

Conflict, Cooperation and 21st Century Renaissance

passage from Baltimore County: Celebrating a Legacy

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“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.” While Charles Dickens was assessing France before its Revolution, the same words could also be used to describe the travails and the triumphs of Baltimore County.

In the first decades of the County’s existence, issues of survival, land patents and religion were the source of most disputes. However, cooperation between farmers and their association with millers were examples of economic partnerships which were beneficial to both parties and the power of working together transcended most differences.

As society progressed, growing pains were inevitable regarding personal and civil rights, labor issues, servitude, slavery and divergent political ideologies. Conversely, cooperation can also be documented through myriad acts of kindness and a willingness of individuals and groups to make Baltimore County a better place in which to live.

One of the most enduring themes of controversy throughout Baltimore County’s long history has involved issues regarding working conditions and compensation. Discord between labor and management has manifested itself in the forms of strikes, negotiations, protests and even violence. However, positive resolutions to these conflicts have usually allowed both parties to prosper.

While most events involving conflict and cooperation never made the national news, some events have placed Baltimore County in the national spotlight. One such example was the burning of draft records by the Catonsville Nine during the era of Vietnam; an event which crystallized attitudes about the unpopular conflict.

Like the past, in recent years the usage of land has been a source of great discussion along with the issues of economic development and community conservation. Partnerships between the Baltimore County Government and private enterprise have created such endeavors as urban renaissance projects and thirteen Commercial Revitalization Districts have now been designated throughout the County.

Through these efforts, lively main streets with renovated shopping areas and dynamic town centers are replacing aging strip malls. In addition, new tax credits are available to help maintain and restore historically significant properties and to encourage construction of high performance, environmentally friendly, “green” buildings.

In retrospect, Baltimore County has often been at the vanguard of change while at other times it has had to work hard just to catch up to societal norms. Conflict, frequently the catalyst for change, tested the resolve and made the County stronger as growth took place. Thus, rather than being a dilemma, social ferment has forged Baltimore County’s collective personality and has defined who it is; a work in progress.

“We must learn to live together as brothers or we are going to perish together as fools.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.