

Excerpted from May 14th, 2003 interview with Kenny Booker and John Alexander by Camille Cosby for The National Visionary Leadership Project, archived at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center

MS. COSBY: So your family lost everything when your house-

MR. BOOKER: Oh, yeah.

MS. COSBY: --was torched.

MR. BOOKER: Yeah.

MS. COSBY: Just everything was lost.

MR. BOOKER: Everything; yeah.

MS. COSBY: Were you aware of what started this riot? Were you told about the young man, the black man--

MR. BOOKER: Oh, everybody--

MS. COSBY: --who was arrested?

MR. BOOKER: Everybody was--

MS. COSBY: Everybody knew.

MR. BOOKER: --told about--

MS. COSBY: What about the white woman who pressed charges against this young black man?

MR. BOOKER: She dropped the charges.

MS. COSBY: She dropped the charges eventually but--

MR. BOOKER: And I heard somebody was saying they even got married, later on. So I don't think that happened but--but I heard someone say that even. That was--but that was no really charge against him in the first place. I don't think he did--I'm sure he didn't do anything because if I were [inaudible] anyway, if he'd a done anything.

MS. COSBY: What was the story around--I understand his name was Dick Rollin?

MR. BOOKER: Right.

MS. COSBY: And the white woman's name was Sara Page.

MR. BOOKER: right.

MS. COSBY: Mr. Alexander, what was the story around these two people? What, what--why was this young man arrested?

MR. ALEXANDER: Why, the reason he was arrested was because during the lunch hour, this lady, Page, and, and this Rollin were, were friendly at work, and, and during the lunch hour she, she saw him walking down the street with some of the black women that worked down--downtown, and, and he seemed be enjoying himself so, and as--and when he came back to work, the story was that she asked him, I saw you, didn't I see you with the other ladies? and of course he, he denied it and so forth, and she stopped the elevator between floors and proceeded to jump on him, and they looked down in the whole in the elevator, since the elevator wasn't up at the main floor, and they said that a black man had attacked the white woman, when it was just the opposite.

So they arrested, they got the elevator moved up to the main floor and arrested him, and they gave a report that the, that they were going to lynch him and all the black men that, that had arms, and so forth, came down to guard the courthouse, to see that the Ku Klux Klan didn't bring him out and lynch him.

And while they were there, watching each other, well, someone fired a shot and they said the black people had started a uprising, and that, and that, the riot started from that.

MS. COSBY: I see.

MR. ALEXANDER: It was a misunderstanding all the way.

MS. COSBY: All of it.