

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

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Alfonso Cervantes
David Rivera
Alberto Miranda



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 socio-economic, 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



Mrs. Malinda Bell has hobby
**Gardening 'gives you
something to do . . .
makes you feel better'**

By Susan Gendron
East-St. Louis Journal Staff
Gardening has been a hobby for Mrs. Malinda Bell, 70, 2142 Lantry Ave. in South City community of East St. Louis, ever since she and her husband moved here in 1952. "It gives you something to do and makes you feel better so you can get on and get in the garden," she says.
Mrs. Bell received a year ago as a community aid worker for the Neighborhood Organizing Committee in East St. Louis. She says she won't really be retired but "I needed that help."
As a community aid worker she headed a garden club whose members got to small gardens all over East St. Louis and shared the



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???
- "Money talks, if those people want it, they'll get it."
 - James Bell

Our Road Trip to East St. Louis

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

