## Mr. James 'Snookums' Bell East St. Louis Action Research Project

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### Rush City's Culture

- Historically an African-American community in economic disinvestment, environmental pollution, and industrial encroachment
- Surrounded by industry, railroads, and highways
- People have faint southern dialect, strong belief system, outstanding hospitality, family oriented
- East St. Louis has constant environmental problems and unfavorable conditions
- Known for having all major types of pollution -air, soil, water

### **Project Description**

- Discovering what individual people are doing to create positive change in their neighborhoods.
- Documenting the lives of individuals who have dedicated many years to neighborhood improvement efforts.

# The Exploration of a Forgotten City

- Using the interview as a tool of research
- Personal testimony of the history of Rush City
- Rush City: "at one time East St. Louis best little city in Illinois" –James Bell
- 1940s Physical changes
  - "white flight"
  - Northern Migration
  - Industry decline
- The Effects of Negligence

# East St. Louis: Once the "land of opportunity"

- A Place of Thriving Industry
- -Blue Collar
- -Industrial Companies buying land (Employment Opportunities )
- 1960s
- -Whites Moving to Suburbs=Black Housing Opportunities
- City moved from Residential Zone to Heavy Manufacturing and Industry Zone
  - Environmental Deterioration and Population Decline

#### Last Few Decades...

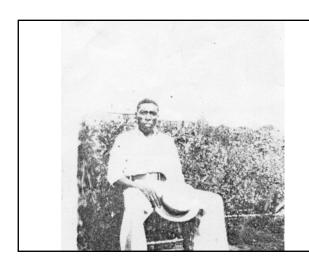
- Sharp decline in population
- white population declined sharply
- Black Population has risen, Median age is rising
- unemployment rising
- percentage below poverty level has slowly decreased.

### Goals & Objectives

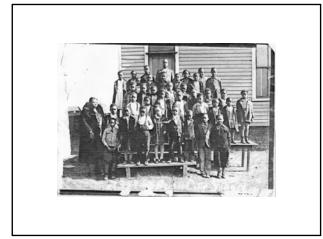
- Acquiring a first-hand experience of a day in East St. Louis
- Discovery of neighborhood activism to create positive change in their neighborhoods
- Understanding the effects of socioeconomic, political, and racial barriers

#### **Community Partner**

- Born in 1926 "in a house down the alley." –James Bell
- Father was a railroad worker from Rush City.
  Mother moved north from Mississippi and was a community aid worker.
- Attended Lincoln High School with Miles Davis
- Served in the military from 1950 to 1952
- Married for 53 years and retired in 1999
- Enjoys the quiet and close community
- Moved out of Rush City for housing purposes but still considers it home







### **Project Process**

- Pre-interview preparation
  - -Rush City background
  - -development of questions
  - -assignment of roles
  - -mock interview and analysis
- James Bell interview
- Transcription
- Interview analysis

#### Reflections

- Substance of the project process was in the conversation
- East St. Louis is in state of urban decline due to a variety of factors
- Offers for property buyouts from ethanol producing companies.
  - -\$50,000 dollars for each property
  - -Is that enough???
  - -Does a community only have monetary value???

#### Our Road Trip to East St. Louis

Thanks Stacy!!....and Emilio and Emma

