

**For Immediate Release**

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**GPB and the Jessye Norman School of the Arts Present New Podcast**

***Shots in the Back: Exhuming the 1970 Augusta Riot***

GPB and the Jessye Norman School of the Arts have partnered to produce ***Shots in******the Back: Exhuming the 1970 Augusta Riot****,* a new six-episode podcast which tells the story of one of the first major Civil Rights era riots in the South, and its relevance today.

Premiering Monday, June 29, the series will be available wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Tunein, NPR One, and Google Podcasts. ***Shots in the Back*** also will be hosted at [gpb.org/shots](https://www.gpb.org/shots).

“The sad reality is there are so many parallels with this story to what we are seeing with recent unrests in cities like Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Ferguson, Mo.,” said Sean Powers, GPB’s director of podcasting. “If we forget these stories, we run the risk of repeating history.”

The spark that lit the Augusta riot was the brutal murder of Charles Oatman, an African American teenager held by police in the county jail.

“He had three long gashes across his back, about a half an inch deep and about a foot long,” recalled the late Augusta city councilman Grady Abrams, who is featured in the podcast. “The back of his skull was busted out. He had cigarette burns all over his body and fork marks all across this body as if somebody had taken a fork and just pressed him all over his body.”

During the riot, hundreds of people looted and set fire to businesses in the black business district, most of which were white and Chinese American owned businesses. Some 1,500 members of the National Guard were called in to ease the unrest. Six black men were killed by white police officers - all of them shot in the back.

“How many black families got to continue to lose their life in the state of Georgia for them to see that we got a problem here with the police department?” says Grace Stewart, whose brother William Wright Jr. died in the riot.

**(More..)**

Then, Georgia Gov. Lester Maddox called upon one of Augusta’s most famous citizens, entertainer James Brown, to help ease racial tension in the city. However, despite all of the chaos, the riot has largely been forgotten, even in Georgia.

The podcast is hosted and reported by journalist Sea Stachura, who serves as an instructor at Jessye Norman School for the Arts. ***Shots in the Back: Exhuming the******1970 August Riot*** also features the voices and contributions of middle and high school students who are part of her podcasting class at the school.

Gary Dennis, Executive Director of The Jessye Norman School, speaking on the importance of this story and the involvement of the students said, “This is almost forgotten history. Obscuring such a monumental injustice stole history from everyone, and it stole context to history from our families and our students. I hope more than anything that when people hear what happened 50 years ago and hear our children’s reaction that it reminds them that we have the opportunity to do things differently this time. That we will find the best parts of ourselves.”

**The episode schedule is as follows:**

**6/29: Episode 1: “The Forgotten Riot”**

In this episode, we set the stage for the scope of the podcast, including the violent death of Charles Oatman. Listeners will hear from Oatman’s uncle, as well as a nearby cellmate and the city councilor whose radio broadcast shared the news about Oatman’s death.

**7/13: Episode 2: “A Lay of the Land: Augusta in 1970”**

Oatman’s death lit the match for black Augustans, but years of racial injustices provided the kindling. In this episode students investigate seemingly isolated issues

that together stymied the progress and equality of Augusta’s black citizens.

**7/27: Episode 3: “The Days of the Riot”**

This timeline charts the chronological and geographic path of the 48-hour riot. We hear about rioters who targeted Chinese American owned businesses, while police in armored personnel carriers patrolled the streets and the National Guard surrounded Paine College, a historically black college.

**8/10: Episode 4: “Shoot to Kill”**

Inside the chaos, black and white leaders were trying to quell the violence, but as rioters set fire to white-owned businesses, officers were told to shoot to kill. Using interviews as well as FBI documents, the episode examines the stories of each victim, through the perspective of the participants as well as the police, sometimes at the same moment of time. Students asked whether these deaths were necessary, and a survivor asks, “Was it worth it?”

**(More..)**

**8/24: Episode 5: “What Happens Next”**

Just as today’s protestors are demanding change, so too did African Americans in Augusta, in 1970. Two black teens were charged in the death of Charles Oatman. One hundred black men and women were found guilty of riot-related crimes. Meanwhile, the city failed to conduct an investigation into the riot, instead beefing up the police force and promoting its officers, two of whom were later charged by the DOJ with civil rights violations. Augusta’s black business district shriveled further, but individual black residents started taking political action where they could, and students consider the parallels between events then and now.

**9/7: Episode 6: “Confronting the Past”**

In this final episode recorded from a live event, we answer some of our listener questions about the podcast.

The mission of the Jessye Norman School of the Arts is to develop students to become creative, caring, visionary, responsible citizens through the transformative power of the arts. The broad-ranged fine arts program challenges students academically, integrates technology and lays the foundation for extraordinary life experiences.

The Jessye Norman School of the Arts is an after-school program and community arts center designed to develop and nurture the artistic and creative talents of students of all ages.

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