 2007;
Interviewer: John Schwallenberg
Transcribers: Nicholas Ricks and Nora Feinstein

Interviewer: Today is Saturday, October 13, 2007 and I am interviewing... Please state your name.

Parsons: Lee Parsons.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your situation in the 1960's?

Parsons: I was a young, married woman in my twenties with two small children living in the Reisterstown area, a suburb of Baltimore.

Interviewer: Where did you shop?

Parsons: I shopped in the Reisterstown area or sometimes in the Westminster/Carroll County area.

Interviewer: Before the riots, what kind of interaction did you have with people of other races?

Parsons: Actually, when I was in high school, the schools were integrated and we did have several black girls who had started riding my bus that I began to talk to. There was this small population of black families in the Reisterstown area that went back generations and other than that, not too much.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you remember about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

Parsons: Well, I did hear the news and watched pretty much the whole thing unfolding on the TV show, read reports in the paper, and in the news journals... It was pretty shocking.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the TV shows or news broadcasts that you saw...the report of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King?

Parsons: I did. I watched the news coverage quite a bit.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you... How did you hear about the riots starting?

Parsons: On TV. I had the TV on watching all the things as they were happening live.

Interviewer: Okay. Was it local channels, national channels?

Parsons: I watched a local channel out of Baltimore.

Interviewer: Okay. During the riots, what information did you get and where...where did you... Where did it come from?

Parsons: The information that I got was from the TV so, of course, it was all filtered through the newscasters, the local newscasters.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your impression of the reporting of the riots?

Parsons: I just assumed that what I was getting from the news reports was accurate. You know, we sort of trusted the reporters on TV to tell the truth, so... And when we saw the live pictures of things that were happening across the country...

Interviewer: Okay. How do you think the national news portrayed the situation in Baltimore?

Parsons: You know, I can't remember Baltimore specifically being on the national news. It seems to me, like, when we would see film clips that it...it centered more on other places, although I'm sure they must have, you know, talked about local [rioting] as well.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your impression of the neighborhoods that were affected?

Parsons: It was frightening. I can't imagine, you know, with people in the streets, and fires and looting... You know, it was a pretty frightening scene and I think the most significant image that I remember on TV is actually seeing machine guns mounted on the Capitol steps. I mean, it was like watching another country; it didn't seem like my own country to see that.

Interviewer: Okay. The types of violence that was occurring— what were the types of violence that you see that was occurring? What did you see?

Parsons: We saw mobs in the street, looting, people being pushed and shoved, policemen with batons and dogs and, you know, spraying people with things... As a personal experience, my grandfather was still working at the time in the city and he had always worked in the city. He didn't think what they were saying on TV would apply that much to the areas. He just couldn't believe it was really that bad in Baltimore. So he went off to work and he was stopped at an intersection and people shook his car up and down and surrounded his car and beat on the hood of his car. I mean, if it was today, honestly, with all the guns that are in the population... I think, you know, he might seriously have been hurt but that was a little bit different back then as far as guns was concerned.

Interviewer: 'Kay. Did you see the National Guard troops in your neighborhood?

Parsons: I not only saw the National Guard troops but I had a girlfriend who was a newlywed and her husband was in the National Guard so they called him up to go. I think he was in the Washington Boulevard area, and she was very frightened so she came and stayed with me while her husband was called up on active duty.

Interviewer: Okay. How did the... How did their presence make you feel in your neighborhood?

Parsons: Well, in Reisterstown area we really did not have a problem right in the area but we still had curfews, so that part affected our lives. My great-grandmother died at the time. We weren't able to go to the funeral home in the evening because the curfew was, I think, 7:00 [PM], so...but we really didn't have anything going on right in my own neighborhood.

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

Parsons: I think that probably it created a lot of uncertainty. I mean, people who had lived side by side before and sort of trusted each other...and to imagine that people could do the things that happened and that violence could just erupt that way. I think it must have taken a lot of years for people to feel safe again.

Interviewer: 'Kay. How do you think Baltimore changed after the riots?

Parsons: That's the one you just asked.

Interviewer: I just asked you that. How did you... How did your immediate neighborhood change?

Parsons: Again, because it...it really was a small black population in my neighborhood... I don't think that my particular neighborhood changed so much other than the way people change from seeing those images. And I guess it's sort of like people that have lived through a war and they've seen things happen and it changes them because they know things can change suddenly. But I don't know about my particular neighborhood.

Interviewer: In your experience, what businesses were affected?

Parsons: Well I think...pretty much in the larger cities and where a lot of this was happening, a lot of them were affected because there was the looting and windows broken and businesses that were closed that couldn't do business because of the area not being secure. Again, the curfew in the evening, so that they couldn't be open, so...[the riots] curtailed people's movements.

Interviewer: Did your interaction... Did your interaction with people of other races change?

Parsons: For me personally, it didn't. You know, I don't understand the violence in that especially because so much of it was against their own neighborhoods, their own people, their own neighbors. So, I understand being angry but the action that it took where it actually hurt your own people, that part I don't understand.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add in this interview before closing?

Parsons: Let's see, we covered the part about my friend staying with the National Guard, and the curfew... Well I think... I think that we have made a lot of progress since I was a small child

and could remember, the earliest memories that I have. I'm not saying that people are always treated fairly but I don't think that's always a racial issue either. I mean, sometimes you know, race against race that we don't always treat each other fairly. Things have improved but there's still a lot of ways that we could improve things.

Interviewer: Okay.