

## ARKANSAS ATOLL – INTRODUCTION

[Theme music begins]

Shane White (00:28):

The Marshall Islands are a sprawling chain of more than 1,200 volcanic islands and coral atolls in the Central Pacific Ocean. In the mid-twentieth century, the United States used these islands as a site for more than fifty atomic bomb tests. Hi, and welcome to Arkansas Atoll, a podcast series about a community of Marshall Islanders living in Northwest Arkansas. My name is Shane White. I'm a graduate student at the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and a producer on this podcast.

(00:58) At the beginning of 2020, a team of graduate and undergraduate students, including myself, started this project working with The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History and the local Marshallese community. We began producing a series of short documentaries showcasing the contributions and the needs of their community in Springdale, Arkansas, a community that was built on tragedy, a tragedy that forced people from their homes and destroyed their lands.

Newscaster (01:27):

The testing raised questions and fears about whether these stricken islands could ever recover. Could plants and animals become reestablished at this scene of almost total destruction?

Maddion or Belos? (01:40):

The first person who ever asked us this that saw these, you know, sailors from the West that came to the islands. And I guess he got lost, so he said, "Where am I?" So and—I felt like that person, saying, "You know, this is my island. This is our island, you know?"

White (02:03)

Following the atomic test, the Marshallese were granted permission from the United States government to live and work in the States. They're nuclear refugees who face another crisis devastating their community.

Newscaster (02:15)

The Marshallese community is getting hit hard with the current health crisis. In Washington and Benton County alone, a high number of COVID-19 deaths from this group have been reported.

White (02:24)

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 virus pandemic swept the world, killing thousands and shutting down businesses all over, and in some places locking down entire cities under quarantine. We're lucky we can still work during these times when so many are jobless and trying every day just to survive. We opted to take the interviews and material we already had and turn our documentary video series into a podcast and to share the Marshallese stories in that way. What we didn't expect was to see a story unfolding right in front of us; a story about how the Arkansas Marshallese community has been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus.

(03:03) So this is it, the product of five Arkansas journalism students who have never made a podcast in our lives. We're proud to bring you the story of the Arkansas Marshallese and how they're working to preserve and share their culture and their history in the face of a health care crisis and global pandemic. We hope you enjoy Arkansas Atoll.

[Closing theme music]

Shane White (03:33):

Arkansas Atoll is a production of the Arkansas Story Vault project at The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. Shane White, Neba Evans, Obed Lamy, Octavia Rolle, and Sam Whitesell are the student producers for this podcast series. Sarah K. Moore and Colleen Thurston are the staff and faculty advisors to the project, with the guidance of Dr. William Schwab. Funding for this Arkansas Story Vault project was provided by a generous donation from the Walton Family Foundation. A special thank you to KNWA and FOX-24 News in Fayetteville, Arkansas, for allowing us to use the material from their newscast. Our sincerest gratitude is extended to the Marshallese community of Northwest Arkansas for sharing their stories with us. For ways to support them during the COVID-19 crisis, visit [impactnwa.org](http://impactnwa.org). That's [impactnwa.org](http://impactnwa.org). The theme song used for this podcast series, and so that I don't butcher the correct pronunciation, in Mr. Tibon's own words is titled:

Jorelik Tibon:  
Jiduul im Kaddol

Shane White:

We'd like to extend our many thanks to Mr Jorelik Tibon and producer Scott Stege for their musical contribution.

[Theme song continues] (05:24)

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