

History Final

The Baltimore Riots Rise Again

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For a few weeks in April 2015 the city was in an uproar. The people young and old were rioting, looting and burning down their own city. The first thoughts of these incidents were memories of the riots of 1968. So much of what occurred was very similar even down to the month in which it all took place. In April 1968 the riots were in response to the assassination of a very popular leader during the Civil Rights Movement named Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and recently in April 2015 all this commotion erupted after the death of a young African American man named Freddie Gray. There were assumptions, made by the media and other sources, that police brutality was the cause of Freddie Gray's death while in police custody. Those nights in April 2015, after the news of his death, the people started out protesting peacefully; however, it all evolved into violence and destruction of our great city. This report will give us different perspectives including results from three different interviews conducted with current citizens of Baltimore City. From these perspectives we will gain knowledge on how the recent riots compare to those of 1968, what kind of relationship the police have with the public and what kind of response could have protected our city.

Conducting interviews was a great opportunity to learn the firsthand experience from other Baltimore City residence, other than the agitators and the media, who had some type of involvement in the recent riots. During the three interviews that were performed it was recognized that according to the age, background and knowledge of the interviewee, the impact of their personal feelings and their responses from these incidents was associated properly.

The first interview was held the morning of May 11, 2015 in the University of Baltimore's library with Mr. Clyde E. Boatwright. Mr. Boatwright grew up and also worked in the Sandtown, Winchester area of Baltimore city where the recent rioting and looting initiated.

He is the Fraternal Order of Police President for Lodge #5 for Baltimore School police. Mr. Boatwright believes that people used the recent riots as an opportunity to express their personal beliefs and economic pain.

The second interview was held the morning of May 12, 2015 at Baltimore City Hall in the office of President Councilman Bernard “Jack” Young. Councilman Young also grew up in Baltimore City and he is heavily involved with youth programs in the community. He showed a great interest in creating better relationships between the community and the police.

The third and final interview was held the evening of May 12, 2015 in the University of Baltimore’s library with Mr. Ralph E Johnson Jr.. Mr. Johnson another native of Baltimore City is a writer and publisher. He was an active participant of the peaceful protest that took place to better community relations. All three interviews were a very enlightening experience as each of them shared their heartfelt feelings of how the riots affected our city/communities. Each interviewee also offered various suggestions on how the communities and their relationships with our leadership could be strengthen.

The order of events was repeated in 2015 just as the pattern in 1968. According to Badger (2015) there was a funeral, protest, violence, curfews and cancelled ballgames. How ironic that history repeated itself in the shadow of those painful moments. Boatwright (2015) stated in his interview that from what he had heard of the 1968 riots, he felt that both incidents had similar effects. Badger (2015) goes on to say that each of those incidents brought a great shock amongst the Baltimoreans, as also expressed by Young (2015). The capacity for recovery of the low-income urban black communities was diminished. Young (2015) stated that the riots of 1968 were very massive and they left a lot of damage and even a tremendous loss of businesses that unfortunately never recovered. Peter Levy (2013) noted that in the magnitude of

the 1968 riots fifty-four cities in thirty-six states suffered great loss from looting, arson and sniper fire. Councilman Young (2015) also believes that the riots of 1968 have no comparison to what we encountered in April 2015; on the other hand Mr. Johnson feels that the 2015 riots were a little different because in 1968 our resources and education was not as powerful as what we have today. Councilman Young added that he feels that deploying the National Guard just as they did in 1968 along with other state agencies was a great contribution in getting control of our recent riots.

The police will always be an intricate part of our society, therefore the public needs to build better relationships with them to create new and improved community relations. According to Johnson (2015), if you do not have a positive relationship with the police you are on the brink of civil disorder. He adds that the culture of thinking in Baltimore has been “Them against Us” for a long time. Boatwright (2015) said that from what he remembers as a child growing up, there has always been a division between the police and the community. As a youth they did not like to police but they respected them. Boatwright (2015) also states that they had a mutual respect and the understanding that if someone broke the law, the police officer would bring them to justice. When speaking to Young (2015) he suggests that in order to help build the community trust with the police department we need to go back to community policing on foot patrol. Young (2015) did add that overall we still have a lot of good police on the force, we just need to weed out the bad seeds.

It’s no secret that the neighborhoods that were tragically affected during these riots are poverty stricken and have a low education rate. Badger (2015) agreed that poverty and a lack of strong education is a major cause of our citywide crisis. Johnson (2015) and Young (2015) both mentioned several neighborhood programs that included the Police Athletic League and the

Officer Friendly program as being beneficial to keeping our youth occupied in the past.

According to Young (2015), these programs were educational and influential to our youth. The closing of these neighborhood programs could have caused additional fuel to the constituent's anger. Education is a vital part of our youth's growth and engaging in recreational activities could possibly help to release that anger.

In addition to recreating youth programs, there were several things mentioned that could have protected our city from the riots. Boatwright (2015) feels strongly that to prevent the riots they should not have publicized it but dealt with the real issues; therefore the results could have been contained much better. Councilman Young (2015) suggests that there could have been a better plan of coordination by the school system, including parents and other government agencies to alleviate the initial riots. Johnson (2015) added that our leadership should make their presence in the neighborhoods more frequently and not only when it's election time.

In conclusion, there were three points expressed. There was a comparison of recent riots versus those of 1968, the relationship between the police and the public was viewed as a continued issue and it was felt that the riots could have been avoided if our community had some relationship improvements on a political and law enforcement level.

The root of the 1968 riots took place because of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but there were other issues as stated by Badger (2015) like higher rates of poverty and lack of education. The riots of 2015 used the death of Freddie Gray as a weapon to initiate the protest and an opportunity to solicit for justice but instead that continued anger was expressed in the wrong way. Our society is still suffering from years of frustration and historical oppression (Johnson, 2015). Boatwright (2015) says he thinks that this outrage was an opportunity for people (professional protestors) to force their agenda on others.

An ongoing issue for many years has been the relationship between the police and the public which still needs to improve to address some major historical issues. Young (2015) stated that the public tries to give the police a black eye but they just need to remove the bad apples from the force. As far as protecting our city we have some work to do as Young (2015) expressed. He also added that the political leaders, law enforcement and government agencies need to work closer together to recreate youth programs in the communities to influence and educate youth in a more positive manner. History has repeated itself and we still need economical relief to be able to move forward and work together to strengthen our communities.

References

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