RIOTS AND RECONCILIATION:
AN EXAMINATION OF RECONCILIATION IN LIGHT OF THE BALTIMORE RIOTS OF 1968

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Introduction

The reality of many or most conflicts is that they simply remain unresolved. Over time as these unresolved conflicts and their implications slip deeply into the identity and consciousness of a people group, it becomes increasing difficult to confront the presenting problems without addressing the deeper history. Those involved are left with open wounds.

Many have assessed that a number of Baltimore's streets and neighborhoods are "open wounds" that have been festering for over four decades. During a span of four days in April 1968, Baltimore was consumed in racial upheaval due, in part, to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Large portions of the city were looted and burned. Life was lost. Countless injuries ensued. By the fifth day, the city was returned to order and most went back to their lives as normal. The wounds that were opened those four days have been allowed to fester ever since. Michael Parks, writing one year after the riots, said, "The city's progress since, in the eyes of many, both black and white seems measurable not in miles or yards or even feet but in inches – three forward, two back. The riots underlying causes – poverty unemployment, racism, inferior education, poor housing, frustration and despair – remain unsolved and in some cases unapproachable."[1] Even today, the conflict remains "unapproachable" in the minds of many, but the implications are all too real for the city.

The racial upheaval of 1968 accelerated several movements and forces already at play in Baltimore, but it was, by many accounts, a turning point. Peter Levy writes, "According to conventional wisdom, the "riot" marked a turning point in Baltimore's history. One oral history after another, as well as most retrospective newspaper articles on the event, declares that the city

[1] Michael Parks. "A Year Later, City Officials, Community Leaders Appraise The Impact of Rioting," *The Morning Sun*, April 4, 1969.

was never the same again."[2] One man who lived through the riots described the events as if "an iron curtain had come down and it's still going on to an extent."[3] Thomas Carney also lived through the riots. He wrote:

> I once said to a professor in college that probably the most insidious thing that happened during this period was all these things not only got inside your head but they got inside your family; they got inside of your heart and soul; and you were making determinations for the rest of your life of what's right, what's wrong, what's correct, what's not correct.[4]

The riots impacted not only the minds and hearts of those in Baltimore, but also the city's industry, economy, crime and perception. Frank Bressler was a business owner in Baltimore City who observed the riots firsthand. He wrote:

> After the riots nothing was the same… Most of the business in the inner city just never opened again. It wasn't worth it… If you were in business you lost everything that you spent a lifetime building up. You're never gonna forgive anybody for it… Crime moved in, drugs came in,… businesses didn't rebuild and so the result after the riots is where Baltimore is today… People have moved out of Baltimore and the people that live in Baltimore live in fear… I may go all the way around the Beltway to get there but I wouldn't drive through the city anymore."[5]

By a simple drive through certain neighborhoods in Baltimore one can observe the physical scars of the events of 1968. Sections of Pennsylvania Avenue and North Avenue contain boarded up businesses that have been that way for over forty years. They sit vacant as an everyday reminder that the wounds are still plagued.

How do reconciliation movements and a theology of reconciliation address conflicts that have be largely un-dealt with for decades? How can harmony be restored in situations where all that has been known for decades is segregation and disharmony? Is there a path forward for

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[2] Jessica, Elfenbein I., Thomas L. Hollowak, and Elizabeth M. Nix, ed. *Baltimore '68*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 19.
[3] Thomas Donellan, interview by Jamie Nish. ed. Elizabeth Nix, October 11, 2007. *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*
[4] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, 99.
[5] Ibid. ,202.

Baltimore that embraces differences through reconciling conversation? Can Baltimore deal with its past and move forward in reconciliation? Is *shalom* within grasp for Baltimore? Could this become a pattern for other cities that also experienced riots in 1968?

Since reconciliation theology is highly contextual, it is important to spend an extended amount of time examining the causes and events of the upheaval. The first section of this paper will examine the precursors that lead to the riots. This will be followed by an examination of the actual events of the riots, valuing first hand accounts. The next section will explore initial reconciliation movements and the general climate of the city immediately following the riots. We'll examine why the riots have been "largely absent from both civic dialogue and the historical record" and why "the wounds festered and had not healed."[6] The forth section of the paper will examine the impetus and substance of the Baltimore '68 project sponsored by the University of Baltimore in 2008. Finally, we'll examine future reconciling efforts and question what, if any, reconciling path lies before us.

Precursors

The racial tensions that gripped most of America's cities in the 1960's were just as palpable in Baltimore as in any other city. What made Baltimore unique was the fact that they had not experienced rioting prior to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Substantial riots gripped Newark and Detroit in the summer of 1967 causing disruption and destruction. The tension in other racially mixed cities increased.

In the wake of the 1967 riots, President Lyndon Johnson established the National Advisory on Civil Disorders. This advisory committee is best known as the Kerner Commission, named for its chairman, Otto Kerner. The objective of the commission was to explain what

[6] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68,* xv.

caused the riots that gripped the cities and to provide recommendations on how to avoid further riots in further cities. The most basic conclusion of the commission was that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal."[7] The results and recommendations of the commission were released one month prior to King's assassination and Baltimore's Riots. The commission "refused to blame the perpetrators alone for the consequences of their actions. Rather, the commission pointed to underlying social conditions, most notably the concentration of poverty and the sharp restrictions on opportunity that characterized the areas where order broke down."[8] Recommendations were made to the President to enact measures that would address the inequity the commission felt led to the violence.

Nationally, President Lyndon Johnson rejected the recommendations of the commission. Locally, the then Governor of Maryland, Spiro T. Agnew spoke vehemently against the recommendations claiming that the riots "were not caused by poverty or frustration but rather by radicals who incited riots."[9] He took the position that the riots were not about "white racism but permissiveness."[10] Agnew's perspective and the vehement ways in which he communicated them garnered attention for him nationally but added fuel to the fire in an already racially tense city.

Thurgood Marshall referred to Baltimore as "up-south,"[11] meaning Baltimore bore closer resemblance to the segregation practices of southern cities than of "progressive" Northern cities. The practice of "blockbusting,"[12] was prevalent throughout the city.

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[7] *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,* (Washington, D.C..: US Government Printing Office, 1 March 1968), 1.
[8] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68,* vii.
[9] Ibid., 16.
[10] Ibid., 19.
[11] *Baltimore 1968: The Fire Last Time. "The Gathering Storm."* (Narr. Sunni Khalid. WYPR) April 2008.
[12] *See* Not In My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City *by Antero Pietila. Pietila follows the practice of "blockbusting" in Baltimore from 1910 to the present. Pietila*

> [Real Estate] Agents would scare white homeowners into feeling they had to sell their homes in a hurry, before blacks moved in, which might cause home prices to fall. The agents created such a sense of emergency that white homeowners sold their homes to the agents for much less than the houses were worth. Then the agents raised the prices and sold homes to black families for much more than the agents had paid.[13]

The practice of "blockbusting" contributed to a "white flight" movement to suburban Baltimore County and other surrounding counties. By the 1960's "widespread middle class flight in residential and commercial areas had already begun. Many were choosing to live and shop outside the city because of real and perceived urban ills, in addition to the temptations of suburbia."[14] Real or not, this lead to the perception of Baltimore transforming into an ever-expanding urban ghetto, which had the effect of sending residential and commercial business into the counties. Those with means, moved out of the city at a remarkable rate.

Amy Nathan's volume "Round & Round Together" offers a case study of pre-riot racial tensions in Baltimore that surrounded the Gwynn Oaks Amusement Park in West Baltimore. While most of the city's businesses were dropping it's Jim Crow segregation practices, the Amusement Park remained "whites-only." The park became a flash-point for segregation and anti-segregation demonstrations for many years. "Changing just this one amusement park took nearly ten years of protests. Summer after summer, from 1955 to 1963, protestors tried to end segregation there."[15] This amusement park protest took on extra meaning when Dr. Martin Luther King wrote these words, when imprisoned in Birmingham, concerning why he protests:

> When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year old daughter why she can't go to the amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is

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makes comparisons between the South African apartheid practices and the "blockbusting" practices in Baltimore City.

[13] Amy Nathan. *Round & Round Together: Taking a Merry-Go-Road Ride into the Civil Rights Movement,* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2011), 133.

[14] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68,* 180.

[15] Amy Nathan. *Round & Round Together,* 5.

> told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky… they you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.[16]

Due to sustained efforts and systematic protest, the Gwynn Oak Amusement Park opened to all races on August 28, 1963, the same day Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech in Washington, DC. This amusement park was a symbol to the people of Baltimore. Rev. Frank Williams in a letter to the editor of *The Baltimore Sun* wrote, "Gwynn Oak stood as a symbol of all the evils inherent in the system of segregation… It was a symbol that had to be faced and challenged."[17]

Despite the changes at Gwynn Oak, for many the system of segregation was still firmly in place in Baltimore. Desegregation in schools was sweeping through the nation in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Baltimore was no exception. Howell S. Baum speaks of the "de facto segregation"[18] that existed in Baltimore. He writes, "Anxiety blanketed racial boundaries and made it unlikely that many parents, whatever their racial views or educational preferences, would feel comfortable choosing schools associated with the other race. The school board did not address any of these conditions."[19] The lack of initiative spoke volumes concerning Baltimore's stance on *Brown vs. Board of Education.*

Thomas Donellan was the Catholic Priest at the Church of St. Peter the Apostle in downtown Baltimore. He remarked that "prior to World War II, Baltimore was a very tightly segregated city. When I grew up, white people lived on one side of the street, and black people

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[16] Amy Nathan, *Round & Round Together*, 9.
[17] Ibid. 2.
[18] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68,* 157.
[19] Ibid, 156.

lived on the half streets."[20] Donellan describes the segregation that was entrenched in his parish neighborhood that had perpetual potential to fuel racial tension. He continues, "During the '50's, Baltimore was in very much upheaval because the total racial complex of our city neighborhoods changed. Black people having made some money during the war, began to move into white neighborhoods. And white neighborhoods began to empty."[21] These antecedents, according to Donellan did more to fuel the riots than anything else.

All of these factors made the city ripe for riot. Maj. Gen. George M. Gelston, the commander of the National Guard during the riots, said this one year later, "The riot got the city of Baltimore out of a false sense of complacency that it wouldn't happen here – despite the fact that all of us knew the ingredients were here."[22] The riots did not happen simply because Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968. It was simply the climax in racial tension that had plagued the city for decades.

The Riots

Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on Friday, April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN. Shortly thereafter, violence and rioting broke out in many American cities, but not in Baltimore. The collective air was tense that first day but rioting did not begin until Saturday evening, April 5 around 5:00 PM on N. Gay Street, one day later than most cities. In the late hours of Saturday and early hours of Sunday, 6,000 National Guardsmen entered the city under the command of Maj. Gen. George M. Gelston in order to squelch the riots and assist the police. They were also instructed to protect fireman who had reported being shot at while trying to put out fires.

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[20] Thomas Donellan, interview by Jamie Nish., October 11, 2007. *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*
[21] Ibid.
[22] Michael Parks. "A Year Later, City Officials, Community Leaders Appraise The Impact of Rioting".

John Donohue, Jr. was a Second Lieutenant and Platoon Commander in the 29th Artillery Division of the National Guard.[23] Raised in Baltimore City, he had recently moved to Baltimore County. He like many other guardsmen joined the Guard in order to avoid being drafted for service in Vietnam. He recalls that most of the guardsmen were white, wealthy, and college educated. His division swept into the city and quickly secured Mondawmin Mall on Baltimore's Northwest side. They were headquartered at the mall for the next week. His division regularly monitored Pennsylvania Avenue, moving in an out of the city. They were given M1 military-grade weapons with no bullets. Instead, they were given bayonets to fasten at the end of their rifles. Regularly, they were shot at by snipers perched high above them as they patrolled the streets and observed the carnage. John recalls that they did not have control of the city until federal troops arrived on Wednesday. At that point, the National Guard became federalized. This was the first time federal troops had patrolled in Baltimore City since the Civil War.

Thomas Donellan recalls the mood of the troops that had just arrived in Baltimore:

> So, on Wednesday, the governor asked the President to send in federal troops. And there was a contingent of the 161st or 162nd Airborne Division out of Fort Bragg that had just come back from Vietnam and had been granted Easter leave to go see their families. The President cancelled their Easter leave and ordered them into Baltimore. It's not hard to imagine the mood that they were in, just having come back from Vietnam and having their leave cancelled. They were not in an agreeable mood. So, the riot really ended with their arrival, because they were trained to shoot to kill. And the rioters would walk up and just make fun of the National Guard, but they did not make fun of the 161st Airborne.[24]

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[23] *The following is a first hand account give by:* Donohue, John Jr. Personal Interview. 1 May 2013

[24] Thomas Donellan, interview by Jamie Nish., October 11, 2007. *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*

John Donohue, Jr. also recalls the presence of the Airborne division as the end of the riots. "It was if they showed up and everyone went home."[25] The riots came to end, not through any effort at reconciliation, but by a show of force.

After a week of living under curfew and martial law, the city began to return to normal. By Friday, April 12, all seemed to be settled. But, the damage was done.

> Insurers estimate Baltimore losses at $8-10 million. During four days of looting, 288 liquor-related establishments were burned or looted, and 190 food stores vandalized. About 500 of more than 5,700 persons arrested remained to be tried on various charges, mostly curfew violations. The loss of life totals six – three by fire, one in an auto accident, and two of gunshot wounds in suspected lootings. Only one person is killed by a policeman. Baltimore accounts for a quarter of all national arrests and about a seventh of all post-assassination deaths.[26]

The majority of the looting and violence were localized to neighborhoods known to be almost strictly African-American neighborhoods. The physical damage would be done, but the effects of these few days of rioting would prove to have major repercussions throughout the city. All of the precursors were magnified and their effects were accelerated. The image of snipers, martial law, and black smoke would haunt the psyche of an untold many even to this day. The image that struck Thomas Donellan was the hatred and rage. "Just to watch the rage was overwhelming."[27] "Black as well as white Baltimoreans looked at the carnage with shock."[28]

Initial Reconciling Responses

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[25] Donohue, John Jr. Personal Interview, May 1, 2013

[26] *Baltimore '68 Events Timeline.* Langsdale Library Special Collections, University of Baltimore < http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/timeline/timeline.html> *Used with permission by the University of Baltimore.*

[27] Thomas Donellan, interview by Jamie Nish., October 11, 2007. *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*

[28] C. Fraser Smith, *Here Lies Jim Crow: Civil Rights in Maryland,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 235.

Jessica Elfenbein, one of the local leading historians on the racial riots of 1968, admittedly notes that there is little scholarship on the initial response to the riots.[29] In fact, there is little scholarship about the riots as a whole. A few can recall several "penance walks" in the city shortly after the riots. One such walk was documented by the *Evening Sun* on April 11th. The procession began at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen and included roughly 400 white people. "The unprecedented procession saw young girls in bright-colored stockings, elderly women with canes and clergymen, among others, "united to acknowledge our shame for the 'white racism' that permeates our nation."[30] What was noticeable about such an event was that whites owned "their part in creating the conditions that produced rioting here."[31] Unfortunately, events or movements that had this posture were few and far between in the wake of the riots.

Dr. Elfenbein wrote a paper entitled "Church People Work on the Integration Problem: The Brethren's Interracial Work in Baltimore, 1949-1972.[32]" However, it only speaks of the new challenges the riots introduced rather than any faith-based reconciling work. The same is true for many faith-based organizations doing reconciling work in the city. The riots either brought an end to their efforts or at the least greatly complicated them.

The Amercian Friends Committee released a "Report on Baltimore Civil Disorders, April 1968", which remarked that Baltimore was similar to many cities. "'When one accumulates a list of the complaints of Baltmoreans', the Quakers concluded, 'one tends to wonder why the retaliation was not worse." In this report, allusions are made to several reconciling efforts:

> Some efforts are being made to confront the issues. On Sunday, April 14, a number of religious leaders read a "Procession of Penance" as a confession of shared guilt for white racism and a pledge of support for the ideals represented by Martin Luther King. In late

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[29] Elfenbein, Jessica I. Personal Interview, May 12, 2013
[30] Michael Lewis, "Whites Walk In Penance for King." *The Evening Sun,* April 11, 1968.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, 103.

> May two seminars were held at Loyola College to explore racial crisis as it exists in Baltimore. A series of meetings under the overall title "What color is power?" was sponsored by eight white upper middle class churches in North Baltimore. Overflow crowds came to hear from black leaders the facts of life in the black ghetto. Out of such discussions are flowing a variety of education activities for white citizens. [33]

Due to the relative historical obscurity of these initiatives, one must conclude that their reconciliation attempts were not far reaching.

The weight of responsibility fell overwhelming more toward blaming the black community and the black leadership for "allowing" the riots to happen. Just days after the riots, Governor Spiro T. Agnew called the major black leaders of the city to a meeting. Many felt that Agnew was initiating a dialog that would attempt to bring healing to the city. The "civil rights leaders, many of whom had taken to the streets to try to calm the violence at considerable risk to themselves, Agnew proceeded to criticize them for not standing up to the militants and for failing to do enough to prevent the riots – which led many to walk out in protest."[34] Agnew's comments further cemented the racial divide in the city and single-handedly squelched any broad based initiatives at reconciliation. Ironically, it was his treatment of the racial riots in Baltimore that put him on the national political map and helped propel him out of Maryland into the Vice Presidency.

Baltimore '68

In the early 2000's, the history department at the University of Baltimore sponsored surprisingly well-attended conferences featuring historical occasions in Baltimore City.[35] Dr. Jessica Elfenbein, then Professor of History and Community Studies at the University of

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[33] Jane Motz, "Report on Baltimore Civil Disorders, April 1968" (Middle Atlantic Region, American Friends Service Committee, 1968), 32.
[34] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, 136.
[35] *The following account is taken from a personal interview with Dr. Elfenbein.* Elfenbein, Jessica L. Personal Interview, 12 April 2013.

Baltimore, continued to hear anecdotal stories about the Riots of 1968. As she began to explore deeper these stories, she discovered a profound lack of scholarship on the event and felt that the University of Baltimore owed it to the City of Baltimore to apply serious scholarship to the Riots. She partnered with two other colleagues at the University of Baltimore, Thomas Hollowak and Elizabeth Nix, to ensure that the next historical conference sponsored by the University would be on Baltimore in 1968. Many in the city's leadership discouraged them from the event saying that it is best not to "pick at that wound." This did not deter them. In April of 2008, on the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, the Baltimore '68 conference was held. The purpose became to "examine the uprisings' long term causes and consequences in an effort to improve the quality of life in our city."[36] It garnered great attention, reviews, and attendance from not only historians, but many activists throughout the city.

In many different countries and in many different contexts, a Truth Commission or a Truth & Reconciliation Commission has been an effective tactic for dealing with long-standing conflicts. These commissions have happened in Argentina, Guatemala, and most notably, South Africa. According to the *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict Handbook* published by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the principle activities of a truth commission involve 1.) Outreach, 2.) Statement Taking, 3.) Research and Investigation, 4.) Data Processing 5.) Public Hearings, 6.) Emotional Support, 7.) Final Reports, and 8.) Due Process.[37] The Baltimore '68 project never set out to be a Truth Commission. It was simply an attempt at bolstering scholarship in an area in which it was neglected. However, this project grew into something much greater than scholarship. In so doing, it captured many of the initial elements of

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[36] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, xvi.
[37] Bloomfield, David, et al, eds. *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook.* (Stockholm, IDEA, 2003), 133-136.

a truth commission and even stepped into healing some of the wounds that had long been festering. Inadvertently, it became the greatest initiative of reconciliation in post-riot Baltimore, albeit 40 years after the conflict reached its climax.

The preparation for the Baltimore '68 conference began in 2006, when undergraduate students from the University of Baltimore began conducting oral interviews. "Students were able to talk to a racially diverse group of informants whose 1968 situations ranged from a family that lost their home and business in the upheaval, to an African-American physician who defended his fledgling private practice, to people who participated in the looting."[38] The archives of these oral interviews are available on the Baltimore'68 website.[39] In terms of outreach, careful attention was given to ensure that all perspectives were well represented.

What became clear is that many were given an opportunity to speak about these events who had no voice prior. According to the IDEA, "Statement taking is important in at least two ways: it furthers the goal of establishing the truth about the past; and it provides an opportunity for victims to come forward and recount their traumatic experiences in a sympathetic and generally safe environment."[40] Though not intending to be a truth commission, the Baltimore '68 project allowed for these goals to be accomplished in a way that had not been done before in the wake of the '68 riots.

What also became clear was the contested nature of "truth" as relates to the Riots. The project was named "Baltimore '68" for a reason. To call the events of April 1968 a series of "riots" reveals only one perspective on the events. Other perspectives refer to the events of April 1968 as an "uprising." Therein lies the contested nature of "truth" for all those broadly involved

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[38] *Baltimore '68,* <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/oral-histories/index.html>.
[39] *Baltimore '68* <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/oral-histories/oral-histories1.html>.
[40] Bloomfield, David, et al, eds. *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook.* 133.

in the riots. Peter Levy writes, "One school cast the disorders as rational political events, as a form of protest against unjust circumstances, while the other school contended that the riots represented the irrational actions of individuals who were 'seeking the thrill and excitement occasioned by looting and burning."[41] How one chose to name the "disorders" colored the perception of the basic purpose of the "disorders".

The Baltimore '68 team discovered forty years of distance from the events of April 1968 created perceptions of the events that were more mythic than truthful. Elizabeth Nix writes, "The 'Riots' occupy that place where perception and reality meet… Most people, black and white, *felt* they were a turning point… The riots changed the way people thought about the city."[42] The "myth" that has dominated Baltimore for the past forty years is that the "riots" caused many of the ills that plague Baltimore. The truth, however, is more contextual and nuanced. The 'riots' where a climactic event, yet, many of the forces the have brought Baltimore to its current state were in play long before the riots. The history of these events became increasingly more complex. After all "civic memory takes us deeply into the realm of community emotions, into the essence of what people feel most deeply about."[43]

The Baltimore '68 project did far more than simply elicit oral interviews. The organizers wanted to enhance the scholarship and narrative of the riots as well. Through oral interviews and newspaper articles, they were about to draw together and complete a comprehensive timeline of the actual events. Many of the articles were copied and posted to the archives website. They established a driving tour through the areas most damaged in the riots that is accompanied by an audio narrator. The project also involved an art track that gave a different venue for individuals

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[41] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, 6.
[42] Ibid, 188.
[43] Ibid. 264.

to share their experience during the riots. The main product was a mosaic named "One Mosaic: Many Voices."[44] The art track also generated a play, a performance by a dance troupe, and a memory quilt, all intended to not only reflect the events of 1968 but to provide an artistic forum for healing in the City. WYPR, the Baltimore affiliate of National Public Radio, joined the initiative as well. They generated a five-part series entitled "'68: The Fire Last Time."

The project struck a collective nerve with those in attendance who understood that the wounds left by the riots were still festering. Many wanted an ongoing dialog. In the wake of the Baltimore '68 project a series of ongoing dialogs were set at local YMCA branches throughout the city. The stated purpose was "to build understanding, empathy, and relationships in the community to help heal and move forward in the wake of the riot and its underlying causes and conflicts."[45] The meetings were set for the fall of 2008, but there is no record of the conversations or any steps that came from those dialogs.

The stated purpose of the Baltimore '68 was certainly not to be a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, many of its initial elements mimic the best practices of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It also appears that the project made strides in providing some civic healing for those who were involved. When one looks at the Riots as a whole, the Baltimore '68 project appears to be the best initiative in Baltimore's history for fostering reconciliation.

Future Reconciling Efforts

Prior to the Riots, Thomas Donellan tells the story of his Catholic parish in downtown Baltimore.

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[44] *Baltimore '68,* <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/art-track/index.html>.
[45] *Baltimore '68,* <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/conference/documents/balt68brochure2.pdf>.

> The divide between Baltimore Street is significant because the riot was defined by Baltimore Street. Prior to the riots, starting in 1965, or slightly before, major efforts began on both sides of Baltimore Street on the black community side and on the white community side to try to begin to bridge the gap between the two. This – the most significant players in the area in those years were the churches.[46]

Donellan tells the story of ministers reaching across the street to embrace the differences and work together to build community. He recalls the breakthrough coming in 1966 when "black ministers who met every Monday morning for prayer and discussion invited the white ministers to join them. So, for two years, we met together to look at the neighborhood, to coordinate what we could do."[47]

Baltimore continues to be plagued by divides similar to the one in which Donellan describes. These are not simply emotional divides or ones that only exist in the realm of perception. They are physical and real and continue to feed the festering racial tension of the city. In many ways Baltimore is similar to that which the Kerner Commission described. It is two communities existing side by side in one city. Tragically, the strides that were made by Donellan in years prior to the riots were a casualty in the violence. However, his efforts are an example of the church working to break down barriers between these two very different communities. The church community became the bridge between the two racial communities.

Amy Nathan makes the case that the real turning point in the Gwynn Oak Amusement Park protests came when both white and black ministers were together arrested for protesting the park's segregation. "Instead of just preaching about how bad Jim Crow was, ministers need to actually *do* something to end it by taking part in 'demonstrations and direct action'."[48] On July 4, 1963, ministers of different color and denomination descended on the Gwynn Oak

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[46]Thomas Donellan, interview by Jamie Nish., October 11, 2007. *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*
[47] Ibid.
[48] Amy Nathan, *Round & Round Together,* 147.

Amusement park to protest. Promptly, they were arrested. "Photographers snapped history-making photos of solemn religious leaders being arrested. Those images would appear in the next day's newspapers."[49] Two months later, the park desegregated. Ministers were willing to protest in the name of the One Kingdom of God and, in doing so, built a bridge between the white and black communities in Baltimore.

King's concept of "beloved community' initially popularized by Josiah Royce, became the platform for his non-violent civil rights revolution. Both King and Royce spoke of "a perfectly lived unity of individual men joined in one divine purpose."[50] King taught that within the beloved community, "reconciliation demonstrates to the world the truth that 'in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Negro nor white) and that out of one blood God made all men to dwell on the face of the earth."[51] For King, the kingdom of God broke down the barriers of race and class and presented a new community. "Thus, the beloved community is the new social space of reconciliation introduced into history by the church."[52] The church was the primary vehicle for this beloved community.

During the late 1960's, The Greater Homewood Community Corporation was founded in North Baltimore through multiple initiatives stemming from Johns Hopkins University. The corporation was committed to building strong communities in North Baltimore. After the riots, Greater Homewood realized that the tactic of racial equity was too charged. Instead, the corporation "took 'where you live' as the organizing fulcrum'."[53] Applying the principles of King's "Beloved Community" in a purely secular "community building" platform, Greater

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[49] Ibid., 159.
[50] Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today,* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2005), 49.
[51] Ibid. 50.
[52] Ibid. 50.
[53] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, 210.

Homewood "approached racial integration from the imperative of neighborhood stabilization rather than taking integration as its own organizing principle."[54] This removed many of the "baggage" of racial inequity and instead held "strong communities" as the highest priority. Greater Homewood Community Corporation has continued to have influence in building strong communities in North Baltimore to this day, now named Strong City Baltimore.

Thomas Donnellan, the Greater Homewood Community Corporation, and the ministers arrested at the Gwynn Oak Amusement Park all believed in the strength of community as the path forward for reconciliation in Baltimore. As King believed and taught, the church needs to be the primary picture of the "beloved community" in the world. The path forward for reconciliation in Baltimore must include the church practicing "beloved community" in the midst of a segregated city. The church needs to provide the platform for truth-telling, repentance, and reconciliation. The narrative of reconciliation offered by the church can build on efforts like Greater Homewood Community Corporation and the Baltimore '68 project.

How the church accomplishes this is highly contextual, even within the city. The folklore in Baltimore still speaks of Sunday morning as the most segregated hour in of the week. Yet, the theology that underlies most faith traditions speaks of the church as the institution that ought to most value the theology of reconciliation.

In WYPR's treatment of the Baltimore '68 riots, the narrator tell the story of the role of the Baltimore Orioles and Baltimore Colts in the racial make-up of the city. "The city's major league teams, the Orioles and the Colts were perhaps the only institutions to which Baltimoreans of all colors share fierce loyalty. Both teams were integrated, as were the large crowds that

[54] Ibid. 212.

attended the games at venerated Memorial Stadium on 33rd Street."[55] During the riots, Lenny Moore, a running back for the Colts, ended up making sandwiches for those stuck in the Civic Center. He said this concerning the Colts, "When the Baltimore Colts came on that football field, we became one. When the game was over, it was you know, you go your way, we will go our way."[56]

For decades, Baltimore has found unity in the communal sense of sports. Yet, sports teams and their success come and go. The church will remain forever. The church must be the institution that leads the way in reconciliation, reparative justice, communal harmony and in demonstrating to the city of Baltimore what true "beloved community" looks like. It can no longer tolerate being the most segregated institution in the City. It is a call "for the church to be a community which tries to develop the resources to stand within the world witnessing to the peaceable kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world."[57]

Conclusion

Many wonder, "why anyone would bother to open old wounds by revisiting the civil disorders that wracked our nation's cities a generation ago."[58] A bigger question may be, can reconciliation truly be accomplished without dealing with the wounds from the past? Many efforts, like the Procession for Penance and the Baltimore '68 project, have made strides in reconciling some of the hurts and bitterness that still fester in the City. However, a simple drive through numerous neighborhoods will make evident that the wounds still fester and that more work needs to be done. The Church is the only institution that offers the impetus for true

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[55] *Baltimore 1968: The Fire Last Time. "The Gathering Storm."* (Narr. Sunni Khalid. WYPR) April 2008.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics,* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 102.
[58] Elfenbein, Jessica I., ed. *Baltimore '68*, i.

reconciliation because it is not a human institution, but a divine one. It is given the gospel, the theological platform for true reconciliation. The path to reconciliation must involve the church as the agent for healing in the City.

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