

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.

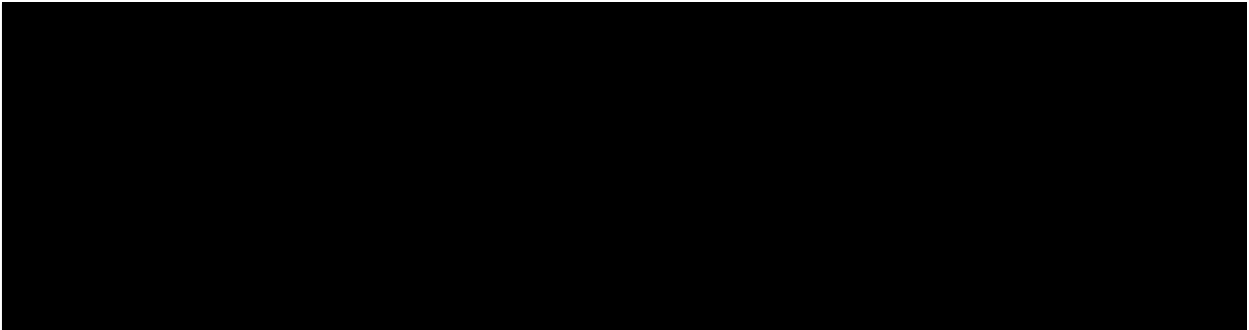
If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name 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 Roxalana Nia Redmond
May 12, 2007;
Interviewer: Maria Paoletti and Nyasha Chikowore
Transcriber: Nicholas Ricks and Nora Feinstein

Paoletti: State your full name for the recording.

Redmond: Yes. I'm Roxalana Nia Redmond.

Paoletti: And in the 1960's, in the years surrounding the riots, where were you in your life? How old were you, what were you doing, where were you working, going to school, where did you live?

Redmond: In nineteen... 1968 I was an eleventh grade student at Northern High School in northeast Baltimore.

Paoletti: Did you have a job?

Redmond: Yes, I worked at Northwood Shopping Center in the Kresge's Five and Ten Cent store.

Paoletti: And so you were 16 years old?

Redmond: Yes. I'm 57 [years old] now.

Paoletti: And where exactly... What area did you live in?

Redmond: I lived in a neighborhood called Berea that's bounded by Edison Highway, Lakewood [Street], Federal Street, and Chase Street in East Baltimore.

Paoletti: Before the riots, not immediately before the riots, but in the years before the riots, what sort of interactions did you have normally with people of other races?

Redmond: Other than a few teachers in our junior high school class who were Caucasian... We went to Clifton, the old Clifton High School. Clifton High School had white instructors and a white principal. My earliest experience, though, with people of another race would have been Sunday school. We were Christian Scientists. We were the only black family in that church, so I was introduced and interactive with people from other cultures at a young age.

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

Redmond: It was segregationist. We lived in a segregated community, whether we were aware of it or not. Northern High School—we were bused to Northern High School

to integrate that school. We went there for ninth grade and it was a predominately Caucasian school. So we were minorities there.

Paoletti: And what do you remember about Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination?

Redmond: Basically, that it occurred...must have been night time, so, we went to school the next day and the principal was on the lawn and the police and they didn't let the children get off the busses. There were about five or six busses that bused children to Northern High School and so the police and our administrators they knew something was wrong. But when you looked across on the other side of the street there was a big cross that had been burnt the night before. And so they didn't want the children to go to school that day. As we found out later, that the head of the Ku Klux Klan for the state of Maryland's son went to that school, and the next day after Dr. King's assassination they came there and put that large cross on that lawn and burnt that. That's the first time I had ever seen that other than the movies. You know, so that was real eye-awakening for young people.

Paoletti: And do you remember how exactly you heard about the assassination, or...?

Redmond: Um...

Paoletti: The day of...

Redmond: That was the news. That would have been both...TV and radio.

Paoletti: Do remember the reaction in your family or neighborhood?

Redmond: Anger, an awful lot of anger...just anger. We were angry about that. You took your reaction from your parents, I believe. A lot of sadness coming from the parents about the situation, and being a young person, you're not used to see your parents sad like that anyway, but I think we reacted with anger that this was happening, that this had happened.

Paoletti: And how did you hear about the riots starting?

Redmond: Through the media, TV, and you were really happy to hear that Watts...Watts [in Los Angeles] was on fire... And that was the reaction, you just were, it was some sort of release mechanism once you saw and the way the announcers announced it, "Watts is now on fire." And you saw the flames and you were very happy that Watts was on fire.

Paoletti: Why?

Redmond: And...because you... It helped you move from a sense of helplessness to [the sense that someone was doing something about it, even...even though it was destructive. You just, that was your response. We felt really happy about it, we wanted to cheer 'em on and then as more news came in and people were kicking off in other cities and that

was the conversation; you know, they're kicking off up north in Philly, they're kicking off down in Old Town Mall [in East Baltimore]— people were, like, passing the word that, you know, they're doing this. And you felt a sense of empowerment. Even though you weren't participating physically, it was some sort of... What is it? Like when you live vicariously? These people were doing what you, you know; we certainly were cheering them on.

Chikowore: So did you hear about the Baltimore riots through the media?

Redmond: Through the media and through kids. Kids were coming through saying, "Hey they're down on Gay Street now, they're getting ready to do Gay Street, Monument Street, and so those were the kind of conversations kids were having until they imposed the curfew. In fact, I remember my own mother coming home early from work. She stayed home a whole week because she did not want us to go out to participate in the riots. Particularly my older brother, particularly my older brothers, so she just chose to stay home.

Chikowore: So you never were allowed to go outside, or?

Redmond: Ah, we didn't, the neighborhood that we lived in was...home ownership 99%. Kids in our neighborhood, normally you wouldn't expect them to be involved in the riot anyway. In fact, they would have to walk 25 blocks to get into a district where you had stores, things to participate in something like that. All the action was down the hill. It was North Avenue, Milton Avenue, Monument Street, Old Town Mall. So you'd have to walk to get to where things were.

Paoletti: And then... So did you watch the riots on TV, the ones in Baltimore?

Redmond: Definitely. I mean, that was the biggest story that was happening so everyone was watching.

Paoletti: What did you think about the way that the riots were reported?

Redmond: At that time you weren't looking at it like that but in hindsight, when you look back at how it was presented... I think the media cast a lot of fear onto people with the way it was being covered. The only thing I can compare it to was the coverage of 9/11 [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001]. That's the only time I've been glued to a TV, to look at something the way that was happening.

Paoletti: Did you...do you remember if the national news had anything about Baltimore in their coverage?

Redmond: Yeah. The national...Baltimore was really glad when we made the national news, that was the sentiment of kids— that you wanted to make the national news. And I think that that was basically the conversation; that kids wanted to be counted in. That other people wouldn't know in other cities that Baltimore's participating. And I think it

was something that, it was just conversation, that people knew that they wanted to make the national news.

Chikowore: So did you see the...neighborhoods that were affected after?

Redmond: Yes, yes.

Chikowore: What was your impression of everything?

Redmond: I think after you saw the damage, you felt a little sad about that because you knew you certainly couldn't go to your favorite store anymore because it was burnt out. It didn't really click to you that you were burning down stores that you, when I say you, I'm talking about the people that we knew that participated and certainly people did participate, even in our neighborhood. All parents weren't as vigil as our mother was to make sure we could not go out in with all of that. We couldn't go any further than our yard, our alley where we played, but the other kids that were able to go and participate, that's how you were getting information about what was happening down the hill, other than just the news.

Chikowore: So nothing related to the riots happened in your immediate neighborhood?

Redmond: The closest for us would've been Milton Avenue, which would have been, like, maybe seven blocks away from us. The movie house that used to be on Milton Avenue, the supermarket on Milton Avenue [were looted]. That was our local supermarket, you know, so they had gone in the supermarket and, you know, broke windows, taken food, all kinds of things, so that would have been the supermarket on Milton [Avenue] and the movie house on Milton [Avenue] between Hoffman and Howard Streets.

Paoletti: Do you want to take a break? Because we're...

Redmond: Sure.

Paoletti: Yeah.