

Silence in Sikeston Trailer Transcript

Cara Anthony: Welcome to Sikeston.

A small, tightknit community in the Bootheel of Missouri — that's the southeast corner of the state.

It's hot, green, and flat down here, where cotton is still king.

There's an annual rodeo, the cotton carnival. And now, a Juneteenth gathering.

Taneshia Pulley: When I look out to the crowd of my people, I see strength. I see power. I just see all magic.

Cara Anthony: But what brought me here wasn't any of those things. It was this one question:

Cara Anthony: What's it like to be Black in the Bootheel?

Rosemary Owens: Being Black in the Bootheel can get you killed.

Cara Anthony: That answer started me on a reporting journey about racism and what it's doing to our health.

Rosemary Owens: It is terrible here in the Bootheel. And it's time to stop.

Cara Anthony: This story starts in 1942, with the brutal lynching of a Black man in Sikeston.

The killing of Cleo Wright generated national headlines at the time.

But here in Sikeston, the response to that killing was mostly silence, even today.

Larry McClellon: They do not want to talk about that subject. That's a hush-hush.

Cara Anthony: Nearly 80 years later, another Black man was killed in the same town. His name was Denzel Taylor.

Mikela Jackson: She said, yeah, they, the police just killed him. And I said, no, they did not. No, they did not. I couldn't believe it. It was heartbreaking.

Cara Anthony: Both men killed by a public health threat of their time.

Together, their deaths tell a story about racism and how it's hurting our health.

I'm Cara Anthony. I'm a health reporter. Telling the stories of Denzel and Cleo unearthed secrets in my *own* family. And a silence we needed to break too.

Bernice Spann: I think there's something in our DNA that still makes us scared to talk about it.

Cara Anthony: This is "Silence in Sikeston," the podcast about finding the words to say the things that go unsaid.

We're exploring what it means to live with the stress of racism and violence. And the toll it takes on our health.

Aiesha Lee: Every time we're silent, it's like a little pinprick. Those little pinpricks turn up as heart disease, as cancer, as all these other ailments.

Cara Anthony: This story is also about how we come together and thrive.

Eddie R. Cole: You can grapple with the truth about racism in America, and you can also go hang out with your friends and family and be happy.

That's certainly the beautiful challenge of being a Black American. Because that history is wrapped all around you searching for Black joy.

Cara Anthony: Each episode, you'll hear a story from my reporting. Then, a guest and I will talk about it.

Maybe these conversations will change what you think is possible.

Cara Anthony: Is there a cure for racism?

Gail Christopher: My answer to you would be yes.

Cara Anthony: From WORLD Channel and KFF Health News and distributed by PRX: This is "Silence in Sikeston."

Coming September 2024.

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