

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

## **(Episode 3 - The Days Of The Riot)**

**Host:** A warning: this episode contains multiple descriptions of graphic violence. And if you're just tuning into the podcast, go back to the first episode and start there. The story will make far more sense. Previously, on "Shots in the Back."

**(MONTAGE)**

**Actor Playing Mrs. Conley:** We have open ditches, cesspools pouring down our streets, and we can't stand the pollution.

**Ellen Dong:** Someone said they resented Chinese coming into their communities to open a business.

**Louis Dinkins:** Probably the most powerful person in the city was a cop.

**Wilbert Allen:** Once you slapped the bully around, the folks around the day, don't got to be afraid of you no more.

**(MONTAGE End)**

**Host:** From Jessye Norman School of the Arts and Georgia Public Broadcasting, this is "Shots in the Back: Exhuming the 1970 Augusta Riot." I'm Sea Stachura.

Today's episode is the first of two about the day of the riot. In today's show, we're going to start with the rallies that happened beforehand. But before we get to that, I want to play for you a clip from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This is likely a quote you've heard before.

**Martin Luther King:** I think we've got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard.

**Host:** King is speaking to CBS's Mike Wallace in 1966.

**Martin Luther King:** And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economic plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years.

**Host:** That summer of '66, there were about two dozen civil rights uprisings.

**Mike Wallace:** How many summers like this one do you imagine that we can expect?

**Martin Luther King:** I would say that every summer we are going to have this kind of vigorous protest. My hope is that it will be nonviolent. And I think the answer about how long it will take will depend on the federal government, on the city halls of our various cities and on white America to a large extent.

**Host:** Akinyele Umoja is the chair of the African-American Studies Department at Georgia State University. Umoja says Black Americans weren't just burning their own communities. They were participating in a spontaneous rebellion. They were rebelling against the systemic violence that we talked about in the last episode, just like today.

**Akinyele Umoja:** The violence that occurs — and we oftentimes don't consider violence, whether it's, you know, the violence of hunger or whether it's the violence of being poor and unemployed and, or the violence that occurs because of the, you know, lack of education.

**Host:** The people typically in these circumstances: they're disproportionately Black and brown. First, they push back with legal protests. And then, when that gets no response, violence can erupt. Rev. Claude Harris says that was the situation in Augusta.

**Claude Harris:** So, when it came up close to the riot, Augusta was — Blacks in Augusta, they were ready for something to happen. It was a lot of tension.

**Host:** To Harris, the riot was an expression of capacity and strength. And the research backs that up. A Harvard human rights and international affairs professor found that protests are a signal of power and force.

The day after Charles Oatman died was Mother's Day. A Sunday. Augusta city councilman Grady Abrams had just come from May's Mortuary. He'd seen the boy's 105 pound tortured body — and then he went on his Sunday afternoon talk show.

**Grady Abrams:** And when I got on the air, I reported what I had seen. And I asked the people to meet me down at the jail and we would get answers as to what happened to Charles Oatman.

**Host:** He hadn't been the only one to view Charles's body. By then, his parents had seen their son. So had other members of the social justice group, the Committee of 10. More than two dozen other people also showed up, including one of the Black police officers.

Rumors spread across the Black community about what happened. About 300 concerned residents gathered at May Park.

**Grady Abrams:** Well, when I got off the air and got to the jail, the jail was surrounded by police officers. The sheriff had called in all available officers to be at the jail and surround the jail.

**Host:** Outside of that jail, the Richmond County Sheriff's Department had spread almost all of its 50 deputies, and then as many jailers as could be spared, and as many police as the Augusta Police Department would offer them.

And they were guarding against 300 or so sign-carrying men and women. And Cecilia Johnson was one of them. She was a student at Paine College.

**Cecilia Johnson:** But we were not getting any really information about why? What happened? Why was he there in that particular cell? What could have been done to save him? We wanted those kind of answers, but they were not coming.

And so, so the students decided that we would go, you know, to the, to the jail and — and for those who might want to criticize that, I would say, "What if it was your child? Wouldn't you want somebody to demand information?"

**Host:** You can hear it in her voice. Johnson was a campus organizer.

**Cecilia Johnson:** You know, there I was — marching — had on a cute little yellow dress and all of that.

**Host:** Johnson remembers everyone carried placards. She says it was peaceful but humid. It reached 85 degrees that afternoon.

**Cecilia Johnson:** Now, I was probably the one who got a little bit out of hand. But I didn't really get out of hand. I just walked up to a policeman, who was on a motorcycle, and I just looked at him. And I said, "Would you kill me?" You know. And, I was just really curious. We're just walking around, and you're here with these guns on. "Would you really kill me?"

And so when, when, when — and when I said I stepped out, then the men, the young boys and leaders who were there, the next thing I knew, they were picking me up literally and taking me away from that scene.

**Host:** They were afraid of what could happen, what the armed deputies positioned on the roof of the jail might do. They were still there when the group came out of its meeting with the sheriff and the county's attorney. City Councilman Grady Abrams told the crowd they didn't get any answers about Charles Oatman's death and urged the crowd to reconvene at Tabernacle Baptist Church to talk about the next steps.

By then, Rev. Claude Harris had heard about Oatman's murder and the rally at the jail. He headed to the church and found a crowd of roughly 900 people — all of them fed up.

**Claude Harris:** And of course, I've listened to some of the other folk that said what had happened, and what they perceive that happened.

And the plan was, on Monday, there was a group — I think Abrams was in that group cause he was a councilman — said we were going downtown to the courthouse, and we're going to try and settle this before something else happened.

Now, in my mind, it's already done happen. You done kill a brother mine in jail and lied about it. And because you lied about it, then telling me on Monday is not going to satisfy me. So our little group, we decided that we're going to do something that's going to really make them notice that we're not going to tolerate racism anymore.

**Host:** Abrams heard rumblings in the crowd — especially among people who identified as militants. So he reached out to Georgia's governor.

**Grady Abrams:** I called Lester Maddox that Sunday evening after the rally and then ask him, could he come down and do something about it. Because local officials didn't seem to want to hear what we were saying. And he told me that he would get in touch with some of the officials and see what they say about it. And evidently...

**Host:** So you were one of the officials?

**Grady Abrams:** Yeah, I was one of the officials, but — of course I, maybe I didn't count.

**Host:** Gov. Lester Maddox later said that Augusta's white leadership told him they had everything under control. At 3 p.m. on Monday, May 11th. Abrams and a number of other Black leaders met at the Municipal Building.

Abrams says they didn't talk a lot about Charles Oatman's death. Overnight, the sheriff had conducted and completed his investigation. He had charged two of Oatman's cellmates with murder. So Abrams and the others focused on moving Black juveniles out of the county jail.

**Grady Abrams:** And we worked out a resolution of getting those kids out of the jail and sending them to Youth Development Center. There was no investigation on, into what happened to Charles Oatman in that meeting. But while we were meeting, a crowd gathered in front of the courthouse.

**Host:** News reports estimated the crowd to be as many as 800 people. The city's police chief got nervous, according to former Sgt. Louis Dinkins. When Dinkins arrived for the night shift, he was told to open the armory.

**Louis Dinkins:** And I, I handed out these old shotguns. And I, I got a couple boxes of the shells and threw them in a truck of the car. So then we go down to the courthouse and we lined up with the other police that were already there.

**Host:** From the ninth floor of the municipal building, Abrams looked outside — and he saw about 25 uniformed officers openly holding shotguns.

**Grady Abrams:** And the cops were in the medium at, on Green Street, across from the courthouse. And they weren't making any, any advancement on the crowd that was standing there.

**Host:** But they looked as menacing as they had the night before at the jail. And this time, the powers that be were shut up in the Municipal Building. Then Black Panther Wilbert Allen says that was ratcheting up the tension.

**Wilbert Allen:** People demanded they come out and explain what happened. And they locked the courthouse door. They was afraid to come out of the courthouse.

**Host:** Some people in the crowd found this — not just frustrating — but also a sign of guilt. Police and elected leaders were hiding something was the thinking. But Detective Tommy Olds says the protesters were creating their own mess. Olds was one of the Black officers who was managing the scene.

**Tommy Olds:** We saw them coming down Green Street, headed towards city hall. They was walking on top of cars, breaking windshields of cars. What should have happened at that time,

they should have stopped — they should've been arrested. But when they were not arrested, then they just went hog wild.

**Host:** Rev. Arthur Simms left the meeting at the Municipal Building to calm the crowd. At that time, he was the head of Augusta's chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

**Arthur Simms:** I was using my time to try to calm all those who wanted to throw rocks and bottles and those who were going, going to instigate the violence. I knew who they were. I saw them. They knew me. And they, they somewhat trusted me. And I was trying to diffuse the situation before I spoke.

**Host:** Simms was as blunt as possible.

**Arthur Simms:** To them, I was trying as — as anyone else would do — to show them that, that the police officers were ready... to kill or do whatever, to keep order there. I let them know that, to do anything violently would be self-destructive. Because they, they would not survive the attempt to be violent. It would play into the hands of those who were against us and would be used by the Georgia Bureau, Georgia Bureau of Investigation. I knew them and other officers there and the city father who didn't want to see us progress.

**Host:** Mallory Millender was in that crowd. By 1970, he was an assistant professor at Paine College. He had stopped by the rally to support his students before heading on to a softball game.

**Mallory Millender :** And several people, including Oliver Pope — who was the leader of the student rebellion here at Paine, and certainly including Wilbert Allen — they gave very fiery speeches.

**Host:** Oliver Pope was a Paine College track star and a student representative. And he was also a follower of Stokely Carmichael.

**Mallory Millender :** Oliver Pope, for instance, someone cautioned him about the intensity of his message, in light of the fact that shotguns were trained on him from every direction. And he told them exactly what those police could do with those shotguns — and then he followed it with, "Tonight, we're going to war."

**Host:** They wanted action, meaningful action. So Pope and the others went for the state flag. Back then, Georgia's state flag was three quarters Confederate battle emblem, one-quarter state seal. It is widely considered an emblem of hate. Sgt. Dinkins and the 25 other officers didn't move.

**Louis Dinkins:** And they tore the Georgia flag down and set it on fire, right there. The police stood there.

**Host:** Dinkins says people started to head their separate ways.

**Louis Dinkins:** The people that lived out there — the responsible people — they started walking, going to their cars or, or going and walking back out to the neighborhood.

**Host:** Meanwhile, Abrams and others were trying to draw people to a peaceful rallying point in the Black business district.

**Grady Abrams:** With me, there may have been 10, 10 people walking along side.

**Louis Dinkins:** But these teenagers are the college students. A lot of them stuck together. And they went down on Broad Street. They went straight down the street from, from the courthouse. And they turn left and started going up Broad Street — we were trying to follow them in the cars and watch them.

**Grady Abrams:** And one of those persons tossed a brick at the Rice Road bus that was coming by. And then, when that happened, other people started throwing rocks — not only at the bus, but at all white people that came through the area.

**Louis Dinkins:** And Captain Beck was out there with us. He was, he was the leader on the street. He was in charge of the street. He got behind them. And he said when they, he said... thinking that when they went into the Black area, that would be it. They'd disperse.

So he said just, just follow them all across the railroad tracks and then let them go. But before any fire started or anything, it is just people — just like coming out of an ant hill all over the streets and lining the streets.

**Host:** SCLC leader Arthur Simms says Olds and another Black officer told him the police intended to stay back.

**Arthur Simms:** So there was no attempt, no plan, to stop the violence, but to contain it in that area. Because the city didn't fathers didn't care. Let them, let them get their steam off: tear up and destroy.

But one thing they would not do is to go up Walton Way. They made it clear that — if there was a movement toward Walton Way — people would die.

**Host:** Walton Way is this thoroughfare that leads up to the wealthy white neighborhoods. And police had set up a cordon at the edge of the Black business district. They called in all available officers, including James Walton. He had been on the force for three years and he was one of the department's few Black officers.

**James Walton:** Probably about 6:30. And they called me. Told me to be at the headquarter in 45 minutes, fully dressed.

**Host:** But Walton didn't go. He quit.

**James Walton:** Cause I had made my mind up, I was gonna quit anyway, you know, actually.

**Host:** He says the department's corruption had just become too much for him. But there was something else, too — it was that he knew his fellow officers were trigger happy.

**James Walton:** 12-gauge shotgun with buckshot. And now, what they expected of me to do about it, if I had been out there... You know, I'm with a, I'm with a white officer and Black guy jump up and running, if I don't shot him — I'm gonna hear about it tomorrow. You know, they'll probably run me off the police department: "Why you didn't shoot that guy!?!? What wrong with you? Why you didn't kill him?"

**Host:** Officer John Holmes did respond to the call. And he was one of the department's young, white recruits. He remembers forming that barrier between downtown and protesters.

**John Holmes:** We started seeing people approaching us. And they were carrying goods, and they were laughing and... stuff like that and just, you know, we just did — our orders were to stand there and not do anything and that's what we did. It was very strange when people walk up to you and get 10 feet away and hold the television set up in front of you.

**Host:** Some interpreted the barricade as cowardice. Others, like local historian James Carter the 3rd, saw it as further evidence that police protect and serve only white people.

**James Carter:** They laid back on Telfair Street to guard downtown, because they didn't know whether they will come back downtown and tear the place up and burn it down. So they protected downtown, but they were nowhere to be seen in the Black community — nowhere.



**Host:** Initially, Abrams asked the police to stay back. He believed they would make the situation worse. But he quickly realized trying to quell the anger in the streets was akin to fighting a house fire with a watering can.

**Grady Abrams:** We got in the middle of 9th Street, trying to get between the cops and the people who are rioting. And we just tried to get them to stop. But there was no stop — you can't stop a riot... It's an emotional thing. It's something that people are hyped up with, and it's just almost impossible to get people to stop.

**Host:** And that's when police changed tactics.

**Grady Abrams:** While we were between the cops and the people, Chief — well, he was the captain then. Captain Beck, ordered his, his officers to fire. They were firing up in the air as they marched toward the rioters. And the wire, electrical wires, started sparkling.

**Host:** A few blocks west of Abrams, activist Wilbert Allen was talking with two prominent Black community leaders when police approached and arrested him.

**Wilbert Allen:** We were standing at Tabernacle Church. Kent, who was a lieutenant on the Augusta police department — him and his buddies came and said, they were gonna kill me. And Rev. Hamilton and Ruffin said, he better be like he is when y'all take him to jail. He better — he better be like this tomorrow.

**Host:** Allen says he was lucky the men were with him. When we return, things go from bad to worse as the rebellion heats up. That's ahead on "Shots in the Back." This is "Shots in the Back: Exhuming the Augusta 1970 Riot." I'm Sea Stachura. Welcome back.

9th and Gwinnett Street became the epicenter of the riot. In every direction from here — spread over seven miles of city — people erupted. Let me describe the businesses at this intersection for a second.

In one direction was a white-owned service station. And there was also May's Mortuary, where Charles Oatman's body was delivered. In another, a Chinese American-owned pharmacy. Look toward downtown, and you'd see S-C Woo Grocery, also Chinese American owned. In that same strip was a white owned pawn shop, a beauty supply store, and the famous Lenox Theater, where Ray Charles and Ma Rainey performed.

For the next half of this episode, we'll use this intersection to survey other hot spots during the riot. Because at this point, it's not so much when, as it is what happened. So let's start at S-C Woo's Grocery, one of the first to be burned. Protester Tim Sanders saw it happen.

**Tim Sanders:** This man... I hated to see that man. This man, I knew then, that this man — his children went to the Catholic school. They were, they were good people. But this hate — this thing, this, from this system that we lived in — got his store destroyed.

**Host:** Rev. Claude Harris was at that same intersection.

**Claude Harris:** And I remember, I picked up a garbage can and threw it through the window of a liquor store on the corner of 9th and Laney Walker. I told them, I said — get some courage. Of course, they went and they get the booze and what have you.

**Host:** Firefighters arrived and Sgt Dinkins says that's around when Captain James Beck went from defensive to offensive.

**Louis Dinkins:** And Beck put out a call... said, all units in the area, you know, meet me at, at 9th Street at Gwinnett. He gets out of his car. And he's got a Thompson submachine gun. And he points it up in the air — and he, he shoots a whole magazine. And all these people who were looting on that block above us, they came out and took off in my direction. Now I had said — they were carrying guns and stuff that they stole out of the pawn shop. But they were, they weren't after us — they were after getting away. But they were coming right at us. And they, I mean they were gonna run by, you know.

**Host:** Tim Sanders ran with a group into a neighborhood. He headed west on a side street toward black-owned Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance and A.R. Johnson Junior High School. That's the same school Charles Oatman attended.

**Tim Sanders:** The parking lot of Johnson's is a dead end. I can remember, this white guy driving a truck up Laney and there were Black folks on both sides of the street, just in — just in this rage again. And started attacking this man's truck. And I think they pulled the guy out of the truck and I'm going, you know, this... what is this? You know, what's happening.

**Host:** Near that same school, Sander's says he witnessed a couple of teenagers driving a police motorcycle in circles.

**Tim Sanders:** They had taken a cop's motorcycle and had him up in a tree. He was up in this tree and they said, "Hey man, how long you been on the police force?" You know, like a casual conversation — but he knew not to come down out of that tree.

**Host:** At that point, Sanders decided to go home. Meanwhile, Abrams took shelter on the porch of a teacher's house... the riot that he and others warned about was in full swing. And people like Claude Harris wanted to use this as an opportunity.

**Claude Harris:** So our whole aim and intention was, let's make change. Here's an opportunity: we got a lot of people now that's angry about this little boy. A lot of people have mixed emotions whether they wanted to be involved... Didn't want to be involved, but the whole intention was — don't hurt anybody.

**Host:** Harris and others headed southwest, away from downtown and closer to several housing projects and a railroad track. This was around 6:00 p.m.

**Claude Harris:** And soon as we made the turn, there was a little boy across the railroad tracks. And he threw a brick, and it hit the windshield of a police car. And he started running. You had to run down the tracks, cross I think this university place over to Gilberte Manor. And when it came down to the street, the cop opened the door and snatched a shotgun.

And he says — "come here, [bleep]" And the little boy threw his hands up, said "I ain't did nothing to you" and tried to keep running. And he lowered the shotgun and pulled the trigger.

They went, drove the car down to where he was, grabbed him by his leg, threw him in the back of the car and whipped around the street. And you're right there at University Hospital, emergency room. So that's where they took him.

**Host:** Harris remembers this victim as a boy, but he was actually a teenager. His name was Louis Nelson Williams, a 17-year-old student at T.W. Jose High School. And the FBI interviewed multiple people about his shooting. Callie Mae Sims witnessed it.

She stood at the mouth of a nearby neighborhood when 100 Paine College students came up the sidewalk. She made an affidavit stating that she saw a police car roll up and stop. Here's an actor reading from her affidavit.

**Callie Mae Sims, actor:** There were three city police officers in the car. And all three of the officers got out of the car and started firing at a group of students. Each officer fired

approximately five shots at this group — at no time did I hear any orders being addressed to the students, nor did I see any attempt by the students to throw stones.

**Host:** The three officers got back in the car and began to drive off. When suddenly they stopped.

**Callie Mae Sims, actor:** The driver of the police car got out, went around behind the car, stopped, aimed a shotgun and fired point blank at a young man standing with his arms raised. The two policemen who remained in the car jumped out and dragged the young man to the police car.

**Host:** Sims followed them to the emergency room and got the badge number of the officer. The cop who shot him was Louis Dinkins. Dinkins remembers what happened very differently than Simms and Harris. Dinkins says his patrol drove past a throng of people at the railroad tracks when someone threw a brick.

**Louis Dinkins:** They hit my windshield. And I jumped out with the shotgun and I fired about four, five rounds. Real quick.

**Host:** Up in the air?

**Louis Dinkins:** Yep. No. No. Up in the air. And they ducked or whip — went out of sight. I don't really know what, went over the back. Stopped. And ran. Except this one bastard, he — excuse me. He walks across the street directly at me. Just as arrogant as hell.

And I said, "Well, at least I got one." So I arrested him.

**Host:** Dinkins says Williams struggled, and then he saw sparks flying.

**Louis Dinkins:** And at first the, the, the, door — what it was — I said, you know, "What is that?"

**Host:** According to Dinkins, someone had shot at the car. And so he turned to look to see who it was, and that's when Williams took off running.

**Louis Dinkins:** I turned, and with the gun on my — not in position, still on my hip — I touched off that hair trigger, and I got it right through knees. Or knee, I should say. When those shots hit him, I knew I hit him in the knee, because I could actually see red streaks go through his legs.

**Host:** Another witness, Robert Childs, says Williams was one of the people who scattered after the officers started shooting. Childs told the FBI that Williams turned around and, quote, "walked within 10 to 15 feet of one of the policemen" end quote. Williams put his hands in the air.

Childs says, quote, "It seemed as though immediately after, one of the policemen shot him " end quote. According to Childs, Williams writhed in pain in the street before two of the officers with Dinkins picked him up and dragged him back to their squad car. They drove Williams to the hospital.

**Louis Dinkins:** Anyway, they finally got him in the back seat. He's bleeding like a slaughter hog. And I drove, down to Wrightsboro, made a right, made another right. And went to the old University E.R. We got him in a wheelchair.

But there was a Black guy that was standing out there — older man — I was walking back toward the car and he said, "What happened to him?" And I said, "I shot him." I was hot... I was mad as hell and that wasn't a good thing to do.

**Host:** Dinkins has told this story before. He had to testify about it in court. He was prosecuted for violating Williams's civil rights.

And Williams recovered from his injuries. But he has since passed. And interestingly, his interview with the FBI wasn't included in the 900 pages of documents that we received. That's why we can't give you his version of events, and so instead, we're using several witnesses'. And even though it was only about 6 o'clock — and there was some daylight still on the street — none of those witnesses could identify the shooter. It's striking how different Dinkins recalls the shooting from Harris.

For Harris, the shooting of Louis Nelson Williams was a turning point. The protest had started off as a way to get answers about the death of Charles Oatman.

**Claude Harris:** But when we saw that little kid get shot: strategy changed. Now, we really don't care if we hurt you or not. We gonna hurt what you love the most — things, things.

And so we made a decision then: we need to do something. We don't need, still don't need to do it with guns. Let's make this bigger. So we get here, "All right. Let's, uh, let's make the police run criss cross town." And one of the things that one of the young men said was, "Let's get the Chinese out our neighborhood."

**Host:** Starting around 7:00 p.m., the riots spread across more than 100 blocks. Mostly white and Chinese American owned businesses were damaged in the riot. Over 30 fires were set and most of them were a total loss. It was a scene of chaos. Here's a WSB TV reporter talking with one business owner whose property was destroyed.

**Archival reporter:** Do you know why they picked your place of business?

**Archival business owner:** No, I don't know. No, I don't know why.

**Archival reporter:** What kind of business do you have here?

**Archival business owner:** Grocery business.

**Archival reporter:** Could you estimate your loss?

**Archival business owner:** I haven't any idea right now, 'till we get in — see what's gone. I hope we save some of the store.

**Archival reporter:** How long have you been in business here?

**Archival business owner:** I've been here since World War Two.

**Host:** Another business, Sheppard's Grocery, was ransacked. It was just a few blocks from the epicenter, 9th and Gwinnett. Mrs. Geneva Sheppard told the Georgia Bureau of Investigation how she learned her business would be targeted. Here's an actor reading from the transcript.

**Sheppard Transcript:** Mrs. Sheppard stated: a drunken, colored male customer of hers came into the store and warned her she'd better leave before they came over and tore the store up. Mrs. Sheppard attributes his warning to drunkenness and asked him to leave. She said the man went out crying and continued to say that she'd be sorry, but not in a malicious way.

**Host:** She and her husband took his advice and left. They went by May's Mortuary, where the people there asked them to take a different route that avoided driving through other Black neighborhoods.

**Sheppard Transcript:** One woman fell to her knees and begged them — for their sakes — to go back. Upon hearing a great disturbance in the distance, the Sheppard's back their car out, and went home.

**Host:** Ransacking took place all across town, three miles northwest, where a Black neighborhood edged against a white one, a well-heeled white-owned restaurant was set on fire twice. Some Black residents saved white-owned businesses. And some owners wrote soul brother across their boarded up windows. Ellen Dong's family had closed up their stores that afternoon.

**Ellen Dong:** The way I understood it, my brother heard the rumblings.

**Host:** the family no longer lived above their grocery. And now they owned both the grocery store and the only pharmacy in the Black business district. The area's Black dentist and doctor had patients fill their prescriptions there.

**Ellen Dong:** The one Black doctor that was in town was very much, you know, worked with them. They looted that store. The, the, the, the windows were — rocks were thrown, looted. You know, just, just literally tore up the drugstore.

**Host:** Walter Lum's business on the Far East side of Augusta was also hit. Lum is Chinese American, and he owned Delta Manor Grocery. He also rented the upstairs apartment to the Scotts, who are African-American.

**Walter Lum:** Mr. Scott called me. Said, "Please help me get out, because they starting shooting the place." I said, "Okay, I'm coming down to help you get out." I said, "If you weren't such good friend, I wouldn't come down."

**Host:** Lum grabbed a sawed off shotgun and several clips. Then he and his stepson drove to the downtown police station and asked for backup.

**Walter Lum:** "Let me have a carload of policemen." He said, "I'll give you two car loads." I said, "That's fine. Get to my place, I'll lead the way." So we went down there and I got him out. And when we pulled up in front of the store, there was a little negro girl — light skin and had Afro hairstyle — she's sitting out on the curb like it was nothing was happening.

**Host:** Lum left his dog behind, hoping it would keep the burglars out. But he was told that after he left...

**Walter Lum:** When I left, that's when it happened. See, I had a flat roof. They threw these fire bombs on top and it just, just demolished the whole building.

**Host:** The push and pull of this helpful and then destructive energy basically went on all night. And James Walton had quit the force, but he still wanted to help people stay safe. So he drove his personal car to the center of it.

**James Walton:** Twelfth street. 12th street. Hopkins Street. 9th Street. Gwinnett Street.

**Host:** He went around and he checked in with a number of stores, including B.L. Wong Grocery.

**James Walton:** Bobby Lee Wong. I stopped at his store. And people just — the store was full of people. He was Chinese. And I went in and he, he want — wait on everybody and get them all out. And I said, "That's the wrong thing to do." Because he lived upstairs. I said, "You can't do that. You — stay open, stay open as long, long as you can."

They wasn't going in there. Because they were neighborhood people. And they, he was always, always good to people, so they didn't, they didn't — he was about the only store that they didn't tear up.

**Host:** Walden told them people wouldn't attack the store if they stayed open. But Gerald Chow wasn't so sure. He was Wong's son. He went upstairs where the family lived. And he grabbed a rifle and strapped on a pistol.

**Gerald Chow:** I walked back into the store. And my dad asked me, what was the matter with me. Now, bear in mind, I just got back from Vietnam. I'm not, kind of crazy. I sat down in my chair and I said, "I'm going to sleep. And when I wake up, I hope it's all over."

**Host:** As the street boiled on without any sign of stopping, Chow agreed to leave the store and the city — but he couldn't find their car keys.

**Gerald Chow:** And I went next door to May's Funeral Home. And Willie Mays Jr. was there. And, you know — these are people that I grew up with. So I told him, I said, "Look, I got to get my parents out of here." He said, "I understand." He said, "I'll drive you out of here, but you all have got to keep your head down."

**Host:** Chow says May's didn't want anyone knowing he was driving Asian-Americans out of the melee. Many people, especially Blacks, were stranded in the riot. They didn't have relatives in the suburbs to escape to — but Chow did.



**Gerald Chow:** And he took us to my brother in law's place. And he told me, he said, "I wish I'd brought, brought my sister with me." I said, "You can have mine." I said, "I'll get her back from you later."

**Host:** Guns were everywhere that first night of the riot. To get back to the mortuary, Mays would have likely cut through 15th Street. By late that night, that bustling thoroughfare would have been dangerous — police and would-be robbers were having a shootout at the Sears. An Auto Parts Store and a warehouse were on fire. And the Paine College's 1,000 students were in the thick of it.

**Host:** The campus' front door was 15th Street. Professor Mallory Millender lived on Paine College's campus.

**Mallory Millender :** I mean, it was just rapid fire all night long — I expected to hear how many hundred people died last night. Rather than six, my expectation was like 600.

**Host:** University Hospital was flooded with victims. Randy Smith was an emergency room nurse at the time. He says people came in during the riot with bullet wounds and head injuries.

**Randy Smith:** I just remember seeing some whites, old white people — and bleeding — and then all of a sudden, it was almost like no white people.

**Host:** All of them had left the area by early evening. More than 60 people reported injuries. A third of those victims were white and the rest were Black.

**Randy Smith:** And the police would just come through and just shoot, shoot at them. And then the ambulance people would pick them up and bring them to the emergency room.

**Host:** Late that night, the scene at the hospital would change again.

**Randy Smith:** We began to see soldiers coming into the operating, in — into the emergency room. And they had fixed bayonets and they were on guard in the, in the halls of the emergency room. And then, at one point, I walked out to where the ambulances were, were coming in — and I saw M-60 machine gun on a tripod with a soldier there.

**Host:** Soldiers were also lined up outside of Paine College. The campus was a hotspot for civil rights activism, and the FBI was talking to at least six on campus informants. Most of those seem to be students. And they told the FBI a small group of students were readying Molotov cocktails and walking the perimeter of the campus. Here's an actor reading an excerpt from one report.

**Actor reading FBI report:** A third confidential source advised, he saw a student by the name of [bleep] with a double barrel shotgun walking across the campus, he said this was between 11 p.m. and e a.m., when he saw [bleep] behind the girls dormitory. Sources stated that he kept hearing shots on the campus, which sounded like rifle fire and shotgun fire. There would be one or two shots and then everything would get quiet. When the security guard arrived, the students would say that they had not heard or seen anything related to gunfire.

**Host:** That student described in the FBI report was Rev. Chris Lowe. Lowe was the trumpet player for the soul singer Wilson Pickett. That's the Wilson Pickett song "Lord Pity Us All," which was released in 1970. That year, Chris Lowe left the band and enrolled at Paine.

**Chris Lowe:** But I wasn't, as I said, I wasn't a militant. I wasn't into activism like that. I went up there to study — I wanted to go school. But when I saw what was going on, you could not ignore it. There was the — that was the thing that pulled me, pulled me into.

**Host:** Most Paine College students were primarily focused on their education. They were first generation college students with strict Christian families that had scrimped for them to go to college. At the same time, the mountain of atrocities and injustices they and those around them had been experiencing made staying home feel irresponsible.

**Chris Lowe:** Then me and my, my young mind, I say, "Well, I'm supposed to be out there." So, I get me, my partner, had 20 gauge and 12 gauge shotgun, cross belt. I mean, I strapped down. And when I went out, it was crazy. I mean police all over the place. I went up the hill, went on Paine Campus. And when I got on campus, everybody was all scared — all the kids we're (unintelligible) of the halls. Didn't want to sleep in their room, afraid someone was going to throw a fire bombs and all of this stuff.

**Host:** White Augustan's had driven through Black neighborhoods, throwing rocks and firing weapons. Lowe was concerned that the same thing might happen on Paine's campus during the riot.

**Chris Lowe:** And when security guards saw me — they're friend, friend of my dad — he said, "You can't stay on campus with that." He said, "But Emmett Street" that was a dorm right there. He said, "If you want to help, just go off campus on Emmett Street."

**Host:** With his shotgun strapped to his chest, he stood sentry with several other students. They stalked out a spot where the campus intersected with a major road that led to white neighborhoods.

**Chris Lowe:** And I sat out there, until it got late, and I was satisfied that nothing was going to happen.

**Host:** That was around 1:00 or so in the morning. Professor Millender says the National Guard arrived around that time.

**Mallory Millender:** Lester Maddox, the governor, sent in some 2000 troops to Augusta and surrounded the Paine campus. As a matter of fact, the head of the National Guard told our president that they were not here, not here — in this location — to protect Paine College. That they had us cordoned off.

Their trucks, the convoys, were all facing away from Paine College, meaning that the backs of those trucks were facing Paine College — full of soldiers with guns trained on Paine College.

**Host:** Historian James Carter the 3rd says, once The Guard arrived, the streets got quiet quick.

**James Carter:** And I never dreamed in my life that I'd see tanks coming down my street, with a guy standing up in the hold of the tank with a machine gun at the ready. Troop carriers, this type of thing. And they were posting troops on corners, maybe five here, next corner, five there and so forth. And they covered the town. Oh, yeah — and they had their machine guns ready.

**Host:** The tone of everything shifted. Checkpoints were established and many Black drivers had their cars searched. The jails, by that point were full, but they would get fuller. As with the hospitals.

Police shot and killed six Black men that night — and all of them were shot in the back. How did that happen? How did those individuals become targets? I asked my students what they thought.

**Atticus:** I just see a guy wearing a bandana and trying not to die of tear gas.

**Tiara:** The first thought came to my head was like, innocent people being shot at, because they're being assumed that, you know, they're also rioters.

**Emerson:** It wouldn't be someone who was a part of the riot. It would be someone who wasn't a part of it but kinda just stumbled into it. Police were like, "hmmm, that's a person who is probably a part of it" and just shoot him.

**Kaleyah:** Maybe one of the protesters got, like, a bit, like, too wild. And then just, get shot.

**Host:** That's Atticus Dillard-Wright, Tiara Dugger, Emerson Hudson, and Kaleyah Turmon.

In our next episode, we'll look specifically at the circumstances of each of the six deaths. We'll hear from the witnesses to these killings and the families of the victims. Thanks for joining us.

[PAUSE]

Hey, and heads up- Our website features an interactive map of the major events and locations involved in the riot. Go to [gpb.org/shots](http://gpb.org/shots) to check it out.

"Shot in the Back" is reported and hosted by me, Sea Stachura. Assistant producer Rosemary Scott. Our editor is Keocia Howard.

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