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# The Present-Day Effects of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and Moving Towards Healing

Lisa Rena Groff Spikes

A Thesis in the Field of History

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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## Abstract

In 1921, a terrible race massacre was perpetrated upon the prosperous Black Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. An estimated 300 Black Tulsans were murdered and the entire Black neighborhood full of homes and businesses were looted and burned to the ground by a white mob enabled and deputized by local law enforcement. Prohibitive building codes enacted and the refusal of the city, the state, the country, and insurance companies to take responsibility after the massacre made it difficult for Tulsans to rebuild. Racial redlining, urban renewal projects, and continued racial discrimination that has occurred well after the massacre continue to negatively affect Black Tulsans. The purpose of this thesis is to asses the current situation in Tulsa as a result of the massacre and what steps can be taken to help heal the community.

I evaluated research that has been done about the massacre as well as statistical data about Tulsa. Black Tulsans and the once vibrant Greenwood neighborhood are still being negatively affected by the massacre and the lack of remedy and continuing harm to survivors and descendants of the massacre and the Black neighborhood as a whole.

Much recent work has been done to attempt healing for Tulsa, including the Road to Repair initiative recently announced by Tulsa's first Black mayor on the event's 104th anniversary. Ultimately, I believe much healing can be done by those companies and families that might have profited from or historically been responsible for the massacre to consider the steps they can take to heal the community and to assist with Tulsa Mayor Nichol's Road to Repair plan.

## Author's Biographical Sketch

I am a fourth generation Texan, living most of my life in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. I am married to my high school sweetheart and have three daughters. They have kept my life full of excitement, happiness, and love.

I have always loved education. My mother often tells me the story of when five-year-old me boldly marched over with a brave face to get my vaccines because I knew I needed them before I could start kindergarten. Although I had always wanted to go to college, I started my family young, and college always seemed like an unaffordable dream. I started on my higher education journey at the local community college one year after my children went off to college and only about six months after having a hysterectomy to cure uterine cancer. After I received my associate's degree, I received a special scholarship to help me pay my way at Harvard University Extension School. I earned my bachelor's degree from the Extension School in 2022, and this thesis will round out my master's degree. It has been an honor to learn from distinguished faculty and students at Harvard. I hope to leave a legacy of education and hard work for my children, future grandchildren and beyond and for them to know that anything is possible.

History is a subject I am very passionate about. I love to hear and contemplate stories of other people's lives. The more I learn about history and my own family's genealogy, the more I realize that all of us in the world are connected, and we are all connected to our collective past.

# Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family – those who have come before me, those who have shared my life with me, and those who will come long after I am gone. We are all connected. I have been blessed with grandparents and parents who have loved me, my husband who has been my rock, my girls who have made me oh so proud, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, in laws, and so many family members who have forever impacted my life. I sincerely thank you for your love and support.

Vee, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. We have created a beautiful life together. Thank you for standing beside me during the long hours, days, weeks, months, and years it has taken to get to this point. I couldn't have done it without your unwavering support.

Daddy, I thank you for encouraging me to turn my dream into reality. Mom, look, I am now a Harvard graduate!

To my girls, I am so proud of the women you have grown to become and the lives you have carved out for yourselves in this world. You have all made me a better person. Jasmine, I am so proud to be your mother. I can't thank you enough for your encouragement and love. Ladaysha, I am so glad you came into my life, and I can't imagine it without your love and support. Miku, my dancing queen, I am honored to be your American mom. You all have brought much joy and happiness to my life.

I LOVE YOU ALL!

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I want to express my deepest appreciation to my thesis advisor, Professor Doug Bond, who has supported and guided me through this process. I have struggled more during the writing of this thesis than any other time in my life due to personal circumstances, including the death of my father. Professor Bond has been understanding and encouraged me to keep going. His support has been integral to finishing this work. I am so appreciative of his continued positivity in the face of difficulty.

I am forever grateful for the time, attention, and care Professor Ariane Liazos, my research advisor, has given to me. She helped me get my ideas together from the very beginning of my research proposal and has helped to facilitate the entire thesis process. I am thankful for her positive, helpful attitude, guidance, and feedback. I appreciate her willingness to answer any questions and take the time needed to help me.

I also want to thank all the professors who have helped educate and mold me through my higher education journey. I am honored to learn from so many talented professors who have taught me valuable lessons that have made me a more educated and thoughtful person.

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# Chapter I.

## Introduction

*The mob torched the soul of the city, an evil from which neither whites nor blacks have fully recovered.*[1]

— Oklahoma State Representative Don Ross, 2001

In 1921, the prosperous Black Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa was destroyed in less than twenty-four hours over the course of two days. Thirty-five blocks of Black homes and businesses were looted, bombed, and burned down by a white mob. Even worse, as many as 300 Black Tulsans were murdered during this event that was known for years as the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot. U.S. Congressman Jerrold Nadler equated the massacre to "an Act of ethnic cleansing."[2]

The Black neighborhood and its citizens were left desolate.[3] Although there was nearly two million dollars in property damages reported, no Black Tulsans received reimbursement for their losses.[4] Some citizens and business owners were able to rebuild, but many were not. To this day, no one has ever been held responsible for the murders and destruction of property. Unfortunately, the silencing and cover up about this history,

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[1] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, 2001), viii, https://www.okhistory.org/research/forms/freport.pdf.

[2] Civil Rights United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventeenth Congress, First Session, Wednesday, May 19, 2021* (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2022), 6, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-117hhrg48273/pdf/CHRG-117hhrg48273.pdf.

[3] Chris M. Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, 1st ed. (Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 5–6, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74679-7.

[4] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 8.

further racist policies, including redlining, urban renewal, segregation, and discrimination, still negatively affects Black Tulsans today.[5]




Figure 1. Run[n]ing the Negro out of Tulsa.

*Photograph of Tulsa burning in the background. Black Tulsans on the road are leaving Tulsa and/or observing the destruction of Tulsa. Photographs like this were turned into postcards and distributed widely. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[6]

Terms used for the event that I am addressing have changed throughout time. Initially, this event was called the Tulsa Race Riot. Indeed, there had been many events

[5] Suzette Malveaux, "A Taxonomy of Silencing: The Law's 100-Year Suppression of the Tulsa Race Massacre Symposium: 16th Annual Lutie A. Lytle Black Women Law Faculty Workshop," *Boston University Law Review* 102, no. 7 (2022): 2193, https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/bulr102&i=2201.
[6] Museum of Tulsa History, *Tulsa Race Riot: Smoke From Fires, Catalog Number: 2002.196.001*, 1921, https://digitalcollections.tulsalibrary.org/digital/collection/p15020coll6/id/57/rec/7.

that were referred to as "race riots" across the nation for several years leading up to this event. This term has a loaded history as events described as a race riot were excluded from insurance policies. This had a devastating effect on the financial recovery of Black Tulsans after the event. Also, so called "race riots" were historically blamed on Black citizenry. At the time, this massacre was blamed on "a bad psychological condition…unrest… [and] unemployment" of Black Tulsans, and some lawless whites.[7]

To ensure historical accuracy and sensitivity, I am establishing definitions of terms particular to this topic. The history of treatment of Black Americans being subjugated to slavery and later discrimination and mistreatment is at the center of this research. Many Black Americans in the United States are descended from Africans who were captured, taken to the Americas and enslaved. Because of this history of enslavement in the Americas, it is often difficult to know the country of origin of Black Americans. Because of this history, Black Americans are often referred to as African Americans in writings I may quote.[8] Americans of African descent will be referred to as Black in my writing. Some other terms used in the past that are now seen as unacceptable may be used in historical writing about this topic are Negro, Negroes, or Colored. A derogatory and racist word to describe a Black person is "n***er." When this word comes up in research where it is necessary to quote, I will use the word in this manner as to not traumatize the reader.[9]

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[7] "Tulsa Regional Chamber Donates Minutes from 1921 to Greenwood Cultural Center," 147, accessed October 1, 2024, https://tulsachamber.com/news/2019/05/28/community-development/chamber-donates-meeting-minutes-from-1921-to-greenwood-cultural-center/.
[8] Elise A. Mitchell, "Black and African American," *Journal of the Early Republic* 43, no. 1 (2023): 85–100, https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2023.0005.
[9] Martha Southgate, "Teaching the History of Racist Language," March 17, 2021, https://www.smith.edu/news-events/news/teaching-history-racist-language.

The name of this event is more accurately called the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The reason behind this change in referring to this event is that this name more accurately reflects what actually happened. In fact, two University of Oklahoma librarians were successful in proposing this official change of terminology of the event with the Library of Congress in 2021.[10] The massacre has also been referred to in many other ways, such as a pogrom, battle, conflict, war, race war, catastrophe, disaster, and similar terminology.

Sadly, this event in Tulsa was not unique. In the summer and fall of 1919, there were twenty-five so called "race riots" that broke out around the United States. This period of violence perpetrated on Black Americans was coined the Red Summer.[11] There seems to have been several things happening at the same time that acted as a powder keg for race relations in the United States. Black World War I veterans, who came home from overseas defending freedom, were more mentally and physically prepared to defend the rights of their communities.[12] Racism, along with financial pressures of unemployment and inflation built white anger towards successful Black citizens. Additionally, the Ku Klux Klan, a hate group that has historically targeted Black people, incited and encouraged attacks on Black communities.[13]

The Tulsa Race Massacre seemed to represent the peak of these "race riots" that were perpetrated on Black communities in the post war period. The devastation in terms

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[10] Karen Antell and Jay Shorten, "Changing the Name of the Tulsa Race Riot to Tulsa Race Massacre in LCSH," 2021, https://hdl.handle.net/11244/336476.
[11] Sieber, Karen, "An Act of 'Tactical History,'" Historians, *Https://Www.Historians.Org/*, June 3, 2019, https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/an-act-of-tactical-history-creating-an-archive-of-the-red-summer-of-1919-june-2019/.
[12] Linda T. Wynn, "Red Summer (1919).," *Freedom Facts & Firsts: 400 Years of the African American Civil Rights Experience*, Visible Ink Press, January 1, 2009, 64, https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2becfd23-bddd-3de5-9cd9-14dfcc621ce5.
[13] Wynn, "Red Summer (1919).," 64.

of loss of life, property, and civil rights in Tulsa was particularly egregious. Of the forty-one "race riots" that occurred in 1919, most reported single digit or no deaths. Twenty-two of the events had no reported deaths. Thirteen had one death each; most of these were mobs that attacked and lynched a single Black man. The "race riot" in Chicago had at least thirty-eight reported deaths and in Elaine, Arkansas, an estimated 200 deaths occurred. None of these events appear to have the widespread physical destruction of personal and business property in the Black communities like what happened in Tulsa.[14]

"Tulsa, of course, was the worst," with the "most deaths" and the "most harm."[15] The devastation perpetrated on the Greenwood neighborhood has been described as similar to that of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima.[16] The destruction of the Greenwood neighborhood was "intentional and systematic" and a "military style assault on a civilian community."[17] The Red Cross director who assisted after the massacre wrote, "It should be noted that the disaster had wiped out practically every resource that the negroes formerly had."[18]

In 2001, a full eighty years after the massacre, a major report was completed to study the Tulsa Race Massacre by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. In this report, State Representative Don Russ called the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre "the wors[t] civil disturbance since the Civil War."[19] The authors of the report

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[14] Karen Sieber, "Visualizing the Red Summer," Visualizing the Red Summer, accessed May 31, 2025, https://visualizingtheredsummer.com/?page_id=6.
[15] *Road to Repair event* (2025).
[16] *Tulsa 1921: An American Tragedy*, directed by CBS News, 2021, at 0:27, 43:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptbuPdkI434.
[17] *"Tulsa 1921*, at 10:34.
[18] Maurice Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921* (Tulsa, Okla., 1921), 3, 24th page of document.
[19] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, iv.

studied the event in great detail and made several recommendations to foster reconciliation for the Greenwood community, Black survivors and their descendants.[20]

This thesis is concerned with how Tulsa has been affected to the current day as a result of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, with a particular focus on whether a sense of equality and harmony between the Black and white Tulsans has emerged in the wake of the legacy of this event, and what can be done to bring healing to Tulsa.

The massacre has plagued Tulsa for over a century. The event was hidden for so many years, but since the 2001 report was published, much more information has been available to the public and the lasting effects of the massacre are beginning to be studied. I intend to showcase how the massacre is remembered by Tulsans and how the event has affected its citizens a century later. I argue that this defining event in Tulsa history has negatively affected the Black population of Tulsa in many ways, from financial, physical and mental wellness, and other effects of the generational trauma and systematic racism that still haunts the city. Tulsa is still feeling the effects of the massacre today.

I will discuss the literature written about the massacre starting with early work written shortly after the event, the pivotal Tulsa Race Riot Commission report published in 2001, and later works. I continue by noting my research methods and an overview of the current situation in Tulsa. I further argue the need and responsibility for reparations for survivors and descendants of the massacre, followed by my final thoughts in the conclusion.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the setting leading to the massacre and then the studies about it. The background of race relations in the United States beginning with

[20] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*.

slavery is considered. A short discussion of the unique history of Native Americans and Black citizens in Oklahoma follows. Then, I describe the specific history of mob violence in Tulsa that preceded the massacre.

## Chapter II.

## Background

*All that fire, rifles, revolvers, shot guns, machine guns and organized inhuman passion could do with thirty-five city blocks with its twelve thousand negro population, was done.*[21]

— Red Cross Director Maurice Williams, 1921

This chapter presents a background of the circumstances leading up to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. It begins with the historical context of slavery in the United States. Then a short summary of Oklahoma as Native American land is discussed. Lastly, I contextualize vigilante mob justice events that had already taken place in Tulsa prior to the massacre.

### Destruction

In the early 1900's, the Greenwood community of Tulsa developed into an affluent Black neighborhood that boasted blocks of Black owned homes, Black owned and run businesses, hotels, a hospital, grocery stores, newspapers, nightclubs, lawyers' and doctors' offices, hair salons, movie theaters, clothing stores, schools, and churches. The area was so successful that Booker T. Washington dubbed Greenwood "Negro Wall

[21] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 2, Chapter 1.

Street."[22] Many white Tulsans were jealous of the successful Black citizens, businesses, and land and home ownership.[23] Greenwood's success was seen "as a threat to [the] white hegemony" and "white privilege."[24]



Figure 2. A Panoramic view of Tulsa after the massacre.

*A panoramic view of the devastation left in the wake of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa.*[25]

On May 30, 1921, an incident occurred in an elevator where a nineteen-year-old Black male, Dick Rowland was accused of attempting to rape a seventeen-year-old white female. The *Tulsa Tribune* ran an inflammatory article on May 31 that read, "Nab Negro For Attacking Girl in an Elevator" that incited a mob to gather in an attempt to lynch Rowland.[26]

[22] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 24.
[23] Hannibal B. Johnson, "Tulsa, Then and Now: Reflections on the Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre," *Great Plains Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2020): 181, https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2020.0031.
[24] Chris M. Messer et al., "The Destruction of Black Wall Street: Tulsa's 1921 Riot and the Eradication of Accumulated Wealth," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 77, nos. 3–4 (2018): 789–91, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12225.
[25] *Panoramic View of Destruction of Tulsa, Catalog Number: 1984.002.281*, n.d., https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/E796022A-0BB1-48EA-895D- 481610318903.
[26] Johnson, "Tulsa, Then and Now," 182; Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 3.




Figure 3. White men gathered at the courthouse before the massacre.

*White men gathered at the courthouse where Dick Rowland was being held. An inflammatory newspaper article suggested that Dick Rowland attempted to sexually assault a white woman in an elevator. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[27]

On May 31, 1921, white Tulsans, many armed, gathered around the courthouse where Rowland was being held.[28] This is the same courthouse jail that had held a white man that taken from police custody by a mob and lynched less than a year earlier. Because of this history, the Black community didn't feel Rowland would be protected at the facility.[29] A small group of about 25 Black Greenwood residents, many who were

[27] "Scene From the 1921 Race Riot, Catalog Number: A2428," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://digitalcollections.tulsalibrary.org/digital/collection/p15020coll6/id/5/rec/45.
[28] Marjorie Ann Tracy, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Politics of Lawlessness" (1996), 10, 17, 27, https://www-proquest-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/250222566.
[29] Barbara Kay Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, January 9, 2025, 17.

armed World War I veterans prepared to defend their Rowland, arrived at the courthouse about 9 p.m. to offer protection, but were turned away by law enforcement.[30] The sheriff noted that about 100 of the 500-600 white men gathered at the courthouse were talking of lynching Rowland.[31] By 10 p.m., about 2,000 white men had amassed at the courthouse and about seventy-five Black men had returned, some believing the sheriff had asked for their help.[32] An altercation and gunshots erupted in the crowd, which resulted in at least one death. Black Tulsans retreated to Greenwood. Some of the Black World War I veterans set up sniper positions throughout Greenwood to protect their neighborhood.[33]

About 500 white men were deputized by police within about a 30 minute span; "Most were members of the mob that had earlier been demanding Rowland's lynching."[34] Some of them had been drinking alcohol.[35] Police told officers and newly minted specially deputized white men to "go home, get a gun, and get a n***er."[36] Ku Klux Klan members also participated in the massacre.[37] Some of the participants were told AFTER the massacre ended to, "go out and shoot any n***er you see, and the law'll be behind you."[38]

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[30] Scott Ellsworth and Pat Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, ed. L. L. C. Dreamscape Media (Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 23; Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 17.
[31] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 16.
[32] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 17.
[33] Tracy, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Politics of Lawlessness," 10, 17, 27.
[34] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 21.
[35] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2.
[36] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 38.
[37] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 57.
[38] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 43.



Figure 4. Young white man holding guns.

*Young white man holding guns and posing for a photo during the Tulsa Race Massacre. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[39]

Black Greenwood residents were justified in being armed and the deputization of white Tulsans emboldened white Tulsans in their violence.[40] Officers were seen participating in the destruction of property, including setting fires.[41] Firemen who were trying to put out fires were shot at.[42] A 2025 U.S. Department of Justice report acknowledged that some police allegedly "participated in arsons and murders."[43] The

[39] "Young White Man Holding Guns, Catalog Number: 2002.123.001," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/photo/1B7F8402-F61F-4F02-8964- 522730278435.
[40] Messer et al., "The Destruction of Black Wall Street," 789–90.
[41] Messer et al., "The Destruction of Black Wall Street," 801.
[42] Martin Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?* (Black Dispatch Pub. Co., 1921), 6.
[43] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 2.

attacks became organized between police and white Tulsans against Black Tulsans.[44] "The destruction of the district was total. The survivors were left with nothing."[45] White Tulsans drove some Black Tulsans out of the city during the massacre.[46]

The Red Cross began helping the first night of the massacre, while events were still happening and so were witness to many of the events.[47] Red Cross director Maurice Williams described the atrocities he witnessed during and after the massacre:

> During the riotous hours between dawn and noon of a well-known June day, what had previously been a prosperous, peaceable and fairly well-ordered negro business and residential district, with a population of approximately twelve thousand negroes – men, women and children, was transformed into a burned and devastated area. Skeletons of brick and stone stood out in a ghastly relief against a background of ashes, cinders, twisted iron and steel, charred autos, beds and household implements. Twisted and torn electric wires, gas pipes, meters and other ruined junk scattered about. A heavy pall of smoke kindly mantled the ruins for the first twenty-four hours, during which time Tulsa had rubbed her eyes and prepared to face a condemming [sic] world.

The Red Cross report noted that 1,256 buildings were burned, while 314 additional buildings (the majority of which were homes) were looted of all valuables. About 10,000 people were left homeless. One hundred and eighty-three people were hospitalized due to gunshots, burns, or other issues related to the massacre and 531 other people required first aid or surgeries.[48] Nearly every pregnant mother had complications and there were at least eight babies who were born prematurely and died as a result of the massacre.[49] Figures for the dead were "omitted for the reason that NO ONE KNOWS."[50] Due to the indiscriminate way that bodies were disposed of "in the Arkansas River, on

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[44] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 3.
[45] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 3.
[46] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 3.
[47] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 5, Chapter 2.
[48] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 4, 66th page of document.
[49] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 3, Chapter 1.
[50] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 4, 66th page of document; original author's emphasis.

flatbed rail cars, and in unmarked mass graves," it is impossible to know how many lives were lost.[51]



Figure 5 Destruction of a Greenwood Street.

*Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[52]

The Black neighborhood was just decimated. The events that happened in Tulsa can be better understood in terms of a battle that happens in the midst of a war.[53] Red Cross director Maurice Willows called the event "a well-planned, diabolical ouster of the innocent [N]egros from their stamping grounds."[54] Black Tulsans were severely

[51] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 51.
[52] John Hooker, "2002.137.001," 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/4FBADF0C-040D-43EB-8C5D-832840336760#gallery.
[53] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, iv; Konstantinos D. Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence: The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot and Its Legacy," *European Journal of American Culture* (Bristol) 37, no. 2 (2018): 129–30, https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.37.2.127_1.
[54] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 26.

outnumbered, and the death of Black Tulsans was significantly more than for the whites involved.[55] Black people were seen dead in the streets, including children and women.[56] Black neighborhoods were looted and burned in an organized and systematic fashion, "block by block."[57] Evidence suggests that police were at least partially responsible for much of the destruction in Greenwood.[58] Additionally, many white participants worked in the courts, press, city hall, churches, and other prominent positions in the city."[59] White men were heard saying "you 'n***rs' are getting to ___ rich."[60] The events of May 31 were chaotic and didn't seem very organized. However, on the morning of June 1, a calculated invasion was "directed not only at Black men with firearms but also at women, children, and the elderly." [61] Women fled with their children as white men shot at them.[62] One Greenwood mother who had given birth to a stillborn baby before the massacre lost her baby's body in the chaos of the massacre.[63]

The National Guard arrived on June 1 and declared Martial Law. Most businesses were closed and the general public were not supposed to have weapons at this time. While many Black Tulsans fled the city, the approximately 6,000 that remained were held in detention centers around the city under the guise of protection.[64] Although some Black Tulsans originally sought refuge at these detention centers for their safety or

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[55] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 20.
[56] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 7.
[57] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 27.
[58] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 34.
[59] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," May 29, 2020, 11, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/29/case-reparations-tulsa-oklahoma.
[60] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 6; note that the original author censored the curse word before rich, but did not censor the word n***er.
[61] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 25.
[62] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 29.
[63] *Remembering the Tulsa Massacre*, directed by Carmen Fields (PBS, 2021), 18:40, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/conversations-remembering-tulsa-massacre/.
[64] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 71, 75.

medical help, many were forced at gunpoint to march there upon military orders.[65] Black residents were required to provide free labor with the upkeep of the detention centers they were forcibly being held in.[66] Black men and women were jailed for refusing to work in the Red Cross internment centers.[67] Food was not given freely, but sold to those held at the detention centers.[68]

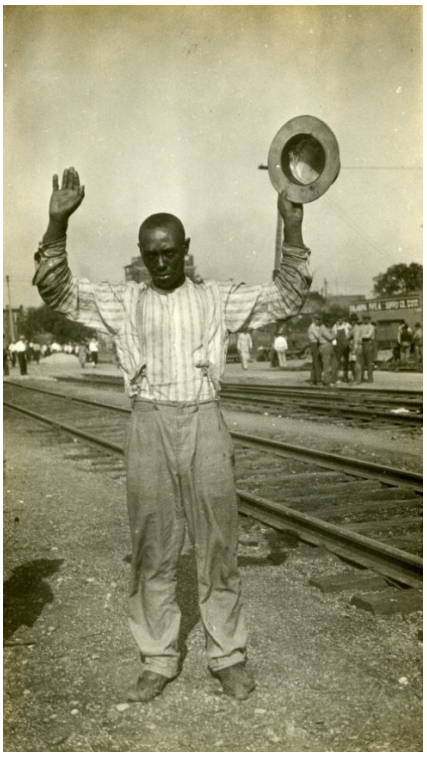


Figure 6. Black man with his hands held up.

*Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[69]

[65] Tracy, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Politics of Lawlessness," 21–26.
[66] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 75.
[67] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 27.
[68] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 9.
[69] "Black Man with His Hands Held up, Catalog Number: 2012.065.003," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/09B86280-D08E-4D7C-AF4D- 116755560835.

Black citizens had to be vouched for by their white employer on specially issued "green cards" to be granted permission to leave the detention centers.[70] No funerals were allowed at this time; reasons given for this were that churches were being utilized in recovery efforts, as well as the issue of "emotional stress which still prevail[ed] within the city."[71] As Black Tulsans were held in detention centers against their will, deceased Black victims of the massacre were disposed of unceremoniously, without funerals and without their families' knowledge. Some were buried in mass graves, some were thrown into the Arkansas River, and some taken away by train – and this is just what we know.[72] While Black residents were released from the detention centers after two weeks, they were required to keep the green cards on their person until the end of July.[73]

From the very beginning, it was obvious that Tulsa was not interested in helping the Black citizens recover. The animosity and racism felt towards Blacks was particularly atrocious after the massacre. One of the local newspapers wrote, "in this old 'N***ertown' were a lot of bad n***ers and a bad n***er is about the lowest thing that walks on two feet…Well, the bad n***ers started it."[74] The Red Cross director, noted the "disinteredness [sic] and lack of sympathy" for Black Tulsans by some city representatives.[75] Funds were promised by the county commissioners to the Red Cross for relief efforts, but then abruptly rescinded when a new committee was formed, whose

[70] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 72.
[71] Loren L. Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot" (M.A., The University of Tulsa, 1946), 46, https://www.proquest.com/docview/250239802/abstract/C33AFD01596C4387PQ/1.
[72] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 75; Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 51.
[73] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 6–7.
[74] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 49.
[75] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 20, 17th page of document.

chief interest appeared to be moving the Black citizens to a new area.[76] The Red Cross director noted that the Reconstruction Committee for seven months of its existence had not done anything constructive for the city or its citizens.[77]




Figure 7. Deceased Black man on truck bed in front of detention center.

*Deceased Black man lying on the bed of this truck. Black Tulsans entering the detention center in the background, many with their hands held up. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[78]

The Greenwood population and neighborhood were utterly devastated. Close to two million dollars (at least twenty million today) in property damages were reported. This event was called a riot on purpose to keep down the status of Black Tulsan survivors

[76] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 19, 16th page of the document.
[77] Williams, *Disaster Relief Report: Riot June 1921*, 25, 20th page of document.
[78] Estate of Edna Chase, "Deceased Black Man on Truck Bed, Catalog Number: 1982.033.003," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/A29352B1-DDA3-4A42-A5DB-626285421202.

as insurance policies did not pay out on claims classified as race riots.[79] Lawsuits against the city and insurance claims were dismissed as a result.[80] Some families and businesses rebuilt, but many didn't have the funds and were never able to.[81]

No one has ever been held criminally or civilly responsible for these crimes, including murder. [82] Not one person or entity has ever been held accountable in any way for the utter devastation that was perpetrated against the Black Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa. This event was swept under the rug and has been essentially hidden to history over the years. Many people who grew up and lived in the Greenwood neighborhood weren't even aware of the history of this event for decades. I am a lifelong resident of the Dallas Metroplex just a few hours from Tulsa and didn't find out about the massacre until I watched a television series, Watchmen, in 2020, ninety nine years after the massacre, and nineteen years after the 2001 report was published.[83] The cover up and structural silencing by government agencies about the massacre continues to negatively impact Black Tulsans to this day.[84] Lost generational wealth, stability, and a sense of wellbeing were lost for generations of Black Tulsans because of this disaster.

## Rebuilding Greenwood

After the massacre, Black Tulsans were held in detention centers, making it impossible to start rebuilding their homes and businesses.[85] The mayor of Tulsa created a

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[79] *"Tulsa 1921*, 28:10.
[80] Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*, 8.
[81] Johnson, "Tulsa, Then and Now," 182.
[82] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 13.
[83] *Watchmen*, directed by Nicole Kassell, 2019, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7049682/.
[84] Malveaux, "A Taxonomy of Silencing."
[85] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 18.

Reconstruction Committee, while at the same time noting that the destroyed land would be better served for businesses and that Black Tulsans should be moved further East and North.[86] This Reconstruction Committee didn't help Black Tulsans financially.[87] Additionally, the city passed restrictive building codes, further restricting Black Tulsans' ability to rebuild.[88] B.C. Franklin, a Black attorney who survived the massacre, temporarily set up his law office in a tent and fought successfully to overturn these unlawful building codes, allowing Greenwood to begin to rebuild.[89]




Figure 8. Business rebuilt with bricks burned during the massacre.

*Courtesy of Lisa Spikes.*[90]

[86] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 54.
[87] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 54.
[88] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 3.
[89] Scott Ellsworth, *The Ground Breaking: An American City and Its Search for Justice*, with ProQuest (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2021), 90.
[90] Spikes, Lisa, *Photo of Business Rebuilt with Burned Bricks*, June 1, 2025.

Many Black Tulsans lived in tents for over a year through a brutal winter while attempting to recover.[91] Although the Greenwood area was never able to rebuild to the same levels as before the massacre, by 1925 much of Greenwood was rebuilt.[92] The areas of Greenwood that were rebuilt were prosperous for many years.[93]

## Slavery in the United States

The United States of America was founded on slavery, principally by treating people with darker skin as less than human, treating them as property with no rights, and forcing them to provide free labor.[94] Although the word "slavery" was never used, America was built with slavery literally written into its constitution, just using different words: in Article 1, Section 9, Clause 1, referring to slaves as "importation of such Persons" and a ban against ending the slave trade for at least 20 years; the Three Fifths clause in Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3, which counts three out of five enslaved people towards representation in Congress; a fugitive slave clause in Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3; and how to handle slave insurrections in Article 1, Section 8.[95]

After a civil war was fought over this issue and slavery was deemed to be illegal in this country, formerly enslaved people were left to start their lives with a blank slate. They didn't own any property, have special skills or education to get a high paying job, or any support system in place to help them start their lives from scratch.[96] In January

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[91] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 50.
[92] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 98.
[93] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 105, 108–9.
[94] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, v.
[95] "The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription," National Archives, November 4, 2015, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript.
[96] Nikole Hannah-Jones, "What Is Owed?," Magazine, *The New York Times*, June 30, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html.

1865, forty-acre plots of land were promised to (and many given) to formerly enslaved people by Special Field Order 15. This order, and any given land was revoked later the same year when Andrew Johnson became president after Lincoln's assassination.[97] This history of maltreatment of Black Americans has continued to negatively harm Black Americans through structural racism, segregation, Jim Crow laws and other discriminatory practices and bad actors.

## Oklahoma as Native American Land

Native Americans were forced to migrate to Indian Territory, later Oklahoma, as a result of the 1830 Indian Removal Act. Blacks who were enslaved by Native Americans walked alongside them in what came to be known as the Trail of Tears. Many of them remained enslaved until after the U.S. Civil War.[98] Initially, Black people who had been enslaved by Native Americans came to be known as Indian Freedmen and often considered themselves part of the tribe they had lived among and been affiliated with, and many still do.[99]

Oklahoma was seen as the "promised land" and very welcoming to Black people, and included over fifty Black towns.[100] An idea had been floated about Oklahoma being admitted into the United States as an all-Black state, but the idea fizzled out.[101] Race has always been a contentious issue in Oklahoma. The very first bill passed after Oklahoma

[97] Hannah-Jones, "What Is Owed?"
[98] Angela Walton-Raji, "Freedmen Settlements of Indian Territory and Three Freedmen Community Clusters," *Great Plains Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2023): 253, https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2023.a918406.
[99] Walton-Raji, "Freedmen Settlements of Indian Territory and Three Freedmen Community Clusters," 260.
[100] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 8.
[101] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vi.

was admitted as a state was to solidify race based segregation.[102] As a result, Black Oklahomans were treated differently, even if they had originally been part of a Native American tribe and considered themselves Native American.[103] Black people who were listed as members of Native American tribes sought promised free land in Oklahoma.[104] Some Black Indian Freedmen were granted land in the Greenwood neighborhood through the Dawes act.[105]

O.W. Gurley, a wealthy Black man, purchased 40 acres in Tulsa and named it Greenwood. Many Black people from around the country moved to Tulsa for more favorable circumstances as Greenwood became known as a safe and prosperous Black neighborhood.[106] Gurley sold plots of land exclusively to other Black people. This land became known as Black Wall Street.[107] When oil was discovered in Oklahoma, many whites who were descendants of those who held Confederate ideals moved to Oklahoma.[108]

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[102] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vi.
[103] Walton-Raji, "Freedmen Settlements of Indian Territory and Three Freedmen Community Clusters," 258.
[104] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vi.
[105] Alexis Clark, "Tulsa's 'Black Wall Street' Flourished as a Self-Contained Hub in Early 1900s," History, September 4, 2019, https://www.history.com/articles/black-wall-street-tulsa-race-massacre.
[106] Clark, "Tulsa's 'Black Wall Street' Flourished as a Self-Contained Hub in Early 1900s."
[107] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vi.
[108] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 8.




Figure 9. Prosperous Greenwood family before the massacre.

*Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[109]

## Vigilante Mob Justice in Tulsa

There had been a long history of vigilante mob justice in Tulsa. With reports of prostitution, drugs, alcohol during prohibition, and other criminal activity rampant in Tulsa, there was a lack of faith in local law enforcement by white Tulsans. More troubling to white Tulsans were reports of white women mingling with Black men.[110] Acts of racial violence had occurred in cities across the nation since 1917.

[109] "Williams Family Photograph, Catalog Number: 1977.046.026," Museum of Tulsa History, accessed June 26, 2025, https://www.tulsalibrary.org/black-wall-street.
[110] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 49–54.



Figure 10. White men in a vehicle with guns during the massacre.

*Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[111]

There were three separate occasions in Tulsa when white men had gathered and threatened to take prisoners from police custody to kill them. In two of the three instances, the mob was able to take possession of the prisoner and subsequently murder them.[112] The last man to be taken by the mob was a white man who was lynched less than a year before the massacre.[113] Black Tulsans felt that if a white man could be taken from police custody and lynched, a Black man had even less of a chance to be protected.[114]

[111] "1921 Tulsa Race Riot: Men With Guns In Car, Catalog Number: 2002.124.001," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://digitalcollections.tulsalibrary.org/digital/collection/p15020coll6/id/56/rec/1.
[112] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 25–44.
[113] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 17.
[114] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 45.

# Chapter III.

## Literature Review

*In all my experience, I have never witnessed such scenes that prevailed in this city when I arrived at the height of the rioting 25,000 whites, armed to the teeth were ranging the city in utter and ruthless defiance of every concept of law and righteousness. Motorcars bristling with guns swept through your city, their occupants firing at will.*[115]

— Brigadier General Barrett, Army National Guard, 1921

The volatile nature of the massacre and efforts to erase it from history led to the concealment of the event for decades. The massacre was a taboo topic among whites as they didn't want it to happen again.[116] Black Tulsans were traumatized and feared backlash for talking about the massacre."[117] The event was banned from being published about.[118] Due to this attitude and culture of fear, silencing, and cover-up for a multitude of differing reasons, literature on the Tulsa Race Massacre has historically been limited. A full ninety-nine years after the massacre, Oklahoma schools finally began introducing the incident into history lessons.[119]

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[115] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 42.
[116] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 28.
[117] Bryan H. Jones, "Revelation Without Reparation: Evaluating the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," *The International Journal of Human Rights* (ABINGDON), Taylor & Francis, 2023, 249, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2023.2251893.
[118] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vii.
[119] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 38.

## Early Works on the Massacre (1921-2000)

The earliest works were done by interested individuals. Newspapers, journals, and government agencies didn't appear to have researched or reported on the massacre after the initial event. In the 2001 report, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (hereafter, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*), mention is made about a booklet written by Martin Brown in July 1921, called "Is Tulsa Sane?" This would be the first known writing about the massacre, other than newspaper and magazine articles. It was noted in the 2001 report that "no copies are known to exist of "Is Tulsa Sane?"[120] I was able to find a copy of "Is Tulsa Sane?" housed at Howard University's archives. Brown visited Tulsa just a week after the massacre occurred and wrote about what he witnessed and heard about the event. Notably, Brown purchased editions of local newspapers from the day the incident began, May 31, to June 9, 1921, and published main articles about the massacre.[121] There were some interesting details I was able to get from this booklet that I hadn't found elsewhere. A particularly heartbreaking scene Brown noted was that while the massacre was going on "men, women and children [were] seen lying dead all over the streets."[122] One newspaper article described how ministers in Tulsa spoke about the massacre during their sermons, many noting how the massacre would be of benefit to Tulsa due to the "cleaner morals, higher ideals and superior citizenship" that would now reside in Tulsa.[123]

Mrs. Mary E. Jones Parrish, a survivor, published a book in 1922 with her personal as well as other survivor accounts of the massacre, lists of financial losses, some

[120] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 44.
[121] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*
[122] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 7.
[123] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 16.

newspaper articles and advertisements from Greenwood businesses. Only twenty-one copies were published and distributed at the time.[124] Parrish's work is extremely valuable as one of the earliest known writings about the massacre and contains personal accounts from the Greenwood perspective. The next published work on the massacre was a 1946 thesis by Loren Gill, a University of Tulsa graduate student.[125] Gill's thesis is the first known academic work on the massacre. Gill conducted a number of oral history interviews with city officials, police, and Black survivors. He also recorded the inflammatory news article from the *Tulsa Tribune*, "Nab Negro For Attacking Girl in an Elevator" in its entirety.[126] Gill's work is the first time the massacre was given serious academic research, including interviews he conducted with both Black and white subjects that lived through the event. Although Gill's work is integral, his views were biased (which was common for the times) and his conclusions about the event have not stood the test of time. Gill was said to have been "critical" of his own work in later years.[127]

No serious work was done after Gill on the Tulsa Race Massacre until Scott Ellsworth published *Death in a Promised Land* in 1982, over 60 years after the massacre.[128] He reported on the history of Tulsa before the disaster, the events of the massacre itself, and how the city has dealt with the aftermath.[129]

The research Ellsworth has done is essential to telling the story of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Ellsworth's work reported on how the history of Tulsa and the state has

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[124] Parrish, *Race Riot 1921: Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, with Internet Archive (Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998), 9.
[125] Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot."
[126] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 28–29; Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot."
[127] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 34.
[128] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land.*
[129] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 101.

impacted race relations in Tulsa. The background Ellsworth provides leading up to the massacre evidences the seriousness with which the Black community felt Rowland was in danger in police custody.

In the five years Ellsworth spent researching this book, he noticed the very different "twin oral traditions" of how Black and white Tulsans remembered this event. White Tulsans often blamed other races and if they were to admit white responsibility, they would often be referred to as "poor white trash."[130] Black Tulsans, however, were proud to talk about the rebuilding of the Greenwood area.[131]

## Tulsa Race Riot Commission Report – 2001

In 1997, the Oklahoma State Legislature created the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission to investigate, report, and make recommendations to government officials regarding the massacre.[132] In 2001, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report* was published. This work was the first time Oklahoma officials ordered the Tulsa Race Massacre to be studied. This research was an integral step in gathering and sharing factual historical accounts of the Tulsa Race Massacre to the public.

Academic professors and other experts participated in the multi-year study and wrote sections of the 200-page report, which did an in-depth investigation and made several recommendations of reparations and healing for Tulsa.[133] The report consists of nine main sections, similar to separate chapters, each with their own author or authors.

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[130] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 104.
[131] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 105, 108–9.
[132] State of Oklahoma House Bill 2468 (1997). https://legiscan.com/OK/text/HB2468/2023; House Joint Resolution 1035.
[133] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*.

This report differed from previous research as it was done by professionals in their fields in an official capacity and looked for evidence and Black perspectives. This research investigated and reported on the history of Tulsa before the massacre; a timeline of events during the disaster; involvement of airplanes; confirmed deaths; possible location of mass graves; financial losses; aftermath of the event; and placed the responsibility of the massacre on the City of Tulsa and the State of Oklahoma for not protecting Black citizens and their property.[134]

Due to the years of silence surrounding this event, the facts of the massacre had to be established. The first section, titled "The Final Report of the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," compiled by Dr. Danney Goble, paints a factual portrayal of the event based on research done by the commission members.[135] John Hope Franklin, son of a survivor, and Scott Ellsworth wrote the second section, in which they wrote about the history of the massacre and how Tulsans were dealing with the history of the event at the time.[136] Of particular interest is the story of a white reporter attempting to write a fiftieth anniversary story for the chamber of commerce in 1970 and 1971. He was warned by two different white men to not run the story. The reporter was also harassed by calls on his home telephone and a life-threatening note was left on his car. The author was not deterred and finished the story with previously unpublished photos of the event. However, the story was squashed by the chamber of commerce. He attempted to have the story published in both of Tulsa's newspapers but was also refused.[137]

[134] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*.
[135] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 1–20.
[136] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 21–36.
[137] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 29–30.

Ellsworth, an authority by now of the Tulsa Race Massacre, wrote the third section about the history of Tulsa before, during, and after the event, similar to his 1982 book.[138] Richard Warner wrote the fourth section, "Airplanes and the Riot."[139] There had been differing accounts of airplanes dropping bombs and/or shooting on the Greenwood neighborhood during the attacks. This has been a heated debate over the years. Warner concluded that although there was likely some shooting and dropping of some incendiary devices from private airplanes, the impact was likely minimal. Warner noted that there were also police, photographers, and other interested parties that flew over the destruction without doing additional damage.[140]

Because deceased Black Tulsans were buried or handled in unknown ways without being recorded, it is unclear exactly how many people died. Clyde Snow investigated and wrote the fifth section about confirmed deaths from the event.[141] Snow admits that this subject is not final as: much more research needed to be done; deaths that occurred later may not have been linked to the massacre; not all deaths were recorded; and many mass graves were likely in Tulsa and not yet found.[142] This leads directly to the sixth section, where Robert Brooks and Alan Witten looked at areas which might hold mass graves for victims.[143] Although ground penetrating radar investigations done in 1998 and 1999 were inconclusive, Brooks and Witten recommend the following: more interviews and research into available archives for clues to possible locations; to look more closely at Oaklawn Cemetery records; to use the same scientific techniques with

[138] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 37–102.
[139] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 103–8.
[140] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 107.
[141] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 109–22.
[142] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 120–21.
[143] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 123–32.

different angles to search for anomalies that might indicate mass graves at Oaklawn Cemetery; and to better define what a mass grave is for the purposes of further studies.[144] Lesley Rankin-Hill and Phoebe Stubblefield wrote the seventh section on how skeletons have been used by anthropologists to determine races, lifestyles, and deaths in other cases. The same techniques they shared will be used to identify and tell more of the history of victims of the massacre as they are located.[145] The 2001 report recommended Tulsa continue its search for mass graves.[146]



Figure 11. Deceased Black man, a victim of the massacre.

*Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[147]

[144] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 131–32.
[145] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 133–42.
[146] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 131–32.
[147] "Unidentified Victim of Race Riot Violence, Catalog Number: 2002.211.001," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/photo/F85D3380-48B4-4C5B-BAE9-224709820420.

The loss of property for Greenwood residents and business owners was devastating. Larry O'Dell wrote about these losses in the eighth section.[148] He used databases, maps, directories, deeds, insurance claims, along with census and other records and found the losses to be between $1.5 and $1.8 million dollars, equating to nearly $17 billion in 1999.[149] Alfred Brophy wrote the ninth and final section of the report titled, "Assessing State and City Culpability: The Riot and the Law." Brophy asserted that the city not only failed to protect its citizens during the massacre, many of the freshly deputized white men actually contributed to the death and destruction of Greenwood.[150] He further noted that the National Guard, in taking all Black citizens to detention centers, left their property unguarded and at high risk for being destroyed.[151] Brophy reported contemporary newspaper reports showed that law enforcement, the National Guard, and white Tulsans worked together during and after the event.[152] Lawsuits against the city for its "failure to protect" life and property during the massacre were denied.[153] Not only were citizens unable to get justice financially from their losses, there was a failure of the city to arrest and prosecute white citizens responsible for the murders and damage to property.[154]

## Later Works on the Massacre (after 2001)

Current research about the Tulsa Race Massacre often highlights the strife that continues in the city surrounding the history of the event. Ellsworth updated his work on

[148] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 143–52.
[149] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 145, 149.
[150] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 153.
[151] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 159–60.
[152] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 165.
[153] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 166.
[154] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, 167.

the study of the Tulsa Race Massacre in 2021, the 100-year anniversary of the massacre, with *The Ground Breaking: The Tulsa Race Massacre and an American City's Search for Justice*. This book focuses on more current research, including Ellsworth's and others journeys searching for bodies of the massacre's victims. Ellsworth focuses on the silencing and coverup of the event over the years by officials, even up to the not-so-distant past.[155]

The narrative and remembrance of the Tulsa Race Massacre has changed over the years. In "Interpreting Violence: The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot and Its Legacy," Konstantino Karatzas argues the event in Tulsa began as a riot with "spontaneous reactions, random shootings and various types of vandalism" that turned into a what amounted to an organized war waged by local officials to destroy the Greenwood neighborhood; Black citizens were misled into leaving their properties defenseless against the white looters and arsonists under the guise of protection.[156] Karatzas noted that the Red Cross cared for the Blacks in the detention camps as prisoners of war under the rules of the Geneva Convention.[157] Prisoners of War are classified as "homeless…, abandoned by their home country, confined…, denied basic human rights, treated without respect and deprived of their possessions."[158] Karatzas asserted that government agencies at all levels were either "[unwilling] or [incompetent] to take care of the Black community.[159] The Red Cross played the major role in Tulsa in assisting Black families heal and put their lives back together.[160]

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[155] Ellsworth, *The Ground Breaking*.
[156] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 129–30.
[157] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 131.
[158] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 131.
[159] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 131.
[160] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 131.

Karatzas details a more recent event that happened in 2013 that highlights the racial divide in Tulsa. A main street in Tulsa was named after Wyatt Tate Brady. It came to the public's attention that Brady had been a participant in the massacre and was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.[161] Brady was part of the Reconstruction Committee, charged with rehabilitating the Greenwood neighborhood.[162] Many Black Tulsans wanted the street to be renamed. The mayor of Tulsa said renaming the street would be unnecessary and cost a lot of money and time.[163] Tulsa City Council, in an underhanded move, changed the naming of the street from W.T. Brady to M.B. Brady, after a famous Civil War photographer with no ties to Tulsa. Karatzas noted that this controversy showed how divided the Black and white citizens are in their views of the history of the city and how Black Tulsans were not respected by city authorities.[164].

The disrespect felt by Black Tulsans was in play before the Tulsa Race Massacre as well. In *Riot and Remembrance*, James Hirsch asserted that the main underlying causes for the massacre was the need for the whites to feel superior and the Blacks' demand for political and financial equality.[165] Hirsch relays many personal stories through the eyes of survivors. Hirsch contends that when the Tulsa Race Riot Commission started investigating, the remembrance of the events was contentious and varied wildly between the Black and white recollections and stories that were passed down through their respective generations.[166]

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[161] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 132–33.
[162] "Commission Minutes May-December 1921," City of Tulsa, 1921, 35th page, original page number 26, https://www.cityoftulsa.org/mayor/road-to-repair/1921-race-massacre-open-record-files/.
[163] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 133.
[164] Karatzas, "Interpreting Violence," 134, 136.
[165] James S. Hirsch, *Riot And Remembrance: The Tulsa Race Massacre and Its Legacy*, Reprint edition (Mariner Books, 2003), 6.
[166] Hirsch, *Riot And Remembrance*, 7.




Figure 12. National Guard troops in Tulsa with a machine gun on back of truck. *Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[167]

The issue of reparations has been central to Black Tulsans who experienced the Tulsa Race Massacre, as well as their descendants from 1921 to the present. The debate about reparations has also been contentious to the current day. In *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, Alfred Brophy, who worked on the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, argues that since the government played a large role in the riot, they were legally liable and responsible for reparations. Brophy writes from the Greenwood perspective, and used court records and Black newspapers that had not been previously studied.[168] In journal article "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Struggle for Reparations," the authors argue that the original framing of the event by white community leaders was

[167] "National Guard Arrives in Greenwood During the Tulsa Race Riot, Accession #AA6," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://digitalcollections.tulsalibrary.org/digital/collection/p15020coll6/id/5/rec/45.
[168] Alfred L. Brophy and Randall Kennedy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation* (Oxford University Press, 2003), xvii–xx.

an uprising caused by Blacks has largely affected how this event was viewed at the time and for many years.[169] This long standing narrative, hidden details of the event, and a "conspiracy of silence" by officials has kept victims of the massacre from obtaining financial reparations from insurance companies and the government to date.[170]

The event being described as a riot, as well as white and official reports resulted in claims being denied by both the city and insurance companies, leaving Black Tulsans and their community desolate. In journal article "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Struggle for Reparations," the authors argue that the original framing of the event by white community leaders described the event as an uprising caused by Blacks has largely affected how this event has been perceived by the general public.[171] Even during the event, Black Tulsans were referred to as the "*enemy"* by the National Guard.[172] Racial attitudes limited help after the massacre. Shortly after the Greenwood community was destroyed, white community leaders enacted plans to make it difficult for the Black community to rebuild and refused outside charity.[173]

Tulsa attempted to cover up and systematically silence public discourse of the event from the very beginning. Ellsworth reported that very soon after the massacre and devastation occurred, White Tulsans desired to both put this event in the past as well as to take land from the Black population.[174]

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[169] Chris M. Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: The Struggle for Reparations," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* (Los Angeles, CA) 4, no. 3 (2018): 390, https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649217742414.
[170] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 393.
[171] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 390.
[172] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 391.
[173] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 391–92.
[174] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 71.

This long standing narrative, hidden details of the event, and a "conspiracy of silence" by officials has kept victims of the massacre from obtaining financial reparations from insurance and government entities to this day.[175] Proponents of reparations to massacre victims and their descendants have three main reasons they are entitled to them: the immediate and long lasting impacts of victims' financial loss and inheritance; the responsibility of the government for their actions and inactions during and after the event; and to heal the community.[176]



Figure 13. Black Tulsans with armed National Guardsmen.

*Black Tulsans with armed National Guardsmen, being taken to detention center. Courtesy of the Museum of Tulsa History.*[177]

[175] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 393.
[176] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 394–95.
[177] "National Guard Walking with Black Men, Virginia A. Hopkins Collection, Catalog Number: 2018.118.009," Museum of Tulsa History, 1921, https://tulsahistory.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/7437E449-0175-4B31-BE14- 374522030523.

Another perspective to consider regarding reconciliation in Tulsa is the current white point of view. Ronni Michelle Greenwood argues that a major issue with getting the white majority to have a positive view of reparations or reconciliation of any kind is that white people may feel there is an implication of guilt based on the wrongdoing of previous generations.[178] In interviews with white allies to the plight of Black Tulsans seeking reparations, respondents felt a better way to get other whites motivated was to draw attention to the suffering of the victims rather than the inhumane actions of the perpetrators.[179] Rather, the responsibility to care for those who have suffered by the majority seems to be a better way of influencing the majority group's opinion.[180] White allies who are effective avoid language that places the majority group in a negative light, instead focusing on positive aspects of the majority and how they can help with issues of reconciliation.[181]

There is an especially key document from 2021, *Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre*, which documents a hearing about the Tulsa Race Massacre in the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties.[182] During this hearing, massacre survivors and descendants testified, and written statements were presented. This is an extremely important primary source with many recent viewpoints about not only the history of the event, but how Tulsa is facing the repercussions now, one hundred years later. Three of

[178] Ronni Michelle Greenwood, "Remembrance, Responsibility, and Reparations: The Use of Emotions in Talk about the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot," *Journal of Social Issues* (HOBOKEN) 71, no. 2 (2015): 340–41, https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1111/josi.12114.
[179] Greenwood, "Remembrance, Responsibility, and Reparations," 347.
[180] Greenwood, "Remembrance, Responsibility, and Reparations," 351.
[181] Greenwood, "Remembrance, Responsibility, and Reparations," 352.
[182] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*.

the then living survivors, all of whom were over 100 years old, spoke at the hearing. Their moving testimony about how the massacre continues to affect them is poignant. They each talked about how the massacre continues to harm them to this day.

The 2021 report "Oil and Blood: The Color of Wealth in Tulsa, Oklahoma," evaluated factors including wealth, household income, earnings, homeownership, incarceration exposure, education, and self-employment, noted that Tulsa had the worst wealth gap, ninety one percent, between Black and white citizens of the six American cities they compared.[183] In fact, the study found that in Tulsa:

> A greater portion of the wealth gap between whites and blacks is unexplained than for any other racial-ethnic group when controlling for demographic and productivity characteristics. Even when adding controls for drivers of wealth, the unexplained portion of the wealth gap remains exceptionally high, providing support for factors that we are not able to control for such as racial bias and discrimination.[184]

Tulsa has been tracking equality statistics since 2018. In the Tulsa Equality Indicators 2023 Annual Report, Tulsa scored 42.37 out of 100 for equality, using 54 criteria.[185] The major categories analyzed were economic opportunity, education, housing, justice, public health, and services available. The report touts this number as it has increased steadily for the six years the report has been done, as the initial equality score was 38.69.[186]

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[183] C. Aujean Lee et al., "Oil and Blood: The Color of Wealth in Tulsa, Oklahoma -," *The Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University*, November 1, 2021, 22, https://socialequity.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/50088_Tulsa-Report_111321_print.pdf; cities evaluated were Tulsa, Washington D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Miami.
[184] Lee et al., "Oil and Blood," 35.
[185] "Tulsa Equality Indicators 2023 Annual Report," Tulsa Area United Way and the City of Tulsa, 2023, 8, https://www.cityoftulsa.org/media/24301/equality-indicators-2023-report-march-2024.pdf.
[186] "Tulsa Equality Indicators 2023 Annual Report," 10.

Although early works on the massacre are sparse, they are incredibly valuable as they are closer to the time period and closer to the event. The 2001 *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, is an invaluable tool that summarizes many important details about the massacre and made the information readily available to the interested members of the public. More recent research is much more diligent and academic. Many more historians have come to know, research, and report on the Tulsa Race Massacre. There is still much more work to be done, as many recommendations from the 2001 report have yet to be realized. Worse yet, discrimination and negative experiences for Black Tulsans in many ways are still a problem.

Although there were a few important pieces of literature shortly after the massacre, it mostly wasn't written about for many years. The Tulsa Race Riot Commission and its 2001 report made information about the massacre readily available to interested members of the public. Thanks to later research, much more information is known about the massacre, and much more is being written, discussed and filmed about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. This is where my research primarily focuses.

# Chapter IV.

## Research Methods

*I will never forget the violence of the white mob when we left our home. I still see Black men being shot, Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams. I have lived through the massacre every day.* [187]

— Mother Viola Ford Fletcher, 2021, testifying before U.S. Congress

The massacre has negatively affected the Black population of Tulsa in many ways, from financial, physical and mental illness, and other effects of the generational trauma and systematic racism that still haunts the city. This thesis analyzes what has been written about the massacre and available data. Most of the sources are from after 2001. I have also focused on how Tulsans remember the massacre, specifically, how the relationship between Black and white Tulsans is now.

Interpretive and qualitative frameworks were used to determine the state of Tulsa in regards to the history surrounding the Tulsa Race Massacre. These methods were used to analyze sources together to better understand how this event is remembered in Tulsa today. My research focus is on how the city and the citizens of Tulsa have dealt with this trauma since 2001. I am not only interested in how the history of the Tulsa Race Massacre is seen in Tulsa now, but how the event and aftermath has affected the relationship between Black and white Tulsans. I have investigated how successful the

[187] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 8.

recommendations in *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report* were or were not followed and the effects of those recommendations on the citizens of Tulsa and race relations within the city.

Multiple sources were used – primary sources including Tulsa newspapers, documentaries, journal articles, books, and other sources since 2001 to find out what recommendations were followed from the *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, as well as public sentiment about how the event has been portrayed more recently.[188] I accessed information using archives, databases, websites, libraries, museums, and historical societies over the internet.

Although there are valuable primary sources available, they all have the capacity to have limited details as well as to be biased. Newspapers are generally written for a specific audience and have innate biases. The same can be said for documentaries as well as other sources. Sources are often based on each person's perspectives, interpretations, and feelings. I have had to depend on what is said and written and have to read between the lines and make inferences on some issues.

Research has also been limited by funds and time available to be spent on this research. As I am not native to nor do I live in Tulsa and I am white, which both limit my understanding as to how this issue affects Tulsans today, particularly Black Tulsans. Additionally, access to the city of Tulsa, archives, and most importantly, its citizens have not been easily accessible to me. More research is possible and necessary to evaluate the many different aspects of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Personal interviews would help future researchers to gather much more information about how Tulsans have interpreted the massacre, its effects, and how it is remembered today.

[188] Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*.

## Chapter V.

## Current Situation

*Tulsa's city government failed to protect Black Tulsans from murder and arson on the night of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, and from discrimination in subsequent decades.*[189]

— G.T. Bynum, former Mayor of Tulsa, May 31, 2021

Discriminatory business zoning and exclusionary redlining and racist housing laws have kept Black Tulsans from securing housing.[190] Black Tulsans own homes at a rate of two and a half times less than whites and experience poverty at a rate of thirty five percent.[191] The Black Greenwood neighborhood has been allowed to become run down, as infrastructure is not invested into North Tulsa as much as it is in South Tulsa.[192] A lack of public services, jobs, exclusion from leadership positions and poor housing conditions continue to negatively affect Black people in Tulsa to the present day.[193]

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[189] Chris Polansky, "Bynum Apologizes For Massacre On Behalf Of City, Supports 'Discussion' On Reparations," Public Radio Tulsa, May 31, 2021, https://www.publicradiotulsa.org/local-regional/2021-05-31/bynum-apologizes-for-massacre-on-behalf-of-city-supports-discussion-on-reparations.
[190] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 57.
[191] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 26.
[192] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 24.
[193] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 58.

## Continued Harm to Black Tulsans

Since the 2001 report was published laying out the facts of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the effects are still visible in the community. More than 100 years have now passed since this horrible event in history. However, not enough is being done or has been done to repair the harms perpetrated on the Black community in Tulsa.



Figure 14. Mural in Greenwood depicting the Tulsa Race Massacre. *Courtesy of The Black Wall Street Times.*[194]

The report, Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventeenth Congress, First Session, Wednesday, May 19, 2021, includes transcripts of those experts and Tulsa community members who spoke in front of Congress, as well as written statements and reports. This report is very helpful and details

[194] Erika DuBose, "1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Mural Unveiling Draws Crowd," *The Black Wall Street Times*, May 28, 2021, http://theblackwallsttimes.com/2021/05/28/1921-tulsa-race-massacre-mural-unveiling-draws-crowd/.

not only the immediate effects of the massacre, but the ongoing harms caused by redlining, urban renewal, aggressive policing, and the lingering and lasting effects of these and other structural forms of racism.[195]

The events of the Tulsa Race Massacre have come to light with more research, books, journal articles, and films that have been produced in recent years. However, there are still gaps in the research and understanding of the lingering effects of the years of silence about the event in Tulsa on its citizens, especially in the years since the 2001 *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report* was published. I describe the results of how well Tulsa has or hasn't followed the recommendations and how Tulsa has healed since this report was published in 2001.

Many recommendations in the report were followed in one way or another. The 1921 Riot Reconciliation Act of 2001, an Oklahoma response to the 2001 report, created and provided seed funds for: 1) The Greenwood Area Redevelopment authority to help rebuild and revitalize Greenwood; 2) The Tulsa Reconciliation Education and Scholarship Program, which provided $1,000 scholarships to two seniors for each Tulsa high school, regardless of if they were descendants of the massacre; and 3) The 1921 Race Riot Memorial of Reconciliation Design Committee & John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park. However, direct reparations to survivors and descendants of the Tulsa Race Massacre were not included in the plan and have never been made.[196] Many Oklahomans were against making cash reparation payments. The main arguments against reparations were: 1) people don't feel like they should be responsible for violence that

[195] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*.
[196] Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples With Its Historical Racial Trauma* (Eakin Press, 2020), 120–23.

they didn't perpetrate; 2) they didn't want for there to be a "precedent leading to endless demands from other groups of victims;" and 3) some were concerned about "white backlash against Blacks."[197] In fact, many wealthy white business owners and leaders in the community contacted members of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission to try to dissuade them from the idea of reparations.[198] One of the commissioners that participated in the 2001 report noted, "The money [used to] build [the John Hope Franklin] Reconciliation Park would have been better spent on paying reparations to the survivors and their families."[199]

There has been a historical disconnect between city leadership and Black Tulsans. The 2016 Centennial Commission about the massacre didn't want to change the naming of the event from riot to massacre. They claimed it was not what the community wanted and wasn't representative of the community.[200] Another example of this split in views happened after the 2020 murder of George Floyd. Black Lives Matter was painted on Greenwood Avenue and the city of Tulsa covered up the writing by paving the road and calling it graffiti.[201]

## Supporting Data

Much more is known about what happened during the event and after years of research that has been done. My focus is on how the city has reconciled with this past since the 2001 *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report* has been published. Today, as in 1921, Black

[197] Jones, "Revelation Without Reparation," 251.
[198] Jones, "Revelation Without Reparation," 252.
[199] Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples With Its Historical Racial Trauma*, 119.
[200] *Triumph Over Trauma: Black Wall Street Then and Now*, (Tidal, 2021), 21:25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrfVNy4wf54.
[201] *Triumph Over Trauma: Black Wall Street Then and Now*, 42:50.

Tulsans generally live in the North, where there are high levels of poverty. There are no nearby supermarkets with fresh food. North Tulsa has a thirty-three percent poverty rate vs. South Tulsa's over thirteen percent. Unemployment rates are over two times higher for Black Tulsans than white. Tulsa schools are segregated, with higher poverty, absenteeism, and dropout rates in the Black neighborhoods.[202] Overall, Black people experience a twenty-seven to thirty percent "larger negative impact" from "racial discrimination" in Tulsa than their white counterparts.[203]

Black Tulsans have bank accounts at about half the rate of white Tulsans.[204] Similarly, Black home ownership is just over half the rate of white homeownership in Tulsa.[205] Black income averages less than half ($25,000) of white income ($65,000).[206] Black Tulsans typically hold six cents for every dollar that whites have.[207] A study analyzing different cities across the nation had no demographic explanation for these severe differences, other than "historical discrimination."[208]

> [C]ompared to other . . . cities that did not experience destruction to the level of the Tulsa Massacre, the Black-White wealth and income gaps and the unexplained portion of the decompositions are the largest in Tulsa. Our results provisionally suggest that past exposure to racial violence can have long-term effects on the economic outcomes of the affected groups decades later. [209]

[202] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 20.
[203] William A. Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities: A Century After the 1921 Tulsa Massacre," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 45, no. 2 (2024): 270, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-023-09938-4.
[204] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, December 2021, 25, https://racepowerpolicy.org/color-of-wealth/.
[205] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," 30.
[206] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," 37.
[207] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," 40.
[208] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 256.
[209] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 256.

Across the nation, whites generally have "six times the per capita wealth of Black Americans" and "differential access to housing, employment, education, and financial services."[210] In Tulsa whites, have a whopping "eleven times more wealth that black households." [211] The median wealth for Black Tulsan households is $5,000, while whites is $78,005.[212] Inheritance rates for white Tulsans is thirty three percent, while the same for Blacks is only fifteen percent.[213] Entrepreneurship rates for white Tulsans is six and a half times more for whites that Blacks.[214] A journal article proclaimed that the

> differences in wealth between Black and White households cannot be explained by observable characteristics alone. Our results support the argument that unexplained factors such as discrimination, prejudice, or racial bias (systematic or not) are important in driving the Black-White wealth gap in Tulsa.[215]

In addition, "racial violence" has a negative effect on "property values, and employment and income."[216]

Perhaps more disturbing than the financial discrepancies, there is an up to fourteen-year difference in life expectancy for Black and white Tulsans.[217] There is no hospital in North Tulsa, even though there was one before the massacre. This life expectancy can be attributed to lack of "access to adequate healthcare."[218] The North Tulsa area lacks sufficient local grocery stores and limits many Black residents' access to fresh and healthy food.[219]

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[210] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 256.
[211] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 257.
[212] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 261.
[213] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 262.
[214] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 262.
[215] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 270.
[216] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 259.
[217] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 31.
[218] *Greenwood Is Still Burning*, directed by Justice For Greenwood Foundation, 2024, 22:23, 28:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsntELVEdc8.
[219] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 32.

Black Tulsans are more negatively affected by criminal debt and higher and more aggressive policing.[220] Immediately following the massacre, aggressive policing policies for Black citizens was ordered.[221] "Oklahoma has one of the highest incarceration rates in the United States and possibly in the world."[222] Black Tulsans experience double the rates of incarceration exposure then white Tulsans.[223] And, incarceration rates for Black Tulsans is two times as likely.[224]

> Black people, even regardless of wealth or poverty, disproportionately receive aggressive treatment by police. … Black people nearly all had personal experiences of abusive policing, ranging from extreme violence towards themselves or family members, to more mundane harmful interactions like unnecessary traffic stops, coercive searches and intimidating encounters.[225]

Black Tulsans are "shot and beaten by police three to four times more than whites."[226] In 2016, Terence Crutcher, a Black Tulsan, was shot and killed by a white Tulsa police officer. His sister, Dr. Tiffany Crutcher's heartbreaking words show how the legacy of the massacre is still relevant to the treatment of Black Tulsans when she said that her brother was "killed with his hands in the air at the hands of the same police department that deputized Klansmen."[227] In addition to these problems Black people

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[220] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 20–21.
[221] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 53.
[222] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," 23.
[223] Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, "Color of Wealth," 23.
[224] Darity et al., "Racial Disparities in Family Income, Assets, and Liabilities," 262.
[225] Human Rights Watch, "'Get on the Ground!': Policing, Poverty, and Racial Inequality in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Case Study of US Law Enforcement," Human Rights Watch, September 12, 2009, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/09/12/get-ground-policing-poverty-and-racial-inequality-tulsa-oklahoma/case-study-us.
[226] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 26.
[227] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, directed by Justice for Greenwood Foundation, 2024, 14:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAAoe_jJcFg.

encounter with law enforcement, it is worth taking note that Tulsa devotes about a third of its annual budget to their police department.[228]

Education for Black Tulsans is also an important issue and is not equal to the educational opportunities in white neighborhoods. The education problem in Tulsa extends from Oklahoma's overall funding issues. The highly segregated communities in Tulsa result in highly segregated schools, with majority Black schools performing more negatively. Schools in Black neighborhoods tend to have higher levels of poverty, more attendance problems, two and a half times higher rate of school suspensions, and higher dropout rates.[229]

## Urban Renewal – Urban Removal

Many Tulsans rebuilt in the aftermath of the massacre. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, many neighborhoods were bulldozed – many remaining vacant to this day, and a highway was built right through the Greenwood neighborhood and business district.[230] Redlining and expressways built through Black neighborhoods further damaged the Black community and its capacity for wealth building. [231]

Over 1,000 homes and businesses in Tulsa, with the Greenwood neighborhood being hit particularly hard were torn down and reused by urban renewal programs, by use of eminent domain. Locals often call this destruction of property and community "urban removal."[232] Highways were built in and around the Greenwood neighborhood as part of

[228] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 36.
[229] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 35.
[230] *"Tulsa 1921*, 29:47.
[231] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 3.
[232] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 16.

this urban renewal, which cuts through the Greenwood neighborhood and "displaced many families and businesses."[233] Additional harm has been caused by redlining; thirty five percent of Tulsa is redlined in mostly "low-income and minority" areas now, leaving Black Tulsans nearly two and a half times less likely to get a mortgage loan approved.[234]

In a documentary about the massacre, Dr. Crutcher noted that "urban renewal destroyed Greenwood a second time."[235]Attorney Damario Solomon-Simmons compared Interstate 244, built in 1967, to "a confederate monument," and a "symbol of white supremacy" that was "built specifically [and] intentionally to destroy the remnants of Greenwood to create a physical barrier between Black Tulsa and white Tulsa" and that it should be removed.[236]

## Personal Reflections

In 2022, my husband and I visited Tulsa and we were interested in Greenwood as we had both found out about the Tulsa Race Massacre a few years before while watching the Watchmen TV series.[237] We first saw the many city blocks that lay completely empty where houses should stand. There are stairs and driveways in place where houses should be standing. I learned later that this was a result of urban renewal efforts decades after the massacre.

As we headed into the Greenwood business district, we saw Oklahoma State University. Close to one of the entries to the university, there was a pond with a pretty

[233] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 17–18.
[234] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 15.
[235] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, 12:50.
[236] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, 12:24.
[237] *Watchmen*.

sitting area. My husband got out to take some pictures and realized there were small plaques embedded in the sidewalk he had been walking over. He looked down the sidewalk and realized there were so many, and each one represented a business that had been destroyed during the massacre. Each plaque named the business that was destroyed and stated whether the business reopened or not. There were so many plaques up and down the sidewalk and we found out later that they are located all throughout the Greenwood district. My husband took pictures and video walking down the sidewalk as I drove next to him. As we got closer to Greenwood Cultural Center and Vernon AME Church that was across the street, a man from the church noticed us and called my husband over. The man had been giving food to homeless people and offered for us to come in and get a bite to eat with him and offered us a tour of the church.

I had done some research about the massacre before arriving, so I knew about this church. It had been destroyed down to the basement during the massacre. This tour was very emotional for both of us. Our guide showed us some physical scars on the building from when the church was burned during the massacre, such as a pillar that showed physical damage from fire. We could see the damage and feel it with our hands. We also saw what was the kitchen at the time, where many people hid during the massacre. The church had been working on a partial remodel in 2021 when the smell of smoke halted construction. Some of the bricks found during the remodel still smelled of smoke from the fire 100 years before. We observed the scars of the massacre inside Vernon AME Church and all over Greenwood and the uncomfortableness, heaviness, and uneasiness in the air was palpable. We also saw the resolve of Greenwood residents.

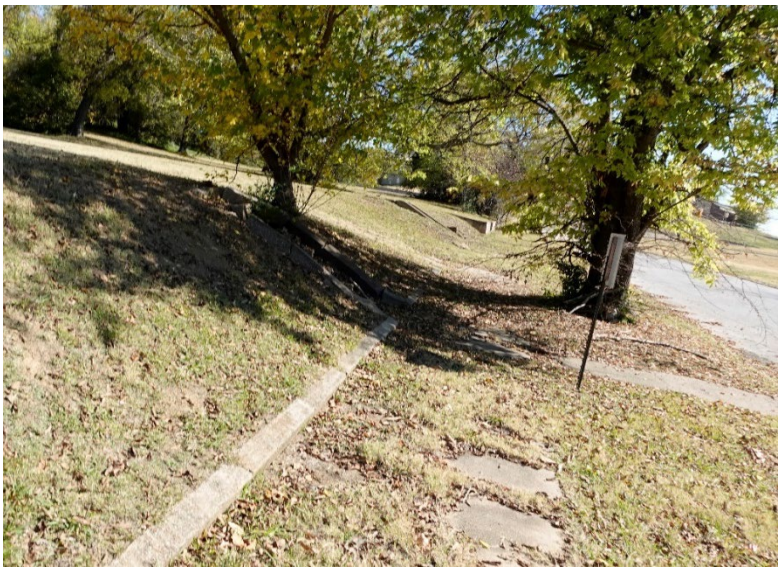


Figure 15. Sidewalk and Stairs leading to where houses should be standing.

*This is just one street view in North Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood. There are blocks of empty lots like these where houses should be standing. Courtesy of Vee Spikes II.*[238]

One very interesting thing our guide showed us was the ledger book that kept track of all the donations recorded to rebuild the church. The original was professionally restored and preserved under special protective glass. A duplicate copy was made that can be looked through. The book recorded donations that were made in varying amounts from 25 cents, 50 cents, one dollar, etc. Some who did not have money to donate brought bricks instead. The church started rebuilding shortly after the massacre. To me, this shows the tenacity and sense of community that Greenwood exudes – the courage to rebuild and take care of each other that continues to this day.[239]

[238] Vee Spikes, *Sidewalk and Stairs Leading to Empty Lots*, October 2022.
[239] Leroy H. Alfred, "Interview and Tour of Vernon AME Church with Church Member," October 2022.




Figure 16. Plaque noting the destruction of Vernon AME church in Tulsa.

*There are plaques like these all over the Greenwood neighborhood that tell the businesses that were destroyed during the massacre and whether or not the business reopened afterwards. Courtesy of Vee Spikes II.*[240]

This past May 31 and June 1, 2025, was the 104th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre. There were many celebratory events held in Tulsa to commemorate the anniversary, collectively advertised as the Black Wall Street Legacy Festival 2025.[241] I was able to attend one of the events on Sunday, June 1, 2025, at the Greenwood Cultural Center. The event, titled The Road to Repair event, was hosted by Tulsa Mayor Monroe Nichols, Tulsa's first Black mayor. There were hundreds of people in attendance – many of whom were descendants of survivors or of those killed during the Tulsa Race Massacre. The last two living survivors were in attendance as well, Mother Viola Ford Fletcher and Mother Leslie Benningfield Randle, 111 and 110 years old respectively. I felt such a wave of emotions come over me, realizing I was in the midst of the last two known survivors and so many descendants of the horrific crimes that happened in 1921.

[240] Spikes, Vee, *Photo of Plaque for Vernon AME Church in Sidewalk*, October 2022.
[241] "Black Wall Street Legacy Festival," accessed June 13, 2025, https://www.blackwallstreetlegacyfest.com/?fbclid=IwY2xjawK5NbNleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETF4VjA5RlJIWUdWMFo0ZU5PAR4Zoc9nLla3S_6EhFfglzfn9anMlArm800kVkXegvJJ4Xf0dX5UC54Vt49NEw_aem_KwG31Ku2w1cFcab6beuSxQ.

During the event, the pastor who was emceeing reminded everyone who was a descendant to access free money that was available through the scholarship programs that are in place. A woman sitting next to me proclaimed, "It ain't free!"[242]

I arrived at Greenwood Cultural Center early before the Road to Repair event started. When one of the massacre survivors arrived, she was accompanied by two security guards. I didn't think a lot about this then, but I did take note of it. After the event was over, I saw some of the speakers at the event taking photos with one of the survivors of the massacre in a smaller room that was off to the side. There was a young white man, who appeared out of place. He mumbled under his breath and walked out. There was an uneasiness in the room and talk of security between some of the organizers of the event. Even after all the time I have spent researching this horrible event, I realized that my own white privilege had blinded me to the facts that that there might still be white people in Tulsa today who may want to inflict harm on Black Tulsans, and specifically to massacre survivors and descendants.

One of the events for the 104th anniversary of the massacre was a candlelight vigil held at the Greenwood Rising museum. Fox 23 News in Tulsa made a Facebook post about the vigil. There were hostile comments on the posting, which may appear to be subtle to an outsider, but would be very obvious to Tulsans and those familiar with the intricacies of the massacre and how it is remembered. One of the comments read, "That's nice that they had a vigil for the white and black people that perished during the riot," while another read, "Tulsa race riots. Corrected your political headline."[243]

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[242] *Road to Repair Event*.
[243] "FOX23 News - The Greenwood Rising History Center Hosted a Candlelight Vigil on Sunday in Honor of the Lives Lost during the 1921 Race Massacre," Facebook, June 1, 2025,

# Chapter VI.

# Reparations

*The deplorable event is the greatest wound Tulsa's civic pride has ever received and every right thinking man and woman in the city, black and white, is now doing everything possible to heal the wound as quickly as may be… and as quickly as possible rehabilitation will take place and reparation made.*[244]

— Tulsa Regional Chamber Minutes from June 2, 1921

Reparations were in the public discussion from the very beginning. Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce minutes from just a day or two after the massacre stated, "Tulsa feels intensely humiliated and standing in the shadow of this great tragedy pledges its every effort to wiping out the stain at the earliest possible moment and punishing those guilty of bringing the disgrace and disaster to this city."[245] Early attempts for compensation from insurance companies and the city were dismissed.

## Early Attempts to Block Assistance

A June 3, 1921 newspaper article titled "Plan to Move Negroes into New District" touted the purposeful effort to repurpose Black owned land instead of helping Greenwood residents rebuild.[246] Shortly after the massacre, further discussions were had about using

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https://www.facebook.com/fox23news/posts/the-greenwood-rising-history-center-hosted-a-candlelight-vigil-on-sunday-in-hono/1248841383272572/.

[244] "Tulsa Regional Chamber Donates Minutes from 1921 to Greenwood Cultural Center," 147.

[245] "Tulsa Regional Chamber Donates Minutes from 1921 to Greenwood Cultural Center," 147.

[246] Elizabeth M Burton, "Tulsa Wealth Disparity: The Political Legacy of the 1921 Race Massacre" (Macalester College, 2021), 5.

the land for railroads and businesses on the land where homes and businesses were destroyed.[247] These and later efforts were successful in limiting Black Tulsan's ability to rebuild. Before the massacre, there were 600 Black owned businesses in Greenwood and now there are only twenty-six.[248]

While some assistance efforts within the city were genuine, others had insidious agendas. Outside of the Red Cross, help for Black Tulsans from the white community was minimal.[249] Out of state donations were rebuked as city leaders said they would take care of their own city.[250] A committee was set up in early June to "[bring] Tulsa back to normalcy," including "formulat[ing] a plan of reparation" to reconstruct destroyed homes and help families recover.[251] However, this committee did not raise nor accept funds or any other donations.[252]

In addition, the committee members helped to lower the real estate value of Black owned properties so that they might be sold at below market value to white Tulsans.[253] In a similar effort to thwart Black reconstruction, a city fire ordinance was passed which made it nearly impossible for Black Tulsans to rebuild their homes. A June 4th 1921 Tulsa Tribune editorial read "Such a district as the old "N***town" must never be allowed in Tulsa again."[254] On June 14, 1921, Tulsa's mayor said that it would be better if the burned Black district was used for railroads.[255]

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[247] Netisha Currie, "'The Responsibility Is Placed in Your Hands Entirely' – Red Cross Relief after the Tulsa Race Massacre," *Rediscovering Black History*, May 26, 2021, https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2021/05/26/red-cross-relief-after-the-tulsa-massacre/.
[248] *"Tulsa 1921*, 31:36.
[249] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 79.
[250] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 82.
[251] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 82–83.
[252] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 83.
[253] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 84.
[254] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 15.
[255] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 84–85.

The Sunday following the massacre, preachers further touted benefits of moving Black Tulsans from their land and spoke at the pulpit in church of how this event might make Tulsa better, citing "cleaner morals, higher ideals and superior citizenship."[256] One preacher noted the feeling of many white Tulsans, that "'Litte Africa' should never be rebuilt in the heart of the city" and "the most absurd thing in the world would be to rebuild it where it has stood."[257]

## Assessing Blame

A preacher who admitted to being among the crowd at the courthouse to "ascertain their motives and intention" and said he didn't notice any "spirit of mob violence" amongst the whites "but when criminal and liquor-frenzied n***ers appeared on the streets and outraged the white people of this community, the thing was off."[258] The same preacher noted "we should let them know, once and for all, in no uncertain terms, that outlaws of their own color and race [Black people] brought it upon them[selves], else a worse thing than this will happen," and noted that "there can never be anything like social equality between the two races."[259]

In some of the newly released documents, I found a message from the mayor to the commissioners in the June 14, 1921, minutes. In this message, the mayor applauds "officers both regular and special" and "good citizens" for protecting the city and placed the blame of the "negro uprising" on the "armed negroes and their followers who started

[256] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 16.
[257] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 17–18.
[258] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 17.
[259] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 17.

this trouble."[260] The mayor further said there was "no cause for this trouble," since he claimed Rowland was safe and in no way in any danger.[261]

However, many officials at the time placed responsibility for the disaster on the local government. National Guard General Barrett placed blame on the situation he found in Tulsa square on the shoulders of the city and county of Tulsa.[262] Barrett took guns from hundreds of the specially deputized citizens, as he viewed them as "suspicious characters."[263] Additionally, a former judge placed the atrocities on "a complete fall down of the city government, police authorities, and county sheriff's office, influenced by the contributory negligence of Tulsa's citizenship" and held them financially responsible for the damages [264] A June 2, 1921 newspaper article also blamed the city and county government's negligence and "the city and county is legally liable of every dollar of the damage which has been done."[265]

A U.S. Department of Justice report acknowledged that the Tulsa Race Massacre was indicative of "systematic racism, state-sanctioned brutality, and the failure of government institutions to protect victims of color," that "extinguished an entire vibrant community."[266]

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[260] City of Tulsa, "Commission Minutes May-December 1921," 33rd page, original page number 24.
[261] City of Tulsa, "Commission Minutes May-December 1921," 34th page, original page number 25.
[262] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 7.
[263] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 7.
[264] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 13.
[265] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 13.
[266] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 4.

## Responsibility

Survivors of the massacre tried to find remedy through the courts in 1921.[267] Much of who and what is owed is known due to claims filed against insurance companies, many of which are still active companies or absorbed by companies that still exist today.[268] The same can be said for funds lost at banks that are still in operation today; funds were lost due to victim's personal bank books being lost in fire. Without this proof of ownership, banks denied Black Tulsans their own money.[269]

There are specific agencies that still exist that should be held accountable for the actions perpetrated during and after the massacre: the City of Tulsa, the Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Tulsa Police Department, the Tulsa Development Authority, the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, the Board of County Commissioners for Tulsa County, and the Oklahoma Military Department.[270]

Solomon-Simmons noted that although the former mayor of Tulsa admitted, "the city and county of Tulsa, the State of Oklahoma, and the powerful Tulsa Chamber of Commerce – who are some of the perpetrators of the massacre and its 100 years of continued harm – have offered no apology, restitution, or accountability for their unjust actions."[271]

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[267] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 23.
[268] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 27.
[269] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 27.
[270] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 33.
[271] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 31.

Tulsa and the State of Oklahoma both have denied direct compensation to any surviving victims or their descendants.[272] This is stolen wealth that has directly led to disparaging quality of life differences between the Black and white communities in Tulsa.[273] One of the last survivors, Hughes Van Ellis, noted that even though many people who committed these crimes are dead, "the city and county of Tulsa, the State of Oklahoma, and the Tulsa Chamber are still responsible for making it right, because it was they who caused the massacre."[274]

Congressman Steve Cohen opened the Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Constitutional, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the Committee on the Judiciary U.S. House of Representatives titled Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre. Cohen claimed many of the effects of the massacre have been compounded by government action in the years following the massacre and that Black Tulsans "continue to suffer from the effects of the massacre."[275] Generations of white Tulsans were able to build wealth that Black Tulsans were stripped of; the positive and negative financial effects have compounded over the years.[276] Immeasurable generational wealth has been lost by survivors and descendants of the massacre..

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[272] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 3.
[273] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 3.
[274] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 17–18.
[275] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 2.
[276] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 3.

## Precedents for Reparations

According to the "Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law," victims are owed 1) restitution, including return of property, residence, liberty and employment; 2) monetary compensation for damages to include physical or mental health, lost funds, property, and opportunity; 3) rehabilitation to care for individual's healthcare, including mental health, social and legal services and support; 4) satisfaction, which means for the truth about the event to be told, formal apologies, and a way to commemorate victims; and 5) guarantees that a similar event will not happen again, which may necessitate change in policies.[277]

As reported by the U.S. Department of Justice, losses equate to over thirty two million dollars in 2024.[278] However, statutes of limitations have limited the ability for courts to provide reparations.[279] The U.S. Department of Justice report noted that it is impossible to prosecute anyone for these crimes at this point due to statute of limitations and no live perpetrators or witnesses available to cross examine in court.[280]

These statutes of limitations go against international guidelines on human rights.[281] According to the Human Rights Watch,

> Under international human rights law, governments have an obligation to provide effective remedies for violations of human rights. The fact that a government abdicated its responsibility nearly 100 years ago and continued to do so in subsequent years does not absolve it of that responsibility today—especially when failure to address the harm and related action and inaction results in further harm, as it has in Tulsa. Like

[277] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 53–54.
[278] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 51.
[279] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 54.
[280] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 4.
[281] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 54.

> so many other places across the United States marred by similar incidents of racial violence, these harms stem from the legacy of slavery.[282]

There are precedents in the United States on how to publicly care for victims of mass violence in other historical atrocities. Victims and descendants of the Tulsa Race Massacre deserve the same recognition and reparations as people of Japanese descent who were held in internment camps, holocaust victims, victims of the September 11th attacks and victims and survivors of a similar race massacre that happened in Rosewood, Florida.[283] Representative Don Ross noted in the 2001 report that over $5,000 in claims were paid to reimburse for "guns and ammunition" that was stolen during the massacre.[284] Two white people were given payments after the massacre, showing there is a precedent for reparation payments from the Tulsa Race Massacre itself.[285]

Even though a lot of funds have been raised, including thirty million dollars for a museum and Pathway to Hope walkway, none of these funds have been given to any victims or descendants of the massacre.[286] One thing that is particularly disturbing, especially to survivors and descendants, is the fact that the City of Tulsa and white Tulsans are profiting off of the massacre by way of cultural tourism in the city without any type of compensation to the those who were most negatively affected.[287] In addition, many of the city's actions to help Greenwood economically are seen more as

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[282] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 2.
[283] *Why the Tulsa Race Massacre Is So Important to the Reparations Debate*, directed by VICE News, 2021, 13, 17:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4FcpT52hKs.
[284] "The Beyond Apology Report," The Beyond Apology Commission, January 15, 2024, 2.
[285] The Beyond Apology Commission, "The Beyond Apology Report," 2.
[286] *Why the Tulsa Race Massacre Is So Important to the Reparations Debate*, 14:36.
[287] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, 22:05.

gentrification of the area, which makes the historically Black Greenwood community inaccessible for Black Tulsans and continues to push them further away.[288]

## Recent Work Towards Reparations

Much recent work has been done by local community agencies to push the narrative and call for reparations and repair for the massacre survivors, descendants, and the Black Greenwood neighborhood and citizens of Tulsa. In 2021, Tulsa City Council passed Resolution 20113, which acknowledged "significant disparities between Black and white Tulsans; stating the [council] members apologies for actions perpetrated by others during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and subsequent segregation, and discrimination practices" and mandated a committee be formed to get community input about ideas for healing Tulsa. [289] The Beyond Apology Commission was created from this mandate and "a series of community conversations rooted in education on what repair and reparations in Tulsa, OK should look like."[290] This was achieved by four separate three hour meetings open to the public in 2023 in which specific metrics were discussed getting feedback from community members.[291]

Justice for Greenwood, a community organization spearheaded by Solomon-Simmons, created a plan to initiate healing and reparations for Greenwood including: a victim's compensation fund; a descendent scholarship program; a descendent contracting preference program, return of land to descendants; an opening of criminal investigations for murders associated with the massacre; a grant program for churches that survived the

[288] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 47–48.
[289] "Beyond Apology," Beyond Apology, accessed June 14, 2025, https://www.beyondapology.org.
[290] Beyond Apology, "Beyond Apology."
[291] Beyond Apology, "Beyond Apology."

massacre; a program to give preference for employment to descendants; a hospital to be built in North Tulsa; the creation of an official holiday to commemorate the massacre; tax abatement for descendants; business support for descendants; an audit of land owned by the city to see if it was obtained illegally after the massacre; and for public records about the massacre to be released.[292]

Justice for Greenwood has filed lawsuits attempting to help survivors and descendants from the Tulsa Race Massacre receive compensation and other forms of reparations to address continuing harms. The case was brought to the Oklahoma Supreme Court on June 24, 2024, which was dismissed. Eight days later a petition was filed with the Oklahoma Supreme Court for a rehearing on the case.[293] Solomon-Simmons and Justice for Greenwood were also instrumental in demanding the federal investigation completed by the U.S. Department of Justice in January 2025.[294]

The Beyond Apology Report identified eight priorities: education; direct payments to survivors and descendants; community and economic development: home ownership for survivors and descendants; stolen land to be returned; healthcare initiatives; policy changes, including adopting changes requested in the lawsuit and in the 2001 report; and building cultural wealth.[295]

Mayor Nichols established June 1 as a city-wide holiday to commemorate the massacre.[296] On this first holiday, June 1, 2025, Nichols made a ground breaking announcement that the City of Tulsa is establishing the Greenwood Trust, a "private,

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[292] "What Is Project Greenwood?," Project Greenwood, accessed June 14, 2025, https://projectgreenwood.org/.
[293] The Beyond Apology Commission, "The Beyond Apology Report."
[294] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, 21:43.
[295] The Beyond Apology Commission, "The Beyond Apology Report," 39–42.
[296] Monroe Nichols, "Road to Repair," City of Tulsa, June 1, 2025, 3, https://www.cityoftulsa.org/roadtorepair.

charitable Trust" that will raise and invest $105 million dollars to facilitate the Road to Repair plan.[297] The trust focuses on assistance to descendants of Greenwood and will raise twenty four million dollars to be used for housing; sixty million dollars for "cultural and historic preservation;" and twenty one million dollars for "scholarships, small business grants [and] no-interest business loans."[298] This plan is set to raise private funds and be set in working order by June 1, 2026.[299] In addition, the mayor announced the release of over 45,000 documents related to the massacre that have not been previously made public.[300]

Mayor Nichols also announced the continuation of the 1921 Graves Investigation. Almost 200 new graves have been found and many of them are being analyzed using DNA and genealogy tools in order to "bring closure to families of the victims."[301] Nichols said "our effort is not to assign blame" but "is about reconciliation, repair, renewal, and righteousness."[302] Many of these actions taken by the City of Tulsa's Road to Repair initiative are direct recommendations from Justice for Greenwood's Project Greenwood plan and the Beyond Apology Commission's Beyond Apology Report.[303]

[297] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 3.
[298] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4.
[299] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4.
[300] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4.
[301] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4.
[302] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4, 5.
[303] Project Greenwood, "What Is Project Greenwood?"; The Beyond Apology Commission, "The Beyond Apology Report."

# Chapter VII.

# Conclusion

*There is not one Tulsan, regardless of their skin color, who wouldn't be better off today had the Massacre not happened or if generations before had done the work to restore what was lost.*[304]

— Tulsa Mayor Monroe Nichols, June 1, 2025

Why did it take so long for the Tulsa Race Massacre to be reported on publicly? The City and County of Tulsa, the State of Oklahoma, newspapers, schools and the general public didn't talk about the event or flat out denied its existence.[305] White fear of legal accountability and legal and financial liability likely had a big impact on these matters. Lost, destroyed, and/or hidden away records also contributed to the inaction.[306] Black survivors didn't talk about the massacre to avoid the trauma and out of "fear of retaliation."[307] There was little to no investigation and systematic cover up, denial of insurance claims, continued racism, and government failure to repair the harm to Black Tulsans.[308]

The Tulsa Race Massacre was one of the worst tragedies in United States history, perpetrated on Black citizens of Tulsa, who were then blamed for their own

[304] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 2.
[305] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 38; Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of, *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report*, vii; Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 71.
[306] Nichols, "Road to Repair," 4.
[307] Jones, "Revelation Without Reparation," 249.
[308] Messer et al., "Official Frames and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921," 393.

victimization.[309] The scars of generational trauma and financial harm were left on families who were abused, murdered, and abandoned by their community.[310] Black Tulsans were treated as second class citizens and those with limited resources were unable to rebuild their homes and businesses.[311]

This event was hidden and covered up for so many years. Even though the massacre is much more well known in Tulsa and in the country now than in the past, there is still a lack of reparations and accountability to the survivors and descendants whose lives were forever changed in very tangible and long lasting ways.[312] Family members, homes, and generational wealth, along with a sense of overall well-being was lost.[313] Even though the city promised to do whatever they could to make these families whole inasmuch as they could, little has actually been done to this day.[314]

The City and County of Tulsa, along with the State of Oklahoma are responsible for the devastation that occurred.[315] The fact that no one has been held responsible is disturbing. Although it is most likely that all of the perpetrators of this event are deceased, there has been over 100 years available to hold these people accountable for their actions.[316]

Starting very shortly after the massacre, white Tulsans attempted to take land from Black Tulsans and to do whatever it took to make it difficult for Black Tulsans to

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[309] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 49.
[310] Bosserman, *Review and Evaluation Tulsa Race Massacre*, 54.
[311] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 84–85.
[312] Malveaux, "A Taxonomy of Silencing"; Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 13.
[313] Malveaux, "A Taxonomy of Silencing."
[314] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 82–83; "Tulsa Regional Chamber Donates Minutes from 1921 to Greenwood Cultural Center," 147.
[315] Brophy and Kennedy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, xvii–xx.
[316] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 31.

rebuild.[317] Urban renewal, in the 1960s and 1970s negatively impacted Black Tulsans and the Greenwood neighborhood by building a highway right through it and leaving many city blocks of what should be housing neighborhoods sitting as empty lots.[318] Sidewalks and driveways point to where houses should be standing. Redlining and systematic racist policies further and continually limit Black Tulsans ability to thrive.[319] The harms to survivors, descendants, Greenwood businesses and Black Tulsans is still felt.

Funds have been raised by the city to pay for a state-of-the-art museum about the massacre, but to date, no reparations have been paid to any survivor or descendants to ameliorate the pain and suffering endured as a direct result of the massacre.[320] Millions of dollars have been raised to promote tourism specifically regarding the Tulsa Race Massacre without regard to those who the massacre personally affected.[321] This event and the resulting negative effects can no longer be ignored.

Black Tulsans endure many hardships today, including a much higher poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rates. Additionally, they tend to have lower income, life expectancy, and access to grocery stores and hospitals.[322] It is important to note how many of these things the Black community is lacking that had been in place before the massacre. In addition, Black Tulsans receive disproportionately more negative and sometimes violent encounters and treatment by police.[323]

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[317] Ellsworth and Grimes, *Death in a Promised Land*, 71.
[318] *Greenwood Is Still Burning (Extended Version)*, 12:08, 12:50; "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 16–18.
[319] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 57.
[320] *Why the Tulsa Race Massacre Is So Important to the Reparations Debate*, 14:36.
[321] *Triumph Over Trauma: Black Wall Street Then and Now*, 21:25.
[322] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 20; United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 26.
[323] United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 26; Human Rights Watch, "'Get on the Ground!'"

Black Tulsans are owed reparations by the City of Tulsa, the County of Tulsa, the State of Oklahoma, the Tulsa Chamber of Commers, banks, and insurance companies.[324] Survivors and descendants of this massacre face continued financial, mental and physical health harm and generational trauma.[325]

The Tulsa Race Massacre is more known and talked about now than in the past. It is now being taught in Oklahoma school curriculum.[326] Amazingly, there are still two living survivors that are well over 100 years old. My recommendation is that the survivors are paid immediately and work towards reparations for descendants very soon. There are too many other examples of reparations given to conclude that reparations are not only appropriate but achievable.

There are many different things that can be done to help heal Tulsa's wounds. Tulsans, Oklahomans, and Americans can look inside themselves to see how they might personally be able to help heal the wounds left by the Tulsa Race Massacre. The theme I kept hearing at the Road to Repair event on the 104th anniversary of the massacre was that no one can do everything, but we can all do something. Finding out more about the massacre is the first step for many people. Since a lot of people still don't know about the massacre, sharing the details of this horrific event with others is important.

In addition to the steps the City of Tulsa is now taking, much can be done to help Greenwood heal. The identification of perpetrators from known photos or documents would provide a measure of closure as well. So many photos were taken of the massacre

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[324] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 2; United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*, 27, 31.
[325] Human Rights Watch, "'Get on the Ground!'"; United States Congress House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, *Continuing Injustice*; "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 15.
[326] "The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 38.

as it was happening and the destruction afterwards. Even though many whites who participated in the massacre were photographed, none have been publicly identified. Photographs show whites standing casually over dead bodies, holding guns, and taking pictures in front of destroyed buildings. Despite eyewitness accounts claiming to see the dead bodies of women and children in the streets, no photographs portraying this have been made public.[327] Many of these photos were made into postcards that were then shared with many others.[328] Prominent "lynching culture" of the time argues that participants in the massacre likely viewed themselves as "defenders of white womanhood" and "exemplars of white masculine courage."[329] Even though these people cannot be held responsible now, identifying whites in photographs could be part of the steps towards healing.[330]

In cooperation with current Tulsa Mayor Nichols Road to Repair plan, donations can be made to the trust. Businesses, banks, insurance companies, families, and individuals can honestly evaluate, look closely and investigate to see whether they might have benefited in some way from land, funds, or in some other way from the tragedy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. At this point, the U.S. Department of Justice report has made it clear that it is near impossible due to statute of limitations and other legal limitations to hold any individual or entity legally responsible for damages due to the amount of time that has passed and limited laws available at the time of the disaster. Should entities honestly evaluate their culpability in the event, they could make voluntary

[327] Brown, *Is Tulsa Sane?*, 7.
[328] Karlos K. Hill, "Where Did Images of the Tulsa Race Massacre Come From?," PBS, May 27, 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/t-town-tulsa-race-massacre-photographs/.
[329] Hill, "Where Did Images of the Tulsa Race Massacre Come From?"
[330] Hill, "Where Did Images of the Tulsa Race Massacre Come From?"

donations and/or restitution towards the City of Tulsa's new trust. The same could be said for families and individuals who are so inclined to take a heartfelt and honest look at how their generational wealth might have been impacted by the Tulsa Race Massacre. People can take a deep look at their family's records and admit responsibility where they can. These potential good faith donations and reparations and public acknowledgements could be very meaningful and healing to the Tulsa community.

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