

THE MUSIC OF HISTORY

What defines the blues? What and where was a Hush Harbor, and does one exist today? What was the Elaine Race Massacre and how does it define us today?

Those were a few of the questions that were raised and answered at a rare oral-history concert called *Black 'n Da Blues: Stories and Songs from the Arkansas Delta* Sept. 29 at the M.M. Tate Building in Marvell. It was an early commemoration

of the historic Elaine massacre as the 100th anniversary of the bloody event approaches, in October 2019. The event was co-produced by the Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center, the Elaine Legacy Center, the Delta Cultural Center and the Remember2019 Collective, a group of cultural workers organizing Phillips County groups to remember the deadliest racial conflict in Arkansas history.

The massacre, in which hundreds of African Americans were slain in their homes and in fields by posses and vigilantes, occurred after three white men tried to break up a meeting of men, mostly sharecroppers, who gathered at night at the wooded Hoop Spur church on Sept. 30, 1919, to talk about getting higher payments for the cotton they produced. There is no record of how many were slain or lost their farms. A conspiracy of silence fell on the event for more than eighty years.

The concert featured the music of Marcus Mookie Cartwright, James "Gone for Good" Morgan and Vera White. Carlos Sirah, a Mississippian and member of the Remember2019 Collective, invited the musicians to share personal stories that reflected on freedom, their aspirations and the troubling times and to perform music that reflected those themes.

"Our children don't know where the Blues came from, and they don't know anything about the Elaine Massacre," said Rose Tate after the event.

The musicians shared personal testimonies from six of the 12 black men who were wrongfully accused of instigating the riot and who were sentenced to death but eventually freed after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down their convictions. People heard about the roles of Ida B. Wells, the NAACP and Scipio Jones in winning the convicted men's freedom and exposing true accounts of the mass murder.



It was a moving event, both for the participants and the audience.

"We've all had to think about what our ancestors had to go through in order to be citizens of Phillips County and the United States of America," said Rev. Jerome Turner.

