



I'm Dr. Treasure Shields Redmond, and I'm executive director of The Community Archive. It's a oral history nonprofit designed to collect the stories of the African American community and preserve them for future generations. As a dual citizen of Meridian, Mississippi, and East St. Louis, Illinois, I have such a passion, almost an obsession, about the migration, Black people, and the cultural ways that followed us on this journey.

All the way from the continent to now, along the way, we've had to survive some incredible obstacles. And one of them was the 1917 East St. Louis race massacre, popularly known as a race riot. This is the class of 1917, where I'll be talking to descendants of survivors. of the 1917 race massacre and connecting some of those dots about what led up to it, what happened during it, and how we've survived past it.

Welcome to the class of 1917.

A whole lot of young guys from Vietnam in East St. Louis in this area right around here, even going to Granite City, Venice, Cahokia. We lost a lot of young men, young black men in that war over there. Really did. Quite a few. It's interesting that we would come to this point about war.

Because when I spoke to another descendant of 1917 survivors, Mr. Kennedy, I kept on describing it as the East St. Louis Race Massacre. And I thought I was telling it in a more truthful way, rather than say right. Because we know the only people rioting were white people. Black people were not rioting. But he kept saying race war.

And I didn't really catch it until maybe two thirds into the interview that he would always answer and say, yes, the 1917 race war. And then he would continue his conversation. Yeah. Because to him, you know, on the south end there were men. They got on top of the buildings. They shot back. People were defending themselves.

One of the signature, um, events that sparked it was white people driving through the neighborhood and some black men shot back. And then all of a sudden we find out these were the police harassing people that were killed. And then they left the bodies lying so they could really get the white people in an uproar.

That's what got, that's what calls the, uh, I tell everybody that if Michael Brown's body hadn't been lying out like that, a lot of us would have never risen up. It's just a visual impression. So yeah, that does, that does work. But go ahead. Yeah, it was a war. The 1917 said riot was a short term, miniature skirmish.

It was like a warfare skirmish. Can you tell me your name? Glenn Rogers. Glenn Rogers? Yes. And you are an East St. Louis native? Yes. Born in what year? 1950. 1950. And you attended, uh, Eastside? Monroe Elementary School, Rock Junior High School, East St. Louis Senior High. And for one year I went to California to Cabrillo Senior High School in Lumpoc, California.

And when I came back, I graduated from East St. Louis Senior High. And from there I went, I did a year successfully at St. Louis College of Pharmacy. Okay. And State Community College, which is in a vacant, tall building now. That big vacant building in downtown East St. Louis has State Community College in it.

I did a, uh, summer there, taking Trigonometry, believe it or not. So, your family, how did they wind up in East St. Louis? Are they originally from the South? Well, yeah. My grandfather is from Meridian, Mississippi. My grandmother was from uh, Greenwood, Mississippi. Now, you know I was raised in Meridian, Mississippi.

Oh lord. Come on, cuz Come on, cuz you know Meridian keeps coming up because I spoke to another descendant actually, he is the son Johnny Campbell. Oh, okay. He's the son of So the man that was quoted in his crisis article when he came down and did some reporting about the right. Oh, okay He interviewed someone named Mose Campbell.

Oh, Mose Campbell was an older man Who had children? So that's why we still have a living descendant of a person who actually took bullets was shot Yes. Yes Mose Campbell Was a man who actually he and he fled to Brooklyn He fled to Brooklyn to get away from these and crazy mobs. Yeah, but his His father So Johnny Campbell's grandfather was from Meridian.

Oh my yeah interesting. So your family was from Meridian Yeah, my granddaddy was from Meridian My father on my father's side. I found out he was from Jackson, Tennessee. So I don't know much about that side, but Yeah, yeah Meridian, Mississippi Do you remember his name? My father the grandfather from Meridian Uh, oh, yeah Shelby Lorenzo Youngblood Youngblood.

That's my granddaddy had the pool hall. Okay, and on the south end of East St. Louis Yeah, Mr. Blood So did they come up because of the incredible job opportunities here? I would imagine so yeah, that is that is why they came up this way. They want to get away from that life down there Yeah, yeah Um And so he was your mother's father.

Yes. But was your mother born here or was she born in Mississippi? She was born here. She was born here, okay. She was born here. Okay. Okay. And what did your mother do? My mother was a data processor for the government, civil service. Okay, beautiful. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, that reminds me of, I mean, both of the descendants I've talked to in that When they came up, they came up with people who were really entrepreneurial, but rural folk.

And they sold into their families so beautifully that now you have retired law enforcement, aldermen, certified public accountants. I'm also a pilot. What? I flew, uh, yeah, I'm one of the few, uh, I was a first lieutenant pilot for Air Force Auxiliary. Uh, yeah, yeah, yeah, so a lot of things happened. You know, I remember my granddad telling me, right over here on 17th and, uh, um, Broadway, there was a building there that they just tore down, it was a restaurant.

And he had, uh, he had what he called Missouri Builders. And he had a lot of old names, you know, Gene O'Connor and the guys, a lot of guys like that, uh, a lot of the Prestons and stuff like that. Uh, they started that in order to train, uh, young black guys how to, uh, you know, to build and to do stuff like that.

It was called Missouri builders. And, um, but he started that because he told me, he said, when he, when he first started, when he came here from down south, he said, uh, he was involved in wood company and where they were doing woodwork. And he said, the white man would always go, he go shoulder to shoulder. So he couldn't see how to make crafts and how to do this and how to cut and how to measure that.

He said they would go shoulder to shoulder and look over their shoulder like nigga you this ain't for you, you know Uh, you can't you never do this and so I really remember that stayed out in my mind how Because he didn't say he didn't say a whole lot about Uh how they treating him, but he just said that they did not want him to see anything That would have given him any type of a legitimate occupation and The thinking of racism in many ways, it doesn't quite make sense.

Um, you know, oftentimes when you read about lynchings and instances like the 1917, you know, race war, um, it has something to do with black people doing well. Now, by all accounts, white people have spoken in a unified voice and We don't want to be near you. We don't think you're quite human. Stay over there.

So it would seem that if we, you know, got our own businesses and our own schools, then that's what they would have. They would have total separation. But what we have found out is something different. That's not quite what they want. They don't want total separation. They want total aggravation. Hey!

Subjugation. Subjugation. That's right. Elimination. Right. You know. Come on, Ralph. Right, right, right. Uh, well, this was kicked off. The riots here were kicked off because black people were willing to take the jobs that they really didn't want. And some of the employers said, well, hey, we'll get the cheapest.

cheapest form of labor that we can get, which was black people coming from the south. You know, we ain't got to negotiate with them and put up with a whole lot of white BS. These people want to work. So the fact that we accepted those jobs, uh, white folks felt threatened by it, you know, and they always lie.

They create a whole bunch of lies about the fact that we were coming in here in order to illegally vote certain people out of office. What they used to call colonized. Yeah, it's such an ironic Way



to name that because actually we wouldn't be in this country if y'all hadn't colonized some places. Yeah.

Now you're saying we're the colonizers But okay Yeah

So was your grandfather the one who Witnessed the riots my grandfather. Yeah, he definitely did but he didn't talk much about it. Really? He wouldn't talk much about it. I don't know whether he was one of the shooters and didn't want to talk about it, but he wouldn't talk much about it. Now come to think about that is strange that he would not mention a word about that riot.

Um, what about my grandma? How did you find out that he was impacted? Because he was here. My grandmother were together. Well, they were here at about the same time. Um, my grandma was the one that gave me the story about it. She told me, in reference to the, uh, 1917 riot, she said it was terrible. She said that, uh, she remembered all the screaming, the smoke, the fear that was everywhere.

She said that, um, she and, uh, Papa Brack, which was her father and mother, um, they had to escape up to 33rd and Missouri Avenue, and they, and they, they, it was shooting and, All kind of stuff going on. It's just a horrible situation, but they made it up there right across from where the aluminum oil is.

They're building down on Missouri Avenue now. Yeah. And they laid in, she said, they were, her mother told her, she was a little girl then, about maybe eight or seven, eight, lay down, lay down. Don't get up for nothing. Don't cry. Don't do anything because if we get hurt, we may get shot and killed. Okay. So they said they could hear screaming.

They could hear the, uh, what it's all like. Ambulance is going and, uh, it was the smell of smoke and stuff in the air. And she said that they had to lay down there on that ground, and they were terrified to move for. It was like a couple days, and eventually they had no water. They had no food, and I'm probably maybe had defecate on somewhere around in the area with little Children, right?

And she said her mother couldn't take it anymore. They were gonna maybe pass out or the heat or whatever. And they went across there to the, um, what is now Missouri Avenue. They took a chance across the problems of dirt road back then. And the mother begged the white man that was there, said, Would you please give us some water?

Because I've got Children. We just can't take it anymore. And she said, the white man said, why are you here? I can be killed for even talking to you. Okay. That was the attitude he had, but at least he didn't try to hurt her and he didn't try to hurt her children that she had. And he's, for some reason the act of God or the mercies of God or whatever.

Um, it was something, I guess they were in a very pitiful situation that he could see it. He said, look. He gave him some bread. He gave him some water and he told him to stay up under the stairs. It was up under the step like a cat or a dog or puppy. And they stayed there until finally, I don't know how long was selected.

Sometime the next day or the day after he felt good enough to open up, open it up and tell them that they could go. And that was pretty much that was what I remember her telling me about that incident. Wow. Wow. So much to unpack there. So, your grandmother and her mother and her siblings were the ones that went into hiding to survive.

Right. And I think, I think Papa Brack got separated. Cause she never talks about Papa Brack being up there. Uh, uh, whether he was running for his life or what he was doing, I don't know. Cause he was a, he was a school teacher, you know. And you know, those that look to be affluent in any kind of way, they wanted to kill him.

They wanted to hurt him. So I don't, and I never asked her about where, where was he during that time. But he, he, he might have been in hiding or fighting or whatever. I don't know where they got, might have got separated. Yeah. They, um, Nana said they were, they were, she said they were burning. Black people were being burned up in their homes.

Uh, couldn't get out. And I think I asked her, I said, um, What do you mean they couldn't get out? She said, she said, boy, there's some of them were just too afraid to come out because of the crowds. And maybe when they tried, the house was already too, too much inflamed. Um, and you know, and I, now she didn't see this, but you know, the history is that, uh, they were dragging black people off the bus.

Um, white men were seen stomping, busting the skulls of black children with their feet, white women, and white also stomping and killing black children. They say down south most of the severe crimes on black children was done by white women. And it makes sense because you harm who you're in proximity to.

So children are women's business. Yeah. So that's who's gonna have more opportunity to hurt them. Yeah. You know, yeah. Um, but yeah, I mean, it's, it's incredible. And so your grandmother was how old during the I would imagine she was about seven. She was born and it's a really question mark about When she was born, I think she's born in 1914, but I'm not I'm no See, they were unsure.

Really. She actually had two birth year dates And the same thing happened with my grandmother my grandmother said she was out from the show of accounts So she didn't, it wasn't even a city. Yeah, right. Just out from the show of accounting. So we just did the best we could. We just, it's, this sound like a date, you know,



we've been through a lot as black people, you know, um, I say that, you know, the reason that we suffer so much as we've gotten away from now, I do a lot of hunting and stuff too. And every creature on there is no creature on the face of the earth that relies on another creature to feed it. To protect it.

Or to make it healthy. Nature puts in every creature the natural tendency to survive. And to get from this earth what you need to survive. Okay. We were put in a position totally opposite. We take care of everything. Black so and so, we take care of you, we feed you, you look up to us, you get everything from us.

And so we lost the connection to nature, which was bad. And also, nature teaches that, in our scripture, you know, there's nothing in nature that won't fight to protect itself, fight to the death. That's right. Nothing. in the human body. Bacteria is even fighting, being fighting by natural killer cells. Uh, you can take a little bit of birds.

I see hummingbirds fighting out in the window out here. Uh, bugs fight fly. It doesn't matter. Even we got the little garden out there. There's certain plants that fight other plants for nutrients. Yeah, we, and, and every, every, every race of people around us has been fighting. this particular white man problem except us.

What we did is we let what I say the image of Jesus, which is not the biblical image at all, or the historical image. We let that image tie our hands to what's natural. And truthfully, in my opinion, if if we were going to die, you know, you either die as a hero or dies a zero. And we've been dying too often.

The zeros mean there's no profitability from our life to carry on to the next generation and other and other people. That's very important that they do something to either sustain what the, you know, the people, their families have gotten. Or to make it better for them in the future. I'm going to end Mr.

Glenn's narrative here. But I have to add this extra bonus clip. You know, Mr. Glenn just ended by saying that he felt like we need to take more personal responsibility about not leaving a legacy. But earlier in the conversation, he shared a story about the same woman. Who survived the riot? That's Miss Ruby Youngblood.

May she rest in power. Well, check out what he told me about a legacy that Miss Miss Ruby Youngblood was prevented from leaving. And, um, let me preface this, this, this lady, Ruby Youngblood told me, and has told us all our lives, even before all of Just let me tell you the story that she told us before. She said that around 1954, something like that.

It might have been before that. I'm getting the times wrong maybe now. She said she put a, there was a, uh, ad in the journal, uh, one of the newspapers here, and it said, uh, it was for a jingle. A company was, had a nationwide request out to give the jingle to a product. And she was ironing and living over there on, she said, on Bond Avenue.

And she wrote down, she said, well, she didn't think nothing about it. She said, Shelby, her husband was gone to work and she was just ironing and doing the daily chores. And, uh, and the question was, they said, uh, we want a jingle for this soap, which was the life boy. And so she wasn't thinking about it. She said, but it just like something came to her head.

And she does, she does, she wrote a lot of poems and she said, she wrote, Aren't you glad you use Lifebuoy? Don't you wish everybody did? She wrote that down, she put it on the postcard, eventually sent it off. She didn't think, she said she didn't think no more about it. She got a response back from Procter Gamble about Lifebuoy.

And she said, your, your jingle, they called it, have been selected as one of the finalists. And if we choose to use it, the prize was only like 25 or something. She said, you'll be notified. She never heard anything about it. She said, figured they didn't want to do anything with it. But what was going on?

They liked it so much. They knew they had a new product coming out called Dial Soap. They liked it so much, they didn't stick it on that old Lifebuoy product. They stuck it on the dial, so. And she said she was, that time TV was starting to come out, with where you put the little screen in front of, I don't know if you know, but color TV, did you know how they used to be?

It used to be black and white, and in order to get color, they had a blue color on the front that was transparent, and green on the bottom, so it looked like grass. So And kind of yell in the middle that was your first image of color tv So it was like a little cellophane Or an insert that you put on front of the table put on front of the tv So she was looking at tv and they had the big tube tvs.

I remember putting them on it. It said, uh, She heard that she said Commercial came on aren't you glad you use dial don't you wish everybody she did she said oh my god She said they used my slogan And they never contacted her about the 25. And about, what, 18 years ago, I sent Procter Gamble something said, you know, and I told Nana, I said, Nana, I said, what?

She said, baby, and she's all, shoot. She said, Child, I'm just one of the many black people that contributed something. There's been a whole lot of us that didn't get nothing back. She said, boy, what would you think about it? Boy, nobody's suing nobody back during that time and all that stuff. But she should, she should be recognized for that.

Yeah, you're right. Yeah. Wow.



The Class of 1917 was made possible by your donations to the Community Archive and an Illinois Humanities grant. Stay tuned for episode 3, where we talk to another descendant of a survivor of the 1917 East St. Louis race massacre.