

Tulsa Race Riot

**A Report by the Oklahoma Commission
to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921**

February 28, 2001

COMMISSIONERS:

Currie Ballard, Coyle
 Dr. Bob Blackburn, Oklahoma City
 Joe Burns, Tulsa
 Vivian Clark, Tulsa
 Rep. Abe Deuschendorf, Lawton
 Eddie Faye Gates, Tulsa
 Jim Lloyd, Tulsa
 Sen. Robert Milacak, Waukomis
 Jimmie L. White, Jr., Checotah

Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921

**CHAIRMAN:**

T. D. "Pete" Churchwell, Tulsa

SPONSORS:

Sen. Maxine Horner, Tulsa
 Rep. Don Ross, Tulsa

ADVISORS:

Dr. John Hope Franklin, Durham, NC
 Dr. Scott Ellsworth, Portland, OR

February 21, 2001

Honorable Frank Keating
 Governor of Oklahoma
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Honorable Susan Savage
 Mayor of Tulsa
 Tulsa, Oklahoma 74119

Honorable Larry Adair
 Speaker of the House of Representatives
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Members of the City Council
 City of Tulsa
 Tulsa, Oklahoma 74119

Honorable Stratton Taylor
 President Pro Tempore of the Senate
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Dear Sir or Madam:

Pursuant to House Joint Resolution 1035 (1997), as amended, I have the honor to transmit here with the Final Report of Findings and Recommendations of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission. The report includes the commission's findings on each specific item assigned it by statute, and it also explains the methods and processes that led to those findings. In addition, the commission has exercised the option, granted it by law, to make recommendations concerning reparations related to the tragedy.

This Commission fully understands that it is neither judge nor jury. We have no binding legal authority to assign culpability, to determine damages, to establish a remedy, or to order either restitution or reparations. However, in our interim report in February, 2000 the majority of Commissioners declared that reparations to the historic Greenwood community in real and tangible form would be good public policy and do much to repair the emotional and physical scars of this terrible incident in our shared past. We listed several recommended courses of action including direct payments to riot survivors and descendants; a scholarship fund available to students affected by the riot; establishment of an economic development enterprise zone in the historic Greenwood district; a memorial for the riot victims.

In the final report is sued to day, the majority of Commissioners continue to support these recommendations. While each Commissioner has their own opinion about the type of reparations that they would advocate, the majority has no question about the appropriateness of reparations. The recommendations are not intended to be all inclusive, but rather to give policy makers a sense of the Commission's feelings about reparations and a starting place for the creation of their own ideas.

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Prologue

By State Representative Don Ross

Personal belongings and household goods had been removed from many homes and piled in the streets. On the steps of the few houses that remained sat feeble and gray Negro men and women and occasionally a small child. The look in their eyes was one of dejection and supplication. Judging from their attitude, it was not of material consequence to them whether they lived or died. Harmless themselves, they apparently could not conceive the brutality and fiendishness of men who would deliberately set fire to the homes of their friends and neighbors and just as deliberately shoot them down in their tracks.

Tulsa Daily World, June 2, 1921

A mob destroyed 35-square-blocks of the African American Community during the evening of May 31, through the afternoon of June 1, 1921. It was a tragic, infamous moment in Oklahoma and the nation's history. The worse civil disturbance since the Civil War. In the aftermath of the death and destruction the people of our state suffered from a fatigue of faith — some still search for a statue of limitation on morality, attempting to forget the longevity of the residue of injustice that at best can leave little room for the healing of the heart. Perhaps this report, and subsequent humanitarian recovery events by the governments and the good people of the state will extract us from the guilt and confirm the commandment of a good and just God — leaving the deadly deeds of 1921 buried in the call for redemption, historical correctness, and repair. Then we can proudly sing together:

“We know we belong to this land.
“And the land we belong to is grand,
and when we say, ay yippy yi ki yea,
“We’re only saying, you’re doing fine
Oklahoma.”

“Oklahoma, you’re O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A,
Oklahoma OK.”

Hopefully with this report, the feeling of the state will be quickened, the conscience of the brutal city will be ignited, the hypocrisy of the nation will be exposed, and the crimes against God and man denounced. Oklahoma can set such an example. It was Abolitionist Frederick Douglass who reminded a callous nation that “[A] government that can give liberty in its Constitution ought to have the power to protect liberty, and impose civilized behavior in its administration.”

Tulsa’s Race Relations Are Ceremonial

In the 80 years hence, survivor, descendants, and a bereaved community seeks that administration in some action akin to justice. Tulsa’s race relations are more ceremonial — liken to a bad marriage, with spouses living in the same quarters but housed in different rooms, each escaping one another by perpetuating a separateness of silence. The French political historian Alexis d’Tocqueville noted, “Once the majority has irrevocably decided a question, it is no longer discussed. This is because the majority is a power that does not respond well to criticism.”

I first learn about the riot when I was about 15 from Booker T. Washington High School teacher and riot survivor W.D. Williams. In his slow, laboring voice Mr. W.D. as he was fondly known, said on the evening of May 31, 1921, his school graduation, and prom were canceled. Dick Rowland, who had dropped out of high school a few years before to become rich in the lucrative trade of shining shoes, was in jail, accused of raping a white woman Sarah Page, “on a public elevator in broad daylight.” After Rowland was arrested, angry white vigilantes gathered at the courthouse intent on lynching the shine boy. Armed blacks integrated the mob to protect him. There was a scuffle between a black and a white man, a shot rang out. The crowd scattered. It was about 10:00 a.m. A race riot had broken out. He said blacks defended

their community for awhile, “but then the airplanes came dropping bombs.” All of the black community was burned to the ground and 300 people died.”

More annoyed than bored, I leaped from my chair and spoke: “Greenwood was never burned. Ain’t no 300 people dead. We’re too old for fairy tales.” Calling a teacher a liar was a capital offense Mr. W.D. snorted with a twist that framed his face with anger. He ignored my obstinacy and returned to his hyperbole. He finished his tale and dismissed the class. The next day he asked me to remain after class, and passed over a photo album with picture and post cards of Mount Zion Baptist Church on fire, the Dreamland Theater in shambles, whites with guns standing over dead bodies, blacks being marched to concentration camps with white mobs jeering, trucks loaded with caskets, and a yellowing newspaper article accounting block after block of destruction — “30, 75 even 300 dead.” Everything was just as he had described it. I was to learn later that Rowland was assigned a lawyer who was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan. “What you think, fat mouth?” Mr. W.D. asked his astonished student.

After having talked to more than 300 riot survivors over the years, I have pondered that question for 45 years. The report raises the same question Mr. W.D. asked me. I now ask the Oklahoma Legislature, the City and County of Tulsa: “What do you think?” To understand the full context of Mr. W.D.’s question is a travelogue of African American history, Oklahoma blacks in particular. It includes, The Seven Year War and the birth of the nation, the infamous Trail of Tears, the Civil War, the allotment of Indian Territory, statehood, segregation, black towns, and the African American on Greenwood Avenue. Each was a preponderance of the fuel that ignited the 1921 race war in Tulsa.

A bit of American history with an African-American perspective

During the Seven Year War, Indians in the Ohio Valley sided with the French against Great Britain in a losing effort. Canada and other territories were ceded to the British.

Treaties were sign with the tribes protecting their right to hold their lands. The treaties were ignore by the colonial governors. The colonies also soon discovered that rum and slaves were profitable commodities. One of the most enterprising — if unsavory — trading practices of the time was the so-called “triangular trade.” Merchants and shippers would purchase slaves off the coast of Africa for New England rum, then sell the slaves in the West Indies where they would buy molasses to bring home for sale to the local rum producers. In debt after the French and Indian War, England began to tax the colonies to pay for occupation. The measure was resisted, and the colonies began to prepare its Declaration of Independence. In an early draft, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

He (King George) has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another.

[This version was removed from the Declaration of Independence after protest from southern colonies, and planted the seed of the Civil War to come.]

The Revolutionary War was fought and a constitution was presented and approved by the colonies. It would sanction slavery and human bondage as the law of the land. Broken treaties and genocide slowly moved Indians for the Ohio Valley, while other treaties settled them in the rich farm lands of the south. The southern tribes held slaves, but also offered the runaway

sanctuary, in some case tribal membership and rights. During the administration of Andrew Jackson, a direct assault on Indian lands was launched. Phony treaties corrupts chiefs and intra-tribal rivalry would lead to warring factions, assassinations and divide the tribal leaders, instigating their removal from their southern homelands. This odyssey, during the 1830s and before, the lives of blacks and Native Americans would be linked on the infamous, cruel "Trail of Tears." On long marches under extreme duress and hardship, the trail led to present-day Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska. Indian Territory would be split by the creation of the Kansas and Nebraska territories and after the Civil War abolished in 1907 with the entrance of Oklahoma as a state. Pressed by rival chiefs many of the tribes officially sided with the Confederacy. Afterward, many former black slaves, Freeman, were registered as members of the tribes and offered sections of the Indian land allotments. After the government opened Oklahoma for settlement more blacks came seeking freedom from southern oppression and for new opportunities in the Promised Land. Of the more than 50 all black towns, more than 20 were located in the new state, the more prosperous were Boley and Langston.

Oklahoma history re-recorded

Attorney B.C. Franklin, one of the genuine heroes in the aftermath of the race war heeded the call to settle into Indian Territory. He was the father of historian Dr. John Hope Franklin, who served as consultant scholars for this report and an earlier inspiration in my inquiry of the riot. In his memoirs attorney Franklin wrote of two men, whom he called "very rich Negroes" and the "greatest leaders" — O.W. Gurley and J.B. Stradford. In 1908, Gurley, constructed the first building, a rooming house and later the home of Vernon A.M.E. Church, on a muddy trail that would become the Black Wall Street of America. According to B.C. Franklin, Gurley bought 30 or 40 acres, plotted them and had them sold to "Negroes only." Attorney Franklin's account of the settlement of Greenwood, shattered earlier notions of blacks being forced in a section of town. It now ap-

pears the division was self-imposed. "In the end," Attorney Franklin wrote, "Tulsa became one of the most sharply segregated cities in the country." One of the possible errors I find in the report is that Gurley lost \$65,000 in the riot. Indeed, he is listed in City Commission reports of having lost \$157,783. Today his fortune would be worth more than \$1 million.

J.B. Stradford, would later join Gurley on Greenwood, and build the finest hotel in the city, valued at \$75,000. Before statehood, the territory had been seen by blacks as not only the Promised Land more notably as the nation's first all-black state, E.P. McCabe was the leading advocate of all-black towns and had migrated from Kansas and founded Langston, Oklahoma. A former Kansas auditor active in Republican politics, McCabe had also become the assistant auditor of Oklahoma. He would lead a crusade to press President Benjamin Harrison into bringing "Indian Territory" into the union as an all-black state. Against that backdrop, Gurley viewed his acres as a natural urban evolution from the rural trend of organizing black towns. White Democrats prepared for the State Constitutional Convention by using the black statehood issues and racist attacks against their Republican "Nigger loving opponents." Both Democrats and Republicans would disenfranchise blacks during the balloting for control of the convention. The Democrats won and sometimes with the Ku Klux Klan as allies maintains political control of the state into the millennium. After statehood the first bill passed by the Oklahoma Legislature was the infamous 'Senate Bill One' that tightly segregated the state.

Stradford, and his friend A.J. Smitherman, publisher of the *Tulsa Star* newspaper, were brave tenacious advocates on behalf of their race. After Stradford was acquitted for violating Oklahoma Jim Crow laws, in 1912, the hotel owner filed a lawsuit in the State Supreme Court suing the Midland Valley Railroad for false imprisonment. In a narrowly interpreted decision the court opined the unconstitutionality of the Jim Crow law did not affect the right of the conductor to rely upon it. Similarly, the court rested upon a case filed by E.P. McCabe challenging Oklahoma's segregation dismissing the McCabe argument as irrelevant to the case. Four years later Stradford petitioned the Tulsa City Commission against its segregationist ordinance that "such a law

is to cast a stigma upon the colored race in the eyes of the world; and to sap the spirit of hope for justice before the law from the race itself." The Tulsa City Ordinance would remain on the books until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. From his unpublished memoirs, Stradford was accused as being an instigator of the riot, but contended he was not present. He said initially the sheriff contacted him and other black leaders for their assistance in protecting Rowland. However, when they arrived the sheriff said he could handle it and would call them when needed. Thus, the men left. The courthouse mob grew and there was no call to them for assistance. Armed and filled with moonshine, the men returned to the courthouse. According to Stradford a white man attempted to take a gun from one of the blacks "our boys shot into the crowd and a number were killed and wounded. Under the threat of lynching, Stradford escaped to Independence, Kansas and from there to Chicago, where his descendants reside to this day.

A.J. Smitherman wrote passionately about the rights of blacks from the daily newspaper columns. In 1917, the brave and fearless publisher traveled to Dewey, Oklahoma in the middle of a race riot where a white mob had pulled the accused from the jail, lynched him, and burned the homes and businesses in the black section. His investigation led to the arrest of 36 white men including the mayor. In 1918, he stood with black farmers and local law officers in Bristow averting a lynching of an innocent black man accused of raping a white woman. Smitherman was involved in similar incidents in Beggs, Okmulgee, Haskell, and Muskogee, Oklahoma. He and Stradford were among the leading black citizens arrested for causing the riot. Both fled. Smitherman died in Buffalo, New York after publishing newspapers there and in Springfield, Massachusetts. His descendants now live in Florida and North Carolina. From my view there were black and whites that stood gallantly in face of a hostile community. Among those were Judge L. J. Martin who called for repatriations and set out to raise \$500,000 from the city's wealthy elite, only to be ousted by the mayor from the city's

welfare committee; Cyrus Avery, treasurer of the relief committee who raised funds to house and feed the black refugees; Maurice Willow, the Red Cross director whose work saved many lives and through his effort food, shelter, medical and hospital care was provided; Franklin, Stradford, Gurley, and Smitherman, aforementioned in his report.

From my Memories of early oral histories of blue suits and Klan sheets

"I teach U.S. History and those decisions that brought us to the riot," Seymour Williams my high school history professor said to me 45 years ago. He and W.D. Williams (no relations) for many years tutored me on their experience and prodded others of their generation to tell me the story. "The riot isn't known much by young teachers. Many were born after the riot and it was banned by book publishers, as much as U.S. history about blacks and slavery. I could teach a course on just what has been left out of history." Why the silence in our community? The old man then introduced this student to his assessment. "Blacks lost everything. They were afraid it could happen again and there was no way to tell the story. The two Negro newspapers were bombed. With the unkept promises, they were too busy just trying to make it." He added, "There were a lot of big shot rednecks at that courthouse who ran the city and still do. Sinclair Oil Company owned one of the airplanes used to drop fire bombs on people and buildings." Polite white people want to excuse what happened as being caused by trouble-making blacks and white trash ruffians. "Nope," he said, noting that blacks did not like to talk about the riot. "The killers were still running loose and they're wearing blue suits as well as Klan sheets." During that time, whites seeking opportunity could not circulate among the rich and powerful without Klan credentials. "Hell, Robert Hudson, the lawyer assigned to Rowland was a charter member of the Klan. In the aftermath of the riot, where could Negroes find justice?" He further noted, "Lot of people were killed. Many, many Negroes." I only vividly remember the stories of Professor and Mr. W.D. The other 300 or more voices have blended in to one essay. Still I hold all their collective anger, fear, and hope.

Reparation?

Reparations: It happened. There was murder, false imprisonment, forced labor, a cover-up, and local precedence for restitution. While the official damage was estimated at \$1.5 million, the black community filed more than \$4 million in claims. All were denied. However, the city commission did approved two claims exceeding \$5,000 “for guns and ammunition taken during the racial disturbance of June 1.” In his memoirs Stradford recalled the guards acted like wild men. “The militia had been ordered to take charge, but instead they joined the rioter.” His view is supported by action of the governor in a concerted effort to rid the National Guard of the Ku Klux Klan in 1922. The preponderance of the information demands what was promised. Whether it was Ku Klux Klan instigated, land speculator’s conspiracy, inspired by yellow journalism, or random acts, it happened. Justice

demands a closure as it did with Japanese Americans and Holocaust victims of Germany. It is a moral obligation. Tulsa was likely the first city in the to be bombed from the air. There was a precedent of payments to at least two whites victims of the riot. The issue today is what government entity should provide financial repair to the survivors and the condemned community that suffered under vigilante violence? The Report tells the story, let justice point the finger and begin the reconciliation!

And Finally

Vigilantes under deputized and under the color of law, destroyed the Black Wall Street of America. Some known victims were in unmarked graves in a city owned cemetery and others were hauled off to unknown places in full view of the National Guard. The mob torched the soul of the city, an evil from which neither whites nor blacks have fully recovered.



(Courtesy McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

Final Report of the Oklahoma Commission to Study The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921

Compiled by Danney Goble

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission originated in 1997 with House Joint Resolution No. 1035. The act twice since has been amended, first in 1998, and again two years later. The final re-writing passed each legislative chamber in March and became law with Governor Frank Keating's signature on April 6, 2000.

In that form, the State of Oklahoma extended the commission's authority beyond that originally scheduled, to February 28, 2001. The statute also charged the commission to produce, on that date, "a final report of its findings and recommendations" and to submit that report "in writing to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Mayor and each member of the City Council of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma."

This is that report. It accounts for and completes the work of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission.

A series of papers accompanies the report. Some are written by scholars of national stature, others by experts of international acclaim. Each addresses at length and in depth issues of expressed legislative interest and matters of enormous public consequence. As a group, they comprise a uniquely special and a uniquely significant contribution that must be attached to this report and must be studied carefully along with it.

Nonetheless, the supporting documents are not the report, itself. The scholars' essays have their purposes; this commission's report has another. Its purpose is contained in the statutes that first created this commission, that later extended its life, and that each time gave it the same set of mandates. That is why this report is an accounting, presented officially and offered publicly, of how Oklahoma's 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission has conducted its business and addressed its statutory obligations.

Its duties were many, and each presented imposing challenges. Not least was the challenge

of preparing this report. Lawmakers scheduled its deadline and defined its purpose, and this report meets their requirements. At the same time, four years of intense study and personal sacrifice surely entitle commission members to add their own expectations. Completely reasonable and entirely appropriate, their desires deserve a place in their report as well.

Together, then, both the law's requirements and the commissioners' resolves guide this report. Designed to be both concise and complete, this is the report that law requires the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission to submit to those who represent the people. Designed to be both compelling and convincing, this also is the report that the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission chooses to offer the people whom both lawmakers and the commissioners serve.

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The Commission shall consist of eleven (11) members

The legislative formula for commission membership assured it appropriate if unusual composition. As an official state inquiry, the state's interest was represented through the executive, legislative, and administrative branches. The governor was to appoint six members, three from names submitted by the Speaker of the House, three from nominees provided by the Senate President Pro Tempore. Two state officials — the directors of the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and of the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) — also were to serve as ex officio members, either personally or through their designees.

Reflecting Tulsa's obvious interest, the resolution directed the city's mayor to select the commission's final three members. Similar to the gubernatorial appointments, they were to come from names proposed by Tulsa's City Commission. One of the mayor's appointees had to be "a survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot incident"; two had to be current residents of the historic Greenwood community, the area once devastated by the "incident."

The commission began with two ex officio members and ended with two others. After Gracie Monson resigned in March 2000, Ken-

neth Kendricks replaced her as OHRC's interim director and its representative to the commission. Blake Wade directed the historical society until Dr. Bob Blackburn succeeded him in 1999. Blackburn had been Wade's designated representative to the commission anyway. In fact, the commission had made him its chairman, a position he would hold until June 2000.

Governor Frank Keating's six appointees included two legislators, each from a different chamber, each from an opposite party, each a former history teacher. Democrat Abe Deuschendorf's participation in the debate over the original house resolution echoed his lingering interest in history and foretold his future devotion to this inquiry. As a history teacher, Robert Milacek had included Tulsa's race riot in his classes. Little did he know that he, himself, would contribute to that history as a Republican legislator, but he has.

Governor Keating turned to metropolitan Tulsa for two appointees. T. D. "Pete" Churchwell's father serviced African-American businesses in the Greenwood district, and Churchwell has maintained concern for that community and with the 1921 riot that nearly destroyed it. He was Blackburn's replacement as chairman during the commission's closing months. Although born in Oklahoma City, Jim Lloyd and his family moved to Turley (the community just north of Greenwood) when he was three. Raised in Tulsa, he graduated from Nathan Hale and the University of Tulsa's College of Law. He now practices law in Sand Springs and lives in Tulsa.

The governor's other appointees entered the inquiry less with geographical than with professional connections to Tulsa and its history. Currie Ballard lives in Coyle and serves neighboring Langston University as historian-in-residence. Holding a graduate degree in history, Jimmie White teaches it and heads the social science division for Connors State College.

Tulsa Mayor Susan Savage appointed the commission's final three members. If only five in 1921, Joe Burns met the law's requirement that one mayoral appointee be a survivor of the 1921 "incident." He brought the commission not faint

childhood memories but seasoned wisdom rooted in eight decades of life in the Greenwood community and with Greenwood's people.

As the resolution specified, Mayor Savage's other two appointees live in contemporary Greenwood, but neither took a direct route to get there. Eddie Faye Gates's path began in Preston, Oklahoma, passed through Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, and crisscrossed two continents before it reached Tulsa in 1968. She spent the next twenty-four years teaching its youngsters and has devoted years since researching and writing her own memoirs and her community's history. Vivian Clark-Adams's route took nearly as many twists and turns, passing through one military base after another until her father retired and the family came to Oklahoma in 1961. Trained at the University of Tulsa, Dr. Vivian Clark-Adams serves Tulsa Community College as chair of the liberal arts division for its southeast campus.

In the November 1997, organizing meeting, commissioners voted to hire clerical assistants and expert consultants through the OHS. (The legislature had added \$50,000 to the agency's base appropriations for just such purposes.) They then scheduled their second meeting for December 5 to accommodate the most appropriate and most eminent of all possible authorities.

John Hope Franklin is the son of Greenwood attorney B. C. Franklin, a graduate of Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School (Fisk and Harvard, too), and James B. Duke Professor of History Emeritus at Duke University. Recipient of scores of academic and literary awards, not to mention more than a hundred honorary doctorates, Franklin came back for another honor. He received the Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award on December 4 and stayed to meet and help the commission on the fifth.

Commissioners were delighted to learn that Franklin was anxious to serve, even if he confessed the contributions limited by age (he was eighty-two at the time) and other obligations. They enthusiastically made John Hope Franklin their first consultant, and they instantly took

his advice for another. Dr. Scott Ellsworth, a native Tulsan now living in Oregon, was a Duke graduate who already had written a highly regarded study of the riot. Ellsworth became the second consultant chosen; he thereafter emerged first in importance.

As its work grew steadily more exacting and steadily more specialized, the commission turned to more experts. Legal scholars, archeologists, anthropologists, forensic specialists, geophysicists — all of these and more blessed this commission with technical expertise impossible to match and unimaginable otherwise. As a research group, they brought a breadth of vision and a depth of training that made Oklahoma's commission a model of state inquiry.

Ten consultants eventually provided them expert advice, but the commissioners always expected to depend mostly on their own resources, maybe with just a little help from just a few of their friends. Interested OHS employees were a likely source. Sure enough, a half-dozen or so pitched in to search the agency's library and archives for riot-related materials.

That was help appreciated, if not entirely unexpected. What was surprising — stunning, really — was something else that happened in Oklahoma City. As the commission's work attracted interest and gathered momentum, Bob Blackburn noticed something odd: an unusual number of people were volunteering to work at the historical society. Plain, ordinary citizens, maybe forty or fifty of them, had asked to help the commission as unpaid researchers in the OHS collections.

At about that time, Dick Warner decided that he had better start making notes on the phone calls he was fielding for the Tulsa County Historical Society. People were calling in, wanting to contribute to the inquiry, and they just kept calling. After two months, his log listed entries for 148 local calls. Meanwhile, Scott Ellsworth was back in Oregon, writing down information volunteered by some of the three hundred callers who had reached him by long distance.

Most commission meetings were in Tulsa, each open to any and all. Oklahoma's Open Meetings Law required no less, but this com-

mission's special nature yielded much more. It seemed that every time the commissioners met at least one person (usually several) greeted them with at least some thing (usu ally a lot) that the commission needed.

Included were records and papers long presumed lost, if their existence had been known at all. Some were official documents, pulled together and packed away years earlier. Uncovered and examined, they took the commission back in time, back to the years just before and just after 1921. Some were musty legal records saved from the shredders. Briefs filed, dockets set, law suits decided — each opened an avenue into another corner of history. Pages after pages laid open the city commission's deliberations and decisions as they affected the Greenwood area. Overlooked records from the National Guard offered overlooked perspectives and illuminated them with misplaced correspondence, lost after-action reports, obscure field manuals, and self-typed accounts from men who were on duty at the riot. Maybe there was a family's treasured collection of yellowed newspaper clippings; an envelope of faded photographs; a few carefully folded letters, all handwritten, each dated 1921.

One meaning of all of this is obvious, so obvious that this report pauses to affirm it.

Many have questioned why or even if anyone would be interested now in events that happened in one city, one time, one day, long ago. What business did today's state lawmakers have in something so old, so local, and so deservedly forgotten? Surely no one cares, not anymore.

An answer comes from hundreds and hundreds of voices. They tell us that what happened in 1921 in Tulsa is as alive today as it was back then. What happened in Tulsa stays as important and remains as unresolved today as in 1921. What happened there still exerts its power over people who never lived in Tulsa at all.

How else can one explain the thousands of hours volunteered by hundreds of people, all to get this story told and get it told right? How else can one explain the regional, national, even international attention that has been con-

centrated on a few short hours of a mid-sized city's history?

As the introductory paper by Drs. Franklin and Ellsworth recounts, the Tulsa disaster went largely unacknowledged for a half-century or more. After a while, it was largely forgotten. Eventually it became largely unknown. So hushed was mention of the subject that many pronounced it the final victim of a conspiracy, this a conspiracy of silence.

That silence is shattered, utterly and permanently shattered. Whatever else this commission has achieved or will achieve, it already has made that possible. Regional, national, and international media made it certain. The *Dallas Morning News*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, National Public Radio (NPR), every American broadcast television network, cable outlets delivering Cinemax and the History Channel to North America, the British Broadcasting Corporation — this merely begins the attention that the media focused upon this commission and its inquiry. Many approached it in depth (NPR twice has made it the featured daily broadcast). Most returned to it repeatedly (the *New York Times* had carried at least ten articles as of February 2000). All considered it vital public information.

Some — including some commission members — thought at least some of the coverage was at least somewhat unbalanced. They may have had a point, but that is not the point.

Here is the point: The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission is pleased to report that this past tragedy has been extensively aired, that it is now remembered, and that it will never again be unknown.



The Commission shall undertake a study to [include] the identification of persons. . . .

No one is certain how many participated in the 1921 riot. No one is certain how many suffered how much for how long. Certainty is reserved for a single quantifiable fact. Every year there remain fewer and fewer who experienced it personally.

Legislation authorizing this commission directed that it seek and locate those survivors. Specifically, it was to identify any person able to

“provide adequate proof to the Commission” that he or she was an “actual resident” of “the ‘Greenwood’ area or community” at the time of the riot. The commission was also to identify any person who otherwise “sustained an identifiable loss . . . resulting from the . . . 1921 Tulsa Race Riot.”

Some considered this the commission’s most difficult assignment, some its most important duty, some its most compelling purpose. They all were right, and had Eddie Faye Gates not assumed personal and experienced responsibility for that mandate, this commission might have little to report. Because she did, however, it principally reports what she and those who worked with her were able to accomplish in the commission’s name.

Commissioner Gates’s presence gave this commission a considerable and welcomed head start. She already had included several riot victims among the early pioneers whom she had interviewed for *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa*. The book finished, she had an informal list of survivors, but the list kept changing. Death erased one name after another. Others appeared. Many were of old people who had left Oklahoma years, even decades, ago; but she heard about them and patiently tracked them down. As lawmakers were authorizing this inquiry, the count stood at thirteen, nineteen if all the leads eventually panned out. No one presumed that even nineteen was close to final, but no one knew what the accurate total might be either.

At its very first organizing meeting on November 14, 1997, this commission established a “subcommittee on survivors,” headed by Commissioner Gates and including Commissioner Burns and Dr. Clark-Adams. From that moment onward, that subcommittee has aggressively and creatively pursued every possible avenue to identify every possible survivor.

Letters sent over Dr. Ellsworth’s signature to *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines urged readers to contact the commission if they knew of any possibilities. From *Gale’s Directory of Publications*, Commissioner Gates targeted the nation’s leading African-American newspapers

(papers like the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*), appealing publicly for survivors or to anyone who might know of one. The commission’s website, created and maintained by the Oklahoma Historical Society, prominently declared a determination to identify and register every survivor, everywhere. For affirmation, it posted the official forms used as the subcommittee’s records, including instructions for their completion and submission.

An old-fashioned, intensely personal web turned out to be more productive than the thoroughly modern, entirely electronic Internet. Like historical communities everywhere, modern Greenwood maintains a rich, if informal, social network. Sometimes directly, sometimes distantly, it connects Greenwood’s people, sometimes young, sometimes old. Anchoring its interstices are the community’s longest residents, its most active citizens, and its most prominent leaders.

One quality or another would describe some members of this commission. After all, these are the very qualifications that lawmakers required for their appointments. Others share those same qualities and a passion for their community’s history as well. Curtis Lawson, Robert Littlejohn, Hannibal Johnson, Dr. Charles Christopher, Mable Rice, Keith Jemison, Robert and Blanchie Mayes — all are active in the North Tulsa Historical Society, all are some of the community’s most respected citizens, and all are among this commission’s most valuable assets.

The initial published notices had early results. Slowly they began to compound upon themselves. The first stories in the national and international media introduced a multiplying factor. Thereafter, each burst of press attention seemed to increase what was happening geometrically. People were contacting commissioners, some coming forward as survivors, more suggesting where or how they might be found. Names came in, first a light sprinkle, next a shower, then a downpour, finally a flood.

Old city directories, census reports, and other records verified some claims, but they could confirm only so much. After all, these people had been children, some of them in infants, back in

1921. After eighty years, could any one remember the kind of details — addresses, telephone numbers, property descriptions, rental agreements, business locations — someone else could verify with official documents? Not likely. In fact, these were exactly the kind of people most likely to have been ignored or lost in every public record. Officially, they might have never existed.

Except that they did, and one who looked long enough and hard enough and patiently enough could confirm it — that is, if one knew where to look and whom to ask.

That is what happened. Name-by-name, someone found somebody who actually knew each person. In fact, that is how many names surfaced: a credible figure in the community knew how to find older relatives, former neighbors, or departed friends. Others could be confirmed with equal authority. Maybe someone knew the claimant's family or knew someone that did. If a person claimed to be kin to someone or offered some small detail, surely someone else knew that relative or remembered the same detail as well. Some of those details might even be verified through official documents.

It was a necessary process but slow and delicate, too. As of June 1998, twenty-nine survivors had been identified, contacted, and registered. (The number did not include sixteen identified as descendants of riot victims.) It took another fourteen months for the total to reach sixty-one. It would have been higher, except that three of the first twenty-nine had died in those months. This deadline had an ominous and compelling meaning.

Work immediately shifted through higher gears. In March 2000, the identification process finished for forty-one survivors then living in or near Tulsa. Just a few more still needed to be contacted. The real work remaining, however, involved a remarkable number of survivors who had turned up outside of Oklahoma. Following a recent flurry of media attention, more than sixty out-of-state survivors had been located. They lived everywhere from California to Florida, one in Paris, France!

All of that work is complete. As the commission submits its report, 118 persons have been identified, contacted, and registered as living survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot. (Another 176 persons also have been registered as descendants of riot victims.)

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission thereby has discharged the mandate regarding the identification of persons.



The Commission shall . . . gather information, identify and interview witnesses . . . , preserve testimony and records obtained, [and] examine and copy documents . . . having historical significance.

Whatever else this commission already has achieved or soon will inspire, one accomplishment will remain indefinitely. Until recently, the Tulsa race riot has been the most important least known event in the state's entire history. Even the most resourceful of scholars stumbled as they neared it for it was dimly lit by evidence and the evidentiary record faded more with every passing year.

That is not now and never will be true again. These few hours — from start to finish, the actual riot consumed less than sixteen hours — may now comprise the most thoroughly documented moments ever to have occurred in Oklahoma. This commission's work and the documentary record it leaves behind shines upon them a light too bright to ignore.

The Oklahoma Historical Society was searching its existing materials and aggressively pursuing more before this commission ever assembled. By the November 1997, organizing meeting, Bob Blackburn was ready to announce that the society already had ordered prints from every known source of every known photograph taken of the riot. He was contacting every major archival depository and research library in the country to request copies of any riot-related materials they might hold themselves. Experienced OHS professionals were set to research important but heretofore neglected court and municipal records.

This was news welcomed by commission members. It assured early momentum for the job ahead, and it complemented work that some of

them were already doing. Eddie Faye Gates, for one, had pulled out every transcript of every interview that she had made with a riot witness, and she was anxious to make more. Jim Lloyd was another. Lloyd already had found and copied transcripts from earlier interviews, including some with Tulsa police officers present at the riot. He also had a hunch that a fellow who knew his way around a courthouse just might turn up all sorts of information.

That is how it began, but that was just the beginning. In the months ahead, Larry O'Dell and other OHS employees patiently excavated mountains of information, one pebble at a time, as it were. They then pieced together tiny bits of fact, carefully fitting one to another. One by one, completed puzzles emerged. Arranged in different dimensions, they made magic: a vision of Greenwood long since vanished.

Master maps, both of the community on the eve of the riot and of the post-riot residue, identified every single piece of property. For each parcel, a map displayed any structure present, its owner and its use. If commercial, what firms were there, who owned them, what businesses they were in. If residential, whether it was rented or owned. If the former, the landlord's name. If the latter, whether it was mortgaged (if so, to whom and encumbered by what debt.) For both, lists identified each of its occupants by name.

It was not magic; it was more. Larry O'Dell had rebuilt Greenwood from records he and other researchers had examined and collected for the commission. Every building permit granted, every warranty deed recorded, every property appraisal ordered, every damage claim filed, every death certificate issued, every burial record maintained — the commission had copies of every single record related to Greenwood at the time of the riot.

Some it had only because Jim Lloyd was right. Able to navigate a courthouse, he ran across complete records for some 150 civil suits filed after the race riot. No one remembered that they even existed; they had been misplaced for thirty-five years. When Jim

Lloyd uncovered and saved them, they were scheduled for routine shredding.

The commission gathered the most private of documents as well. Every form registering every survivor bears notes recording information taken from every one of 118 persons. With Kavin Ross operating the camera, Eddie Faye Gates videotaped interviews with about half of the survivors. Each is available on one of nine cassettes preserved by the commission; full transcripts are being completed for all. Sympathetic collectors turned over transcripts of another fifty or more. Some had been packed away for twenty, even thirty years.

Others, including several resourceful amateur historians, reproduced and gave the commission what amounted to complete documentary collections. There were sets of municipal records, files from state agencies, reports kept by social services, press clippings carefully bound, privately owned photographs never publicly seen.

People who had devoted years to the study of one or more aspects of the riot supplied evidence they had found and presented conclusions they had reached. Beryl Ford followed the commission's work as a Tulsan legendary for his devotion to his city and its history. William O'Brien attended nearly every commission meeting, sometimes to ask questions, sometimes to answer them, once to deliver his own full report on the riot. Robert Norris prepared smaller, occasional reports on military topics. He also dug up and turned over files from National Guard records. Others located affidavits filed with the State Supreme Court. The military reports usually had been presumed lost; the legal papers always had been assumed unimportant.

Commissioners were surprised to receive so much new evidence and pleased to see that it contributed so much. They were delighted to note that so much came from black sources, that it documented black experiences and recorded black observations.

It had not always been that way. Too many early journalists and historians had dismissed black sources as unreliable. Too few early librarians and archivists had preserved black sources as important. Both thereby condemned

later writers and scholars to a never ending game of hide-and-go-seek, the rules rigged so no one could win.

This commission's work changes the game forever. Every future scholar will have access to everything every one ever had when the original source was white. In fact, they will have a lot more of it. They also will have more from sources few had before when the original source was black.

Because they will, the community future scholars will behold and the property they will describe was a community of black people, occupied by black people. The public records they will examine involved black people and affected black people. Objects they will touch came from black people. Interviews they will hear and transcripts they will read were recorded from black people. The evidence they will explore reveals experiences of black people.

Consider what so much new information and what so many new sources can mean for future historians. Consider what it already has meant for one.

Read closely Scott Ellsworth's accompanying essay, "The Tulsa Riot," a rather simple title, as titles go. Much more sophisticated is the title he gave the book he wrote in 1982, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*.

It is fair that they have different titles. They tell somewhat different stories in somewhat different ways. The chief difference is that the one titled so simply tells a tale much more sophisticated.

For one thing, it is longer. The report attached here filled 115 typed pages in the telling; the comparable portion of the book prints entirely in 25 pages. The report has to be longer because it has more to report, stories not told in the first telling. It offers more because it draws upon more evidence. The report packs 205 footnotes with citations for its story; 50 did the job for the first one.

Within that last difference is the difference that causes every other difference. To write this report, Scott Ellsworth used evidence he did not have — no one had it — as recently as

1982. He cites that new evidence at least 148 times. He had information from black sources accessible now because of this commission. That knowledge contributed to Scott Ellsworth's citations from black newspapers, black interviews, or black writings. He cites black sources at least 272 times.

No wonder the two are different. From now on, everything can be different. They almost have to be.

Before there was this commission, much was known about the Tulsa race riot. More was unknown. It was buried somewhere, lost somewhere, or somewhere undiscovered. No longer. Old records have been reopened, missing files have been recovered, new sources have been found. Still being assembled and processed by the Oklahoma Historical Society, their total volume passed ten thousand pages some time ago and well may reach twenty thousand by the time everything is done.

The dimensions of twenty thousand pages can be measured physically. Placed side-by-side, they would reach across at least ten yards of library shelving, filling every inch with new information. The significance of these twenty thousand pages has to be gauged vertically and metaphorically though. Stacked high, they amount to a tower of new knowledge. Rising to reach a new perspective, they offer visions never seen before.

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission thereby has discharged the mandate to gather and preserve a record of historical significance.

◆ ◆ ◆

The Commission shall... develop a historical record of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot

The commission's first substantive decision was to greet this obligation with a series of questions, and there was compelling reason why. Eighty years after the fact, almost as many unresolved questions surround the race riot as did in 1921 — maybe even more. Commissioners knew that no "historical record" would be complete unless it answered the most enduring of those questions — or explain why not. That was reason enough for a second decision: Commissioners agreed to seek consultants, respected

scholars, and other experts to investigate those questions and offer answers.

Their findings follow immediately, all without change or comment, each just as the commission received it. Accompanying papers present what scholars and others consider the best answers to hard questions. The reports define their questions, either directly or implicitly, and usually explain why they need answers. The authors give answers, but they present them with only the confidence and exactly the precision they can justify. Most retrace the route they followed to reach their positions. All advance their positions openly. If they sense themselves in hostile territory, some stake their ground and defend it.

The commissioners harbor no illusion that every reader will accept their every answer to every question. They know better. Why should everyone else? None of them do. All eleven have reservations, some here, some there. Some dispute this point; some deny that one. Some suggest other possibilities. Some insist upon positions squarely opposite the scholars'.

None of that matters. However they divide over specifics, they also are united on principles. Should any be in need, they endorse and recommend the route they took to reach their own consensus. The way around an enraged showdown and the shortest path to a responsible solution is the line that passes through points ahead. Each point marks a big question and an important answer. Study them carefully.

What was the total value of property destroyed in the Tulsa race riot, both in 1921's dollars and in today's? Larry O'Dell has the numbers. Any one of them could be a little off, probably none by very much. Could a lawyer argue, and might a judge decree, that citizens living now had a duty to make that good, had to repay those losses, all because of something that happened eighty years ago? Alfred Brophy can make the case, and he does.

Over eight decades, some Tulsans (mostly black Tulsans) have insisted that whites attacked Greenwood from the air, even bombed it from military airplanes. Other Tulsans (mostly white Tulsans) have denied those

claims; many have never even heard them. In a sense, it is a black-or-white question, but Richard S. Warner demonstrates that it has no black-or-white answer.

He proves it absolutely false that military planes could have employed military weapons on Greenwood. He also proves it absolutely true that civilian aircraft did fly over the riot area. Some were there for police reconnaissance, some for photography, some for other legitimate purposes. He also thinks it reasonable to believe that others had less innocent use. It is probable that shots were fired and that incendiary devices were dropped, and these would have contributed to riot-related deaths or destruction. How much? No one will ever know: History permits no black-or-white answer.

Can modern science bring light to old, dark rumors about a mass grave, at least one, probably more, somewhere in Tulsa? Could those rumors be true? If true, where is one? Robert L. Brooks and Alan H. Witten have answers. Yes, science can address those rumors. Yes, there are many reasons to believe that mass graves exist. Where? They can point precisely to the single most likely spot. They can explain why scientists settle on that one — explain it clearly enough and completely enough to convince non-scientists, too. Without making a scratch on the ground, they can measure how deep it has to be, how thick, how wide, how long. Were the site to be exhumed and were it to yield human remains, what would any one learn? Quite a bit if Lesley Rankin-Hill and Phoebe Stubblefield were to examine them.

How many people were killed, anyway? At the time, careful calculations varied almost as much as did pure guesses — forty, fifty, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, maybe more. After a while, it became hard to distinguish the calculations from the guesses. By now, the record has become so muddled that even the most careful and thorough scientific investigation can offer no more than a preliminary possible answer.

Clyde Collins Snow's inquiry is just as careful and just as thorough as one might expect from this forensic anthropologist of international reputation, and preliminary is the word



An Invisible Empire rally at Belle Isle, Oklahoma City in 1923. During the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan flourished across Oklahoma, claiming tens of thousands members (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

that he insists upon for his findings. By the most conservative of all possible methods, he can identify thirty-eight riot victims, and he provides the cause of death and the burial site for each of them. He even gives us the names of all but the four burned beyond recognition.

That last fact is their defining element. Thirty-eight is only the number of dead that Snow can identify individually. It says nothing of those who lost their lives in the vicious riot and lost their personal identities in records never kept or later destroyed. An accurate death count would just begin at thirty-eight; it might end well into the hundreds. Snow explains why as many as 150 might have to be added for one reason, 18 more for another reason. What neither he nor any one can ever know is how many to add for how many reasons. That is why there will never be a better answer to the question of how many died than this: How many? Too many.

For some questions there will never be answers even that precise. Open for eighty years and open now, they will remain open forever because they are too large to be filled by the evidence at hand.

Some of the hardest questions surround the evidence, itself. Evidence amounting to per-

sonal statements — things said to have been seen, heard, or otherwise observed — raises an entire set of questions in itself. Surely some statements are more credible than others, but how credible is that? Most evidence is incomplete; it may be suggestive but is it dispositive? Evidence often inspires inference, but is the inference reasonable or even possible? Evidence is usually ambiguous, does it mean this or does it mean that? Almost every piece of evidence requires an interpretation, but is only one interpretation possible? Responsibilities will be assigned, decisions will be evaluated, judgments will be offered — on what basis?

These are not idle academic musings. On the contrary: This small set of questions explains why so many specific questions remain open. They explain how people — reasonable, fair-minded, well-intended people — can disagree so often about so much.

Consider a question as old as the riot itself. At the time, many said that this was no spontaneous eruption of the rabble; it was planned and executed by the elite. Quite a few people — including some members of this commission — have since studied the question and are persuaded that this is so, that the Tulsa race riot was the result of a conspiracy. This is a serious position and a

provable position — if one looks at certain evidence in certain ways.

Others — again, including members of this commission — have studied the same question and examined the same evidence, but they have looked at it in different ways. They see there no proof of conspiracy. Selfish desires surely. Awful effects certainly. But not a conspiracy. Both sides have evidence that they consider convincing, but neither side can convince the other.

Another nagging question involves the role of the Ku Klux Klan. Everyone who has studied the riot agrees that the Klan was present in Tulsa at the time of the riot and that it had been for some time. Everyone agrees that within months of the riot Tulsa's Klan chapter had become one of the nation's largest and most powerful, able to dictate its will with the ballot as well as the whip. Everyone agrees that many of the city's most prominent men were klansmen in the early 1920s and that some remained klansmen throughout the decade. Everyone agrees that Tulsa's atmosphere reeked with a Klan-like stench that oozed through the robes of the Hooded Order.

Does this mean that the Klan helped plan the riot? Does it mean that the Klan helped execute it? Does it mean that the Klan, as an organization, had any role at all?

Or does it mean that any time thousands of whites assembled — especially if they assembled to assault blacks — that odds were there would be quite a few klansmen in the mix? Does the presence of those individuals mean that the institution may have been an instigator or the agent of a plot? Maybe both? Maybe neither? Maybe nothing at all? Not everyone agrees on that.

Nor will they ever. Both the conspiracy and the Klan questions remain what they always have been and probably what they always will be. Both are examples of nearly every problem inherent to historical evidence. How reliable is this oral tradition? What conclusions does that evidence permit? Are these inferences reasonable? How many ways can this be interpreted?

And so it must go on. Some questions will always be disputed because other questions block the path to their answers. That does not mean there will be no answers, just that there will not be one answer per one question. Many

questions will have two, quite a few even more. Some answers will never be proven. Some will never be disproved. Accept it: Some things can never be known.

That is why the complete record of what began in the late evening of May 31 and continued through the morning of June 1 will never quite escape those hours, themselves. They forever are darkened by night or enshrouded by day.

But history has a record of things certain for the hours between one day's twilight and the next day's afternoon. These things:

- Black Tulsans had every reason to believe that Dick Rowland would be lynched after his arrest on charges later dismissed and highly suspect from the start.
- They had cause to believe that his personal safety, like the defense of themselves and their community, depended on them alone.
- As hostile groups gathered and their confrontation worsened, municipal and county authorities failed to take actions to calm or contain the situation.
- At the eruption of violence, civil officials selected many men, all of them white and some of them participants in that violence, and made those men their agents as deputies.
- In that capacity, deputies did not stem the violence but added to it, often through overt acts themselves illegal.
- Public officials provided firearms and ammunition to individuals, again all of them white.



After looting black homes, the white rioters set them on fire. Here, Thomas and Lottie Gentry's home at 537 N. Detroit—the third house from the left—bursts into flame (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).



By the time the additional National Guard units from Oklahoma City arrived in Tulsa the riot had pretty much run its course. Some contemporary eyewitnesses, however, were critical of the time that it took for the State Troops to deploy outside of the downtown business district (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

- Units of the Oklahoma National Guard participated in the mass arrests of all or nearly all of Greenwood's residents, removed them to other parts of the city, and detained them in holding centers.
- Entering the Greenwood district, people stole, damaged or destroyed personal property left behind in homes and businesses.
- People, some of them agents of government, also deliberately burned or otherwise destroyed homes credibly estimated to have numbered 1,256, along with virtually every other structure — including churches, schools, businesses, even a hospital and library — in the Greenwood district.
- Despite duties to preserve order and to protect property, no government at any level offered adequate resistance, if any at all, to what amounted to the destruction of the neighborhood referred to commonly as “Little Africa” and politely as the “Negro quarter.”
- Although the exact total can never be determined, credible evidence makes it probable that many people, likely numbering between one



Greenwood District prior to the riot (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).



Rebuilding after the destruction (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

building; in fact, municipal authorities acted initially to impede rebuilding.

- In the end, the restoration of Greenwood after its systematic destruction was left to the victims of that destruction.



Maurice Willows Hospital. While Tulsa officials turned away some offers of outside aid, a number of individual white Tulsans provided assistance to the city's now virtually homeless black population. But it was the American Red Cross, which remained in Tulsa for months following the riot, provided the most sustained relief effort. Maurice Willows, the compassionate director of the Red Cross relief, kept a history of the events. (Courtesy Bob Hower).



Aftermath of the riot (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

These things are not myths, not rumors, not speculations, not questioned. They are the historical record.

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission thereby has discharged the mandate to develop a historical record of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot.

♦ ♦ ♦

The final report of the Commission's findings and recommendations . . . may contain specific recommendations about whether or not reparations can or should be made and the appropriate methods

Unlike those quoted before, these words give this commission not an obligation but an opportunity. Nearly every commissioner intends to seize it.

A short letter sent to Governor Frank Keating as a preliminary report in February, 2000 declared the majority's view that reparations could and should be made. "Good public policy," that letter said, required no less. This report maintains the same, and this report makes the case.

Case, reparations — the words, themselves, seem to summon images of lawyers and courtrooms, along with other words, words like culpability, damages, remedies, restitution. Each is a term used in law, with strict legal meaning. Sometimes commissioners use those words, too, and several agree — firmly agree — that those words describe accurately what happened in 1921 and fit exactly what should happen now.

Those, however, are their personal opinions, and the commissioners who hold them do so as private citizens. Even the most resolute of its members recognizes that this commission has a very different role. This commission is neither court nor judge, and its members are not a jury. The commission has no binding legal authority to assign culpability, to determine damages, to establish a remedy, or to order either restitution or reparations. In fact, it has no judicial authority whatsoever.

It also has no reason or need for such authority. Any judgments that it might offer would be without effect and meaning. Its words would as

well be cast to the winds. Any recommendations that it might offer neither have nor need judicial status at all. Statutes grant this commission its authority to make recommendations and the choice of how — or even if — to exercise that authority.

The commission's majority is determined to exercise its discretion and to declare boldly and directly their purpose: to recommend, independent of what law allows, what these commissioners believe is the right thing to do. They propose to do that in a dimension equal to their purpose. Courts have other purposes, and law operates in a different dimension. Mistake one for the other — let this commission assume what rightly belongs to law — does worse than miss the point. It ruins it.

Think of the difference this way. We will never know exactly how many were killed during the Tulsa race riot, but take at random any twenty-five from that unknown total. What we say of those we might say for every one of the others, too.

Considering the twenty-five to be homicides, the law would approach those as twenty-five acts performed by twenty-five people (or thereabouts) who, with twenty-five motives, committed twenty-five crimes against twenty-five persons. That they occurred within hours and within a few blocks of each other is irrelevant. It would not matter even if the same person committed two, three, ten of the murders on the same spot, moments apart. Each was a separate act, and each (were the law to do its duty) merits a separate consequence. Law can apprehend it no other way.

Is there no other way to understand that? Of course there is. There is a far better way.

Were these twenty-five crimes or one? Did each have a separate motive, or was there a single intent? Were twenty-five individuals responsible, those and no one else? The burning of 1,256 homes — if we understand these as 1,256 acts of arson committed by 1,256 criminals driven by 1,256 desires, if we understand it that way, do we understand anything at all?

These were not any number of multiple acts of homicide; this was one act of horror. If we must name the fires, call it outrage, for it was

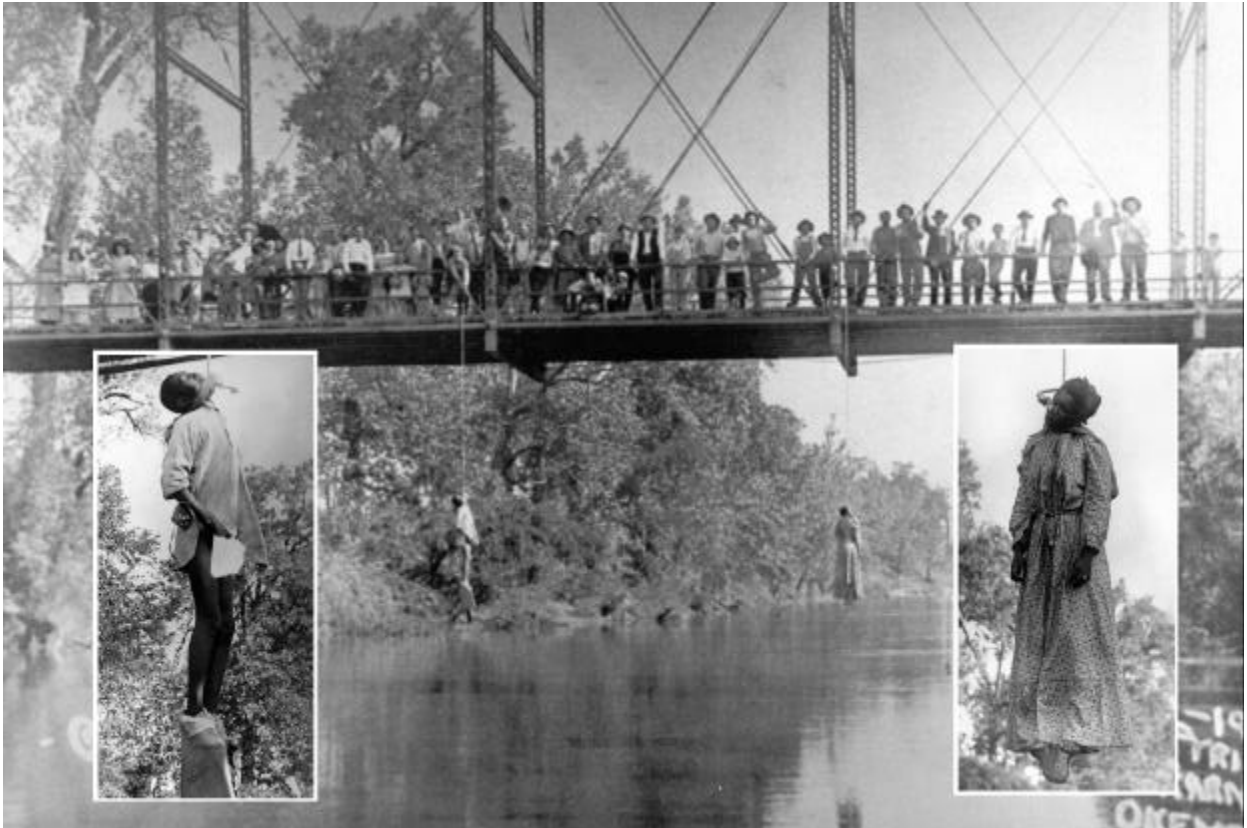
one. For both, the motive was not to injure hundreds of people, nearly all unseen, almost all unknown. The intent was to intimidate one community, to let it be known and let it be seen. Those who pulled the triggers, those who struck the matches — they alone were lawbreakers. Those who shouted encouragement and those who stood silently by — they were responsible.

These are the qualities that place what happened in Tulsa outside the realm of law — and not just in Tulsa, either. Lexington, Sapulpa, Norman, Shawnee, Lawton, Claremore, Perry; Waurika, Dewey, and Marshall — earlier purges in every one already had targeted entire black communities, marking every child, woman, and man for exile.

There is no count of how many those people numbered, but there is no need to know that. Know that there, too, something more than a bad guy had committed something more than a crime against something more than a person. Not someone made mad by lust, not a person gripped by rage, not a heartbroken party of ro-



Lynching believed to be at Mannford, Oklahoma (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).



Although Oklahoma had been plagued by lynchings since the territorial days, with the coming of statehood, more and more of the victims were African American. Of the thirty-three lynchings that occurred in Oklahoma between 1907 and 1920, including this one, which occurred at Okemah, fully twenty-seven of the victims were black (Courtesy of Currie Ballard).

mance gone sour, not one or any number of individuals but a collective body — acting as one body — had coldly and deliberately and systematically assaulted one victim, a whole community, intending to eliminate it as a community. If other black communities heard about it and learned their lessons, too, so much the better; a little intimidation went a long way. All of this happened years before, most fifteen or twenty years before Dick Rowland landed in jail, but they remained vivid in the recent memories of Greenwood's younger adults.

This, or something quite like it, was almost always what happened when the subject was race. Here was nothing as amorphous as racism. Here were discrete acts — one act, one town — each consciously calculated to have a collective effect not against a person but against a people.

And is that not also the way of Oklahoma's voting laws at the time? The state had amended its constitution and crafted its laws not to keep this person or that person or a whole list of per-

sons from voting. Lengthen that list to the indefinite, write down names to the infinite — one still will not reach the point. For that, one line, one word is enough. The point was to keep a race, as a race, away from the polls.

Jim Crow laws — the segregation commands of Oklahoma's statutes and of its constitution — worked that way, too. Their object was not to keep some exhausted mother and her two young children out of a "white car" on a train headed somewhere like Checotah and send them walking six miles home. (Even if John Hope Franklin could recall that about his own mother and sister and himself as he accepted the Helmerich Award some three-quarters of a century afterwards.) No, the one purpose was to keep one race "in its place."

When Laura Nelson was lynched years earlier in Okemah, it was not to punish her by death. It was to terrify the living. Why else would the lynchers have taken (and printed and copied and posted and distributed) that photograph of her



(Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

hanging from the bridge, her little boy dangling beside her?

The lynchers knew the purpose; the photographer just helped it along. The purpose had not changed much by 1921, when another photographer snapped another picture, a long shot showing Greenwood's ruin, smoke rising from fires blazing in the background. "RUNING THE NEGRO OUT OF TULSA" someone wrote across it, candor atoning for misspelling. No doubt there. No shame either.

Another photograph probably was snapped the same day but from closer range. It showed what just days before must have been a human being, maybe one who had spent a warm day in late May working and talking and laughing. On this day, though, it was only a grotesque, blackened form, a thing, really, its only sign of humanity the charred remains of arms and hands forever raised, as if in useless supplication.

Shot horizontally, that particular photo still turns up from time to time in the form of an

early use: as a postcard. People must have thought it a nice way to send a message.

It still sends a message, too big to be jotted down in a few lines; but, then, this message is not especially nice either. The message is that here is an image of more than a single victim of a single episode in a single city. This image preserves the symbol of a story, preserves it in the same way that the story was told: in black-and-white.



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

See those two photos and understand that the Tulsa race riot was the worst event in that city's history — an event without equal and without excuse. Understand, too, that it was the worst explosion of violence in this state's history — an episode late to be acknowledged and still to be repaired. But understand also that it was part of a message usually announced not violently at all, but calmly and quietly and deliberately.

Who sent the message? Not one person but many acting as one. Not a "mob;" it took forms too calculated and rational for that word. Not "society;" that word is only a mask to conceal responsibility within a fog of imprecision. Not "whites," because this never spoke for all whites; sometimes it spoke for only a few. Not "America," because the federal government was, at best, indifferent to its black citizens and, at worse, oblivious of them. Fifty years or so after the Civil War, Uncle Sam was too complacent to crusade for black rights and too callous to care. Let the states handle that — states like Oklahoma.

Except that it really was not "Oklahoma" either. At least, it was not all of Oklahoma. It was just one Oklahoma, one Oklahoma that is distinguishable from another Oklahoma partly by purpose. This Oklahoma had the purpose of keeping the other Oklahoma in its place, and that place was subordinate. That, after all, was the object of suffrage requirements and segregation laws. No less was it the intent behind riots and lynchings, too. One Oklahoma was putting the other Oklahoma in its place.

One Oklahoma also had the power to effect its purpose, and that power had no need to rely on occasional explosions of rage. Simple violence is, after all, the weapon of simple people, people with access to no other instruments of power at all. This Oklahoma had access to power more subtle, more regular, and more formal than that. Indeed, its ready access to such forms of power partially defined that Oklahoma.

No, that Oklahoma is not the same as government, used here as a rhetorical trick to make one accountable for the acts of the other. Government was never the essence of that

Oklahoma. Government was, however, always its potential instrument. Having access to government, however employed, if employed at all — just having it — defined this Oklahoma and was the essence of its power.

The acts recounted here reveal that power in one form or another, often several. The Tulsa race riot is one example, but only an example and only one. Put alongside it earlier, less publicized pogroms — for that is what they were — in at least ten other Oklahoma towns. Include the systematic disfranchisement of the black electorate through constitutional amendment in 1901, reaffirmed through state statute in 1901. Add to that the constitution's segregation of Oklahoma's public schools, the First Legislature's segregation of its public transportation, local segregation of Oklahoma neighborhoods through municipal ordinances in Tulsa and elsewhere, even the statewide segregation of public telephones by order of the corporation commission. Do not forget to include the lynchings of twenty-three African-Americans in twelve Oklahoma towns during the ten years leading to 1921. Stand back and look at those deeds now.

In some government participated in the deed.

In some government performed the deed.

In none did government prevent the deed.

In none did government punish the deed.

And that, in the end, is what this inquiry and what these recommendations are all about. Make no mistake about it: There are members of this commission who are convinced that there is a compelling argument in law to order that present governments make monetary payment for past governments' unlawful acts. Professor Alfred Brophy presses one form of that argument; there doubtless are others.

This is not that legal argument but another one altogether. This is a moral argument. It holds that there are moral responsibilities here and that those moral responsibilities require moral responses now.

It gets down to this: The 1921 riot is, at once, a representative historical example and a unique historical event. It has many parallels in the pattern of past events, but it has no equal for its violence and its completeness. It symbolizes so much endured by so many for so long. It does it,



Shock and despair accompany the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Riot (Courtesy of the Library of Congress).



(Courtesy Bob Hower).

however, in one way that no other can: in the living flesh and blood of some who did endure it.

These paradoxes hold answers to questions often asked: Why does the state of Oklahoma or the city of Tulsa owe anything to anybody? Why should any individual tolerate now spending one cent of one tax dollar over what happened so long ago?

The answer is that these are not even the questions. This is not about individuals at all — not any more than the race riot or anything like it was about individuals.

This is about Oklahoma — or, rather, it is about two Oklahomas. It must be about that because that is what the Tulsa race riot was all about, too. That riot proclaimed that there were two Oklahomas; that one claimed the right to push down, push out, and push under the other; and that it had the power to do that.

That is what the Tulsa race riot has been all about for so long afterwards, why it has lingered not as a past event but lived as a present entity. It kept on saying that there remained two Oklahomas; that one claimed the right to be dismissive of, ignorant of, and oblivious to the other; and that it had the power to do that.

That is why the Tulsa race riot can be about something else. It can be about making two Oklahomas one — but only if we understand that this is what reparation is all about. Because the riot is both symbolic and singular, reparations become both singular and symbolic, too. Compelled not legally by courts but extended freely by choice, they say that individual acts of reparation will stand as symbols that fully acknowledge and finally discharge a collective responsibility.

Because we must face it: There is no way but by government to represent the collective, and there is no way but by reparations to make real the responsibility.

Does this commission have specific recommendations about whether or not reparations can or should be made and the appropriate methods? Yes, it surely does.

When commissioners went looking to do the right thing, that is what nearly all of them found and what they recommended in last year's preliminary report. To be sure they had found the right thing, they have used this formal report to explore once more the distant terrain of the Tulsa race riot and the forbidding territory in which it lies. Now, they are certain. Reparations are the right thing to do.

What else is there to do? What else is there to find?

COMMISSIONERS:

Currie Ballard, Coyle
Dr. Bob Blackburn, Oklahoma City
Joe Burns, Tulsa
Vivian Clark, Tulsa
Rep. Abe Deuschendorf, Lawton
Eddie Faye Gates, Tulsa
Jim Lloyd, Tulsa
Sen. Robert Milacak, Waukomis,
Jimmie L. White, Jr., Checotah

Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921

CHAIRMAN:

T. D. "Pete" Churchwell, Tulsa

SPONSORS:

Sen. Maxine Horner, Tulsa
Rep. Don Ross, Tulsa

ADVISORS:

Dr. John Hope Franklin, Durham, NC
Dr. Scott Ellsworth, Portland, OR



February 7, 2000

The Honorable Frank Keating
Governor of the State of Oklahoma
State Capitol building
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Governor Keating:

The Tulsa Race Riot Commission, established by House Joint Resolution No. 1035, is pleased to submit the following preliminary report.

The primary goal of collecting historical documentation on the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 has been achieved. Attachment A is a summary listing of the record groups that have been gathered and stored at the Oklahoma Historical Society. Also included are summaries of some reports and the full text of selected documents to illustrate the breadth and scope of the collecting process. However, the Commission has not yet voted on historical findings, so these materials do not necessarily represent conclusions of the Commission.

At the last meeting, held February 4, 2000, the Commission voted on three actions. They are:

1) The Issue of Restitution

Whereas, the process of historical analysis by this Commission is not yet complete,

And Whereas, the archeological investigation into casualties and mass burials is not yet complete,

And Whereas, we have seen a continuous pattern of historical evidence that the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 was the violent consequence of racial hatred institutionalized and tolerated by official federal, state, county, and city policy,

And Whereas, government at all levels has the moral and ethical responsibility of fostering a sense of community that bridges divides of ethnicity and race,

And Whereas, by statute we are to make recommendations regarding whether or not reparations can or should be made to the Oklahoma Legislature, the Governor of the State of Oklahoma, and the Mayor and City Council of Tulsa,

That, we, the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission, recommend that restitution to the historic Greenwood Community, in real and tangible form, would be good public policy and do much to repair the emotional as well as physical scars of this most terrible incident in our shared past.

2) The Issue of Suggested Forms of Restitution in Priority Order

The Commission recommends

- 1) Direct payment of reparations to survivors of the Tulsa Race Riot.
- 2) Direct payment of reparations to descendants of the survivors of the Tulsa Race Riot.
- 3) A scholarship fund available to students affected by the Tulsa Race Riot.
- 4) Establishment of an economic development enterprise zone in the historic area of the Greenwood District.
- 5) A memorial for the reburial of any human remains found in the search for unmarked graves of riot victims.

3) The Issue of an Extension of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission

The Commission hereby endorses and supports House Bill 2468, which extends the life of the Commission in order to finish the historical report on the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921.

We, the members of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, respectfully submit these findings for your consideration.



(Courtesy Special Collections Department, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

History Knows No Fences: An Overview

By John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth

As the centennial of Oklahoma statehood draws near, it is not difficult to look upon the history of our state with anything short of awe and wonder. In ninety-three short years, whole towns and cities have sprouted upon the prairies, great cultural and educational institutions have risen among the blackjacks, and the state's agricultural and industrial output has far surpassed even the wildest dreams of the Boomers. In less than a century, Oklahoma has transformed itself from a rawboned territory more at home in the nineteenth century, into now, as a new millennium dawns about us, a shining example of both the promise and the reality of the American dream. In looking back upon our past, we have much to take pride in.

But we have also known heartaches as well. As any honest history textbook will tell you, the first century of Oklahoma statehood has also featured dust storms and a Great Depression, political scandals and Jim Crow legisla-

tion, tumbling oil prices and truckloads of Okies streaming west. But through it all, there are two twentieth century tragedies which, sadly enough, stand head and shoulders above the others.

For many Oklahomans, there has never been a darker day than April 19, 1995. At two minutes past nine o'clock that morning, when the northern face of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City was blown inward by the deadliest act of terrorism ever to take place on American soil, lives were shattered, lives were lost, and the history of the state would never again be the same.

One-hundred-sixty-eight Oklahomans died that day. They were black and white, Native American and Hispanic, young and old. And during the weeks that followed, we began to learn a little about who they were. We learned about Colton and Chase Smith, brothers aged two and three, and how they loved their playmates at the daycare center. We learned about



Perhaps more than anything else, what shocked most observers was the scope of the destruction in Tulsa. Practically the entire African American district, stretching for more than a mile from Archer Street to the section line, had been reduced to a waste land of burned out buildings, empty lots, and blackened trees (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

Captain Randy Guzman, U.S.M.C., and how he had commanded troops during Operation Desert Storm, and we learned about Wanda Lee Howell, who always kept a Bible in her purse. And we learned about Cartney Jean McRaven, a nineteen-year-old Air Force enlistee who had been married only four days earlier.

The Murrah Building bombing is, without any question, one of the great tragedies of Oklahoma history. And well before the last memorial service was held for the last victim, thousands of Oklahomans made it clear that they wanted what happened on that dark day to be remembered. For upon the chain-link fence surrounding the bomb site there soon appeared a makeshift memorial of the heart — of teddy bears and handwritten children's prayers, key rings and dreamcatchers, flowers and flags. Now, with the construction and dedication of the Oklahoma City National Memorial, there is no doubt but that both the victims and the lessons of April 19, 1995 will not be forgotten.

But what would have come as a surprise to most of the state's citizens during the sad spring of 1995 was that there were, among them, other Oklahomans who carried within their hearts the painful memories of an equally dark, though long ignored, day in our past. For

seventy-three years before the Murrah Building was bombed, the city of Tulsa erupted into a firestorm of hatred and violence that is perhaps unequaled in the peacetime history of the United States.

For those hearing about the 1921 Tulsa race riot for the first time, the event seems almost impossible to believe. During the course of eighteen terrible hours, more than one thousand homes were burned to the ground. Practically overnight, entire neighborhoods where families had raised their children, visited with their neighbors, and hung their wash out on the line to dry, had been suddenly reduced to ashes. And as the homes burned, so did their contents, including furniture and family Bibles, rag dolls and hand-me-down quilts, cribs and photograph albums. In less than twenty-four hours, nearly all of Tulsa's African American residential district — some forty-square-blocks in all — had been laid to waste, leaving nearly nine-thousand people homeless.

Gone, too, was the city's African American commercial district, a thriving area located along Greenwood Avenue which boasted some of the finest black-owned businesses in the entire Southwest. The Stradford Hotel, a modern fifty-four room brick establishment which



The Gurley Building prior to the riot (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

housed a drug store, barber shop, restaurant and banquet hall, had been burned to the ground. So had the Gurley Hotel, the Red Wing Hotel, and the Midway Hotel. Literally dozens of family-run businesses—from cafes and mom-and-pop grocery stores, to the Dreamland Theater, the Y.M.C.A. Cleaners, the East End Feed Store, and Osborne Monroe's roller skating rink — had also gone up in flames, taking with them the livelihoods, and in many cases the life savings, of literally hundreds of people.

The offices of two newspapers — the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun* — had also been destroyed, as were the offices of more than a dozen doctors, dentists, lawyers, realtors, and other professionals. A United States Post Office substation was burned, as was the all-black Frissell Memorial Hospital. The brand new Booker T. Washington High School building escaped the torches of the rioters, but Dunbar Elementary School did not. Neither did more than a half-dozen African American churches, including the newly constructed Mount Zion Baptist Church, an impressive brick tabernacle which had been dedicated only seven weeks earlier.

Harsher still was the human loss. While we will probably never know the exact number of people who lost their lives during the Tulsa race riot, even the most conservative estimates are appalling. While we know that the so-called “official” estimate of nine whites and twenty-six blacks is too low, it is also true that some of the higher estimates are equally dubious. All told, considerable evidence exists to

suggest that at least seventy-five to one-hundred people, both black and white, were killed during the riot. It should be added, however, that at least one credible source from the period — Maurice Willows, who directed the relief operations of the American Red Cross in Tulsa following the riot — indicated in his official report that the total number of riot fatalities may have run as high as three-hundred.¹

We also know a little, at least, about who some of the victims were. Reuben Everett, who was black, was a laborer who lived with his wife Jane in a home along Archer Street. Killed by a gunshot wound on the morning of June 1, 1921, he is buried in Oaklawn Cemetery. George Walter Daggs, who was white, may have died as much as twelve hours earlier. The manager of the Tulsa office of the Pierce Oil Company, he



(Courtesy of Greenwood Cultural Center).

was shot in the back of the head as he fled from the initial gunplay of the riot that broke out in front of the Tulsa County Courthouse on the evening of May 31. Moreover, Dr. A. C. Jackson, a renowned African American physician, was fatally wounded in his front yard after he



The destruction affected the African American business section and the residential neighborhoods in North Tulsa (Courtesy Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

had surrendered to a group of whites. Shot in the stomach, he later died at the National Guard Armory. But for every riot victim's story that we know, there are others — like the “unidentified Negroes” whose burials are recorded in the now yellowed pages of old funeral home ledgers — whose names and life stories are, at least for now, still lost.

By any standard, the Tulsa race riot of 1921 is one of the great tragedies of Oklahoma history. Walter White, one of the nation's foremost experts on racial violence, who visited Tulsa during the week after the riot, was shocked by what had taken place. “I am able to state,” he said, “that the Tulsa riot, in sheer brutality and willful destruction of life and property, stands without parallel in America.”²

Indeed, for a number of observers through the years, the term “riot” itself seems somehow inadequate to describe the violence and conflagration that took place. For some, what occurred in Tulsa on May 31 and June 1, 1921 was a massacre, a pogrom, or, to use a more modern term, an ethnic cleansing. For others, it was nothing short of a race war. But whatever term is used, one thing is certain: when it was all over, Tulsa's African American district had been turned into a scorched wasteland of vacant lots, crumbling storefronts, burned churches, and blackened, leafless trees.

Like the Murrah Building bombing, the Tulsa riot would forever alter life in Oklahoma. Nowhere, perhaps, was this more starkly apparent than in the matter of lynching. Like several other states and territories during the early years of the twentieth century, the sad spectacle of lynching was not uncommon in Oklahoma. In her 1942 master's thesis at the University of Oklahoma, Mary Elizabeth Estes determined that between the declaration of statehood on November 16, 1907, and the Tulsa race riot some thirteen years later, thirty-two individuals — twenty-six of whom were black — were lynched in Oklahoma. But during the twenty years following the riot, the number of lynchings statewide fell to two. Although they paid a terrible price for their efforts, there is little doubt except by their actions on May 31, 1921, that black Tulsans helped to bring the barbaric practice of lynching in Oklahoma to an end.

But unlike the Oklahoma City bombing, which has, to this day, remained a high profile event, for many years the Tulsa race riot practically disappeared from view. For decades afterwards, Oklahoma newspapers rarely mentioned the riot, the state's historical establishment essentially ignored it, and entire generations of Oklahoma school children were taught little or nothing about what had happened. To be sure, the riot was still a topic of conversation, particu-

larly in Tulsa. But these discussions — whether among family or friends, in barber shops or on the front porch — were private affairs. And once the riot slipped from the headlines, its public memory also began to fade.

Of course, any one who lived through the riot could never forget what had taken place. And in Tulsa's African American neighborhoods, the physical, psychological, and spiritual damage caused by the riot remained highly apparent for years. Indeed, even today there are places in the city where the scars of the riot can still be observed. In North Tulsa, the riot was never forgotten — because it could not be.

But in other sections of the city, and elsewhere through out the state, the riot slipped further and further from view. And as the years passed and, particularly after World War II, as more and more families moved to Oklahoma from out-of-state, more and more of the state's citizens had simply never heard of the riot. Indeed, the riot was discussed so little, and for so long, even in Tulsa, that in 1996, Tulsa County District Attorney Bill LaFortune could tell a reporter, "I was born and raised here, and I had never heard of the riot."⁴

How could this have happened? How could a disaster the size and scope of the Tulsa race riot become, somehow, forgotten? How could such a major event in Oklahoma history become so little known?

Some observers have claimed that the lack of attention given to the riot over the years was the direct result of nothing less than a "conspiracy of silence." And while it is certainly true that a number of important documents relating to the riot have turned up missing, and that some individuals are, to this day, still reluctant to talk about what happened, the shroud of silence that descended over the Tulsa race riot can also be accounted for without resorting to conspiracy theories. But one must start at the beginning.

The riot, when it happened, was front-page news across America. "85 WHITES AND NEGROES DIE IN TULSA RIOTS" ran the headline in the June 2, 1921 edition of the *New York Times*, while dozens of other newspapers across the country published lead stories about

the riot. Indeed, the riot was even news overseas, "FIERCE OUTBREAK IN OKLAHOMA" declared *The Times of London*.⁵

But something else happened as well. For in the days and weeks that followed the riot, editorial writers from coast-to-coast unleashed a torrent of stinging condemnations of what had taken place. "The bloody scenes at Tulsa, Oklahoma," declared the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, "are hardly conceivable as happening in American civilization of the present day." For the *Kentucky State Journal*, the riot was nothing short of "An Oklahoma Disgrace," while the *Kansas City Journal* was revolted at what it called the "Tulsa Horror." From both big-city dailies and small town newspapers — from the *Houston Post* and *Nashville Tennessean* to the tiny *Times* of Gloucester, Massachusetts — came a chorus of criticism. The *Christian Recorder* even went so far as to declare that "Tulsa has become a name of shame upon America."⁶

For many Oklahomans, and particularly for whites in positions of civic responsibility, such sentiments were most unwelcome. For regardless of what they felt personally about the riot, in a young state where attracting new businesses and new settlers was a top priority, it soon became evident that the riot was a public relations nightmare. Nowhere was this felt more acutely than in Tulsa. "I suppose Tulsa will get a lot of unpleasant publicity from this affair," wrote one Tulsa-based petroleum geologist to family members back East. Reverend Charles W. Kerr, of the city's all-white First Presbyterian Church, added his own assessment. "For 22 years I have been boosting Tulsa," he said, "and we have all been boosters and boasters about our buildings, bank accounts and other assets, but the events of the past week will put a stop to the bragging for a while."⁷ For some, and particularly for Tulsa's white business and political leaders, the riot soon became something best to be forgotten, something to be swept well beneath history's carpet.

What is remarkable, in retrospect, is the degree to which this nearly happened. For within a decade after it had happened, the Tulsa race riot went from being a front-page, national calamity, to being an incident portrayed as an unfortunate,



Despite the aid given by the Red Cross, black Tulsans faced a gargantuan task in the rebuilding of Greenwood. Literally thousands were forced to spend the winter of 1921-22 living in tents (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

but not really very significant, event in the state's past. Oklahoma history textbooks published during the 1920s did not mention the riot at all — nor did ones published in the 1930s. Finally, in 1941, the riot was mentioned in the Oklahoma volume in the influential *American Guide Series* — but only in one brief paragraph.⁸

Nowhere was this historical amnesia more startling than in Tulsa itself, especially in the city's white neighborhoods. "For a while," noted former Tulsa oilman Osborn Campbell, "picture postcards of the victims in awful poses were sold on the streets," while more than one white ex-rioter "boasted about how many notches he had on his gun." But the riot, which some whites saw as a source of local pride, in time more generally came to be regarded as a local embarrassment. Eventually, Osborn added, "the talk stopped."⁹

So too, apparently did the news stories. For while it is highly questionable whether — as it has been alleged — any Tulsa newspaper actually discouraged its reporters from writing about the riot, for years and years on end the riot does not appear to have been mentioned in the local press. And at least one local paper seems to have gone well out of its way, at times, to avoid the subject altogether.

During the mid-1930s, the *Tulsa Tribune* — the city's afternoon daily newspaper — ran a regular feature on its editorial page called "Fifteen Years Ago." Drawn from back issues of the newspaper, the column highlighted events

which had happened in Tulsa on the same date fifteen years earlier, including local news stories, political tidbits, and society gossip. But when the fifteenth anniversary of the race riot arrived in early June, 1936, the *Tribune* ignored it completely — and instead ran the following:

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

Miss Carolyn Skelly was a charming young hostess of the past week, having entertained at a luncheon and theater party for Miss Kathleen Sinclair and her guest, Miss Julia Morley of Saginaw, Mich. Corsage bouquets of Cecil roses and sweet peas were presented to the guests, who were Misses Claudine Miller, Martha Sharpe, Elizabeth Cook, Jane Robinson, Pauline Wood, Marie Constantin, Irene Buel, Thelma Kennedy, Ann Kennedy, Naomi Brown, Jane Wallace and Edith Smith.

Mrs. O.H.P. Thomas will entertain for her daughter, Elizabeth, who has been attending Randolph Macon school in Lynchburg, Va.

Central high school's crowning social event of the term just closed was the senior prom in the gymnasium with about 200 guests in attendance. The grand march was led by Miss Sara Little and Seth Hughes.

Miss Vera Gwynne will leave next week for Chicago to enter the University of Chicago where she will take a course in kindergarten study.

Mr. and Mrs. E.W. Hance have as their guests Mr. L.G. Kelleneyer of St. Mary's, Ohio.

Mrs. C.B. Hough and her son, Ralph, left last night for a three-months trip through the west and northwest. They will return home via Dallas, Texas, where they will visit Mrs. Hough's homefolk.¹¹

Ten years later, in 1946, by which time the *Tribune* had added a "Twenty-Five Years Ago" feature, the newspaper once again avoided mentioning the riot. It was as if the greatest catastrophe in the city's history simply had not happened at all.¹²

That there would be some reluctance toward discussing the riot is hardly surprising. Cities



Dedication of the black wallstreet me mo rial in 1996 at tended by Robert Fairchild (Cour tesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

and states — just like individuals — do not, as a general rule, like to dwell upon their past shortcomings. For years and years, for example, Oklahoma school children were taught only the most sanitized versions of the story of the Trail of Tears, while the history of slavery in Oklahoma was more or less ignored altogether. Moreover, during the World War II years, when the nation was engaged in a life or death struggle against the Axis, history textbooks quite understandably stressed themes of national unity and consensus. The Tulsa race riot, needless to say, did not qualify.

But in Tulsa itself, the riot had affected far too many families, on both sides of the tracks, ever to sink entirely from view. But as the years passed and the riot grew ever more distant, a mindset developed which held that the riot was one part of the city's past that might best be forgotten altogether. Remarkably enough, that is exactly what began to happen.

When Nancy Feldman moved to Tulsa during the spring of 1946, she had never heard of the Tulsa race riot. A Chicagoan, and a new bride, she accepted a position teaching sociology at the University of Tulsa. But trained in social work, she also began working with the City Health Department, where she came into con-

tact with Robert Fairchild, a recreation specialist who was also one of Tulsa's handful of African American municipal employees. A riot survivor, Fairchild told Feldman of his experiences during the disaster, which made a deep impression on the young sociologist, who decided to share her discovery with her students.¹³

But as it turned out, Feldman also soon learned something else, namely, that learning about the riot, and teaching about it, were two entirely different propositions. "During my first months at TU," she later recalled:

I mentioned the race riot in class one day and was surprised at the universal surprise among my students. No one in this all-white class room of both veterans, who were older, and standard 18-year-old freshmen, had ever heard of it, and some stoutly denied it and questioned my facts.

I invited Mr. Fairchild to come to class and tell of his experience, walking along the railroad tracks to Turley with his brothers and sister. Again, there was stout denial and, even more surprising, many students asked their parents and were told, no, there was no race riot at all. I was called to the Dean's office and advised to drop the whole subject.

The next semester, I invited Mr. Fairchild to come to class. Several times the Dean warned me about this. I do not believe I ever suffered from this exercise of my freedom of speech . . . but as a very young and new instructor, I certainly felt threatened.

For Feldman, such behavior amounted to nothing less than “Purposeful blindness and memory blocking.” Moreover, she discovered, it was not limited to the classroom. “When I would mention the riot to my white friends, few would talk about it. And they certainly didn’t want to.”¹⁴

While perhaps surprising in retrospect, Feldman’s experiences were by no means unique. When Nancy Dodson, a Kansas native who later taught at Tulsa Junior College, moved to Tulsa in 1950, she too discovered that, at least in some parts of the white community, the riot was a taboo subject. “I was admonished not to mention the riot almost upon our arrival,” she later recalled, “Because of shame, I thought. But the explanation was ‘you don’t want to start another.’”¹⁵

The riot did not fare much better in local history efforts. While Angie Debo did make mention of the riot in her 1943 history, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, her account was both brief and superficial. And fourteen years later, during the summer of 1957, when the city celebrated its “Tulsarama” – a week-long festival commemorating the semi-centennial of Oklahoma statehood – the riot was, once again, ignored. Some thirty-five years after it had taken the lives of dozens of innocent people, destroyed a neighborhood nearly one-square-mile in size in a firestorm which sent columns of black smoke billowing hundreds of feet into the air, and brought the normal life of the city to a complete standstill, the Tulsa race riot was fast becoming little more than a historical inconvenience, something, perhaps, that ought not be discussed at all.

Despite such official negligence, however, there were always Tulsans through the years who helped make it certain that the riot was not forgotten. Both black and white, sometimes working alone but more often working together, they collected evidence, preserved photographs, in-

terviewed eyewitnesses, wrote about their findings, and tried, as best as they could, to ensure that the riot was not erased from history.

None, perhaps, succeeded as spectacularly as Mary E. Jones Parrish, a young African American teacher and journalist. Parrish had moved to Tulsa from Rochester, New York in 1919 or 1920, and had found work teaching typing and shorthand at the all-black Hunton Branch of the Y.M.C.A.. With her young daughter, Florence Mary, she lived at the Woods Building in the heart of the African American business district. But when the riot broke out, both mother and daughter were forced to abandon their apartment and flee for their lives, running north along Greenwood Avenue amid a hail of bullets.¹⁷

Immediately following the riot, Parrish was hired by the Inter-Racial Commission to “do some reporting” on what had happened. Throwing herself into her work with her characteristic verve — and, one imagines, a borrowed typewriter — Parrish interviewed several eyewitnesses and transcribed the testimonials of survivors. She also wrote an account of her own harrowing experiences during the riot and, together with photographs of the devastation and a partial roster of property losses in the African American community, Parrish published all of the above in a book called *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*. And while only a handful of copies appear to have been printed, Parrish’s volume was not only the first book published about the riot, and a pioneering work of journalism by an African American woman, but remains, to this day, an invaluable contemporary account.¹⁸

It took another twenty-five years, however, until the first general history of the riot was written. In 1946, a white World War II veteran named Loren L. Gill was attending the

University of Tulsa. Intrigued by lingering stories of the race riot, and armed with both considerable energy and estimable research skills, Gill decided to make the riot the subject of his master’s thesis.¹⁹

The end result, “The Tulsa Race Riot,” was, all told, an exceptional piece of work, Gill worked diligently to uncover the causes of the riot, and to trace its path of violence and destruction, by scouring old newspaper and maga-

zine articles, Red Cross records, and government documents. Moreover, Gill interviewed more than a dozen local citizens, including police and city officials, about the riot. And remarkably for the mid-1940's, Gill also interviewed a number of African American riot survivors, including Reverend Charles Lanier Netherland, Mrs. Dimple L. Bush, and the noted attorney, Amos T. Hall. And while a number of Gill's conclusions about the riot have not withstood subsequent historical scrutiny, few have matched his determination to uncover the truth.²⁰

Yet despite Gill's accomplishment, the riot remained well-buried in the city's historical closet. Riot survivors, participants, and observers, to be certain, still told stories of their experiences to family and friends. And at Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School, a handful of teachers made certain that their students — many of whose families had moved to Tulsa after 1921 — learned at least a little about what had happened. But the fact remains that for nearly a quarter of a century after Loren Gill completed his master's thesis, the Tulsa race riot remained well out of the public spotlight.²¹

But beneath the surface, change was afoot. For as the national debate over race relations intensified with the emergence of the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Tulsa's own racial customs were far from static. As the city began to address issues arising out of school desegregation, sit-ins, job bias, housing discrimination, urban renewal, and white flight, there were those who believed that Tulsa's racial past — and particularly the race riot — needed to be openly confronted.

Few felt this as strongly as those who had survived the tragedy itself, and on the evening of June 1, 1971, dozens of African American riot survivors gathered at Mount Zion Baptist Church for a program commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the riot. Led by W.D. Williams, a longtime Booker T. Washington High School history teacher, whose family had suffered immense property loss during the violence, the other speakers that evening included fellow riot survivors Mable B. Little, who had

lost both her home and her beauty shop during the conflagration, and E.L. Goodwin, Sr., the publisher of the *Oklahoma Eagle*, the city's black newspaper. Although the audience at the ceremony — which included a handful of whites — was not large, the event represented the first public acknowledgment of the riot in decades.²²

But another episode that same spring also revealed just how far that Tulsa, when it came to owning up to the race riot, still had to go. The previous autumn, Larry Silvey, the publications manager at the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, decided that on the fiftieth anniversary of the riot, the chamber's magazine should run a story on what had happened. Silvey then contacted Ed Wheeler, the host of "The Gilcrease Story," a popular history program which aired on local radio. Wheeler — who, like Silvey, was white — agreed to research and write the article. Thus, during the winter of 1970-71, Wheeler went to work, interviewing dozens of elderly black and white riot eyewitnesses, and searching through archives in both Tulsa and Oklahoma City for documents pertaining to the riot.²³

But something else happened as well. For on two separate occasions that winter, Wheeler was approached by white men, unknown to him, who warned him, "Don't write that story." Not long thereafter, Wheeler's home telephone began ringing at all hours of the day and night, and one morning he awoke to find that someone had taken a bar of soap and scrawled across the front windshield of his car, "Best check under your hood from now on."

But Ed Wheeler was a poor candidate for such scare tactics. A former United States Army infantry officer, the incidents only angered him. Moreover, he was now deep into trying to piece together the history of the riot, and was not about to be deterred. But to be on the safe side, he sent his wife and young son to live with his mother-in-law.²⁴

Despite the harassment, Wheeler completed his article and Larry Silvey was pleased with the results. However, when Silvey began to lay out the story — complete with never-before-published photographs of both the riot and its aftermath chamber of commerce management



Representative Don Ross at Greenwood and Archer (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

killed the article. Silvey appealed to the chamber's board of directors, but they, too, refused to allow the story to be published.

Determined that his efforts should not have been in vain, Wheeler then tried to take his story to Tulsa's two daily newspapers, but was rebuffed. In the end, his article — called "Profile of a Race Riot" — was published in *Impact Magazine*, a new, black-oriented publication edited by a young African American journalist named Don Ross.

"Profile of a Race Riot" was a hand-biting, path-breaking story, easily the best piece of writing published about the riot in decades. But it was also a story whose impact was both limited and far from citywide. For while it has been reported that the issue containing Wheeler's story sold out "virtually overnight," the magazine's readership, which was not large to begin with, was almost exclusively African American. Ultimately, "Profile of a Race Riot" marked a turning point in how the riot would be written about in the years to come, but at the time that it was published, few

Tulsans — and hardly any whites — even knew of its existence.²⁵

One of the few who did was Ruth Sigler Avery, a white Tulsa woman with a passion for history. A young girl at the time of the riot, Avery had been haunted by her memories of the smoke and flames rising up over the African American district, and by the two trucks carrying the bodies of riot victims that had passed in front of her home on East 8th Street.

Determined that his story of the riot needed to be preserved, Avery began interviewing riot survivors, collecting riot photographs, and serving as a one-woman research bureau for anyone interested in studying what had happened. Convinced that the riot had been deliberately covered-up, Avery embarked upon what turned out to be a decades-long personal crusade to see that the true story of the riot was finally told.²⁶

Along the way, Avery met some kindred spirits — and none more important than Mozella Franklin Jones. The daughter of riot survivor and prominent African American attorney Buck Colbert Franklin, Jones had long endeavored to raise awareness of the riot particularly outside

of Tulsa's black community. While she was often deeply frustrated by white resistance to confronting the riot, her accomplishments were far from inconsequential. Along with Henry C. Whitlow, Jr., a history teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, Jones had not only helped to desegregate the Tulsa Historical Society, but had mounted the first-ever major exhibition on the history of African Americans in Tulsa. Moreover, she had also created, at the Tulsa Historical Society, the first collection of riot photographs available to the public.²⁷

None of these activities, however, was by itself any match for the culture of silence which had long hovered over the riot, and for years to come, discussions of the riot were often curtailed. Taken together, the fiftieth anniversary ceremony, "Profile of a Race Riot," and the work of Ruth Avery and Mozella Jones had nudged the riot if not into the spotlight, then at least out of the back reaches of the city's historical closet.²⁸

Moreover, these local efforts mirrored some larger trends in American society. Nationwide, the decade of the 1970s witnessed a virtual explosion of interest in the African American experience. Millions of television viewers watched *Roots*, the miniseries adaptation of Alex Haley's chronicle of one family's tortuous journey through slavery, while books by black authors climbed to the top of the bestseller lists. Black studies programs and departments were created at colleges from coast-to-coast, while at both the high school and university level, teaching materials began to more fully address issues of race. As scholars started to re-examine the long and turbulent history of race relations in America — including racial violence — the Tulsa riot began to receive some limited national exposure.²⁹

Similar activities took place in Oklahoma. Kay M. Teall's *Black History in Oklahoma*, an impressive collection of historical documents published in 1971, helped to make the history of black Oklahomans far more accessible to teachers across the state. Teall's book paid significant attention to the story of the riot, as did Arthur Tolson's *The Black Oklahomans: A History 1541-1972*, which came out one year later.³⁰

In 1975, Northeastern State University historian Rudia M. Halliburton, Jr. published *The Tulsa Race War of 1921*. Adapted from an article he had published three years earlier in the *Journal of Black Studies*, Halliburton's book featured a remarkable collection of riot photographs, many of which he had collected from his students. Issued by a small academic press in California, Halliburton's book received little attention outside of scholarly circles. Nonetheless, as the first book about the riot published in more than a half-century, it was another important step toward unlocking the riot's history.³¹

In the end, it would still take several years — and other books, and other individuals — to lift the veil of silence fully which had long hovered over the riot. However, by the end of the 1970s, efforts were underway that, once and for all, would finally bring out into the open the history of the tragic events of the spring of 1921.³²

Today, the Tulsa race riot is anything but unknown.

During the past two years, both the riot itself, and the efforts of Oklahomans to come to terms with the tragedy, have been the subject of dozens of magazine and newspaper articles, radio talk shows, and television documentaries. In an unprecedented and continuing explosion of press attention, journalists and film crews from as far away as Paris, France and London, England have journeyed to Oklahoma to interview riot survivors and eyewitnesses, search through archives for documents and photographs, and walk the ground where the killings and burning of May 31 and June 1, 1921 took place.

After years of neglect, stories and articles about the riot have appeared not only in Oklahoma magazines and newspapers, but also in the pages of the *Dallas Morning News*, *The Economist*, the *Kansas City Star*, the *London Daily Telegraph*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *National Post of Canada*, the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *US News and World Report*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*. The riot has also been the subject of wire stories issued by the Associated Press and Reuter's. In addition, news stories and television documentaries about the riot have been produced by ABC News *Nightline*, Australian

Broadcasting, the BBC, CBS News' *60 Minutes II*, CNN, Cinemax, The History Channel, NBC News, National Public Radio, Norwegian Broadcasting, South African Broadcasting, and Swedish Broadcasting, as well as by a number of in-state television and radio stations. Various web sites and Internet chat rooms have also featured the riot, while in numerous high school and college classrooms across America, the riot has become a subject of study. All told, for the first time in nearly eighty years, the Tulsa race riot of 1921 has once again become front-page news.³³

What has not made the headlines, however, is that for the past two-and-one-half years, an intensive effort has been quietly underway to investigate, document, analyze, and better understand the history of the riot. Archives have been searched through, old newspapers and government records have been studied, and sophisticated, state-of-the-art scientific equipment has been utilized to help reveal the potential location of the unmarked burial sites of riot victims. While literally dozens of what appeared to be promising leads for reliable new information about the riot turned out to be little more than dead ends, a significant amount of previously unavailable evidence — including long-forgotten documents and photographs — has been discovered.

None of this, it must be added, could have been possible without the generous assistance of Oklahomans from all walks of life. Scores of senior citizens — including riot survivors and observers, as well as the sons and daughters of policemen, National Guardsmen, and riot participants have helped us to gain a much clearer picture of what happened in Tulsa during the spring of 1921. All told, literally hundreds of Oklahomans, of all races, have given of their time, their memories, and their expertise to help us all gain a better understanding of this great tragedy.

This report is a product of these combined efforts. The scholars who have written it are all Oklahomans — either by birth, upbringing, residency, or family heritage. Young and not-so-young, black and white, men and women, we include within our ranks both the grandniece and the son of African American

riot survivors, as well as the son of a white eyewitness. We are historians and archaeologists, forensic scientists and legal scholars, university professors and retirees.

For the editors of this report, the riot also bears considerable personal meaning. Tulsa is our hometown, and we are both graduates of the Tulsa Public Schools. And although we grew up in different eras, and in different parts of town — and heard about the riot, as it were, from different sides of the fence — both of our lives have been indelibly shaped by what happened in 1921.

History knows no fences. While the stories that black Oklahomans tell about the riot often differ from those of their white counterparts, it is the job of the historian to locate the truth wherever it may lie. There are, of course, many legitimate areas of dispute about the riot — and will be, without a doubt, for years to come. But far more significant is the tremendous amount of information that we now know about the tragedy — about how it started and how it ended, about its terrible fury and its murderous violence, about the community it devastated and the lives it shattered. Neither myth nor “confusion,” the riot was an actual, definable, and describable event. In Oklahoma history, the central truths of which can, and must, be told.

That won't always be easy. For despite the many acts of courage, heroism, and selflessness that occurred on May 31 and June 1, 1921 — some of which are described in the pages that follow — the story of the Tulsa race riot is a chronicle of hatred and fear, of burning houses and shots fired in anger, of justice denied and dreams deferred. Like the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building some seventy-three years later, there is simply no denying the fact that the riot was a true Oklahoma tragedy, perhaps our greatest.

But, like the bombing, the riot can also be a bearer of lessons — about not only who we are, but also about who we would like to be. For only by looking to the past can we see not only where we have been, but also where we are going. And as the first one-hundred years of Oklahoma statehood draws to a close, and a new century begins, we can best honor that past not by burying it, but by facing it squarely, honestly, and, above all, openly.

Endnotes

¹For the so-called “official” estimate, see: Memorandum from Major Paul R. Brown, Surgeon, 3rd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, to the Adjutant General of Oklahoma, June 4, 1921, located in the Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Record Group 1-2, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

For the Maurice Wil lows es ti mates, see: “Di sas ter Re lief Re port, Race Riot, June 1921,” p. 6, reprinted in Robert N. Hower, *“Angels of Mercy”: The Amer i can Red Cross and the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot* (Tulsa: Home stead Press, 1993).

²*New York Call*, June 10, 1921.

³Mary Elizabeth Estes, “An Historical Survey of Lynchings in Oklahoma and Texas” (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1942), pp. 132-134

⁴Jonathan Z. Larsen, “Tulsa Burning,” *Civilization*, IV, I (February/March 1997), p. 46.

⁵*New York Times*, June 2, 1921, p. 1. [London, England] *The Times*, June 2, 1921, p. 10.

⁶*Philadelphia Bulletin*, June 3, 1921. [Frank fort] *Kentucky State Journal*, June 5, 1921. “Mob Fury and Race Ha tred as a Na tional Dis grace,” *Literary Digest*, June 18, 1921, pp. 7-9. R.R. Wright, Jr., “Tulsa,” *Christian Recorder*, June 9, 1921.

⁷The ge ol o gist, Rob ert F. Truex, was quoted in the *Rochester* [New York] *Herald*, June 4, 1921. The Kerr quote is from “Causes of Riots Discussed in Pulpits of Tulsa Sunday,” an unattributed June 6, 1921 article located in the Tuskegee Institute News Clipping File, microfilm edition, Series 1, “1921 — Riots, Tulsa, Oklahoma,” Reel 14, p. 754.

⁸Joseph P. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1929). Muriel H. Wright, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Webb Publishing Company, 1929-30). Edward Everett Dale and Jesse Lee Rader, *Readings in Oklahoma History* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1930). Victor E. Harlow, *Oklahoma: Its Origins and Development* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1935). Muriel H. Wright, *Our Oklahoma* (Guthrie: Co-operative Publishing Company, 1939). [Oklahoma Writers’ Project] *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State* (Nor man: Uni ver sity of Oklahoma Press, 1941), pp. 208-209.

⁹Osborn Campbell, *Let Freedom Ring* (Tokyo: Inter-Nation Company, 1954), p. 175.

¹⁰In 1971, a *Tulsa Tribune* re porter wrote that, “For 50 years The *Tribune* did not re hash the story [of the riot].” See: “Murderous Race Riot Wrote Red Page in Tulsa History 50 Years Ago,” *Tulsa Tribune*, June 2, 1971, p. 7A. A very brief ac count of the riot that not only gave the wrong dates for the conflict, but also claimed that “No one knew then or remembers how the shooting began—appeared in the *Tulsa World* on November 7, 1949.

On the re luc tance of the lo cal press to write about the riot, see: Brent Sta pes, “Un earthing a Riot” *New York Times Magazine*, De cem ber 19, 1999, p. 69; and, oral his tory in ter view with Ed Wheeler, Tulsa, Feb ru ary 27, 1998, by Scott Ellsworth.

¹¹*Tulsa Tribune*, June 2, 1936, p. 16

¹²*Ibid.*, May 31, 1946, p. 8; and June 2, 1946, p. 8.

The *Tulsa World*, to its credit, did men tion the riot in its “Just 30 Years Ago” col umns in 1951. *Tulsa World*. June 1, 1951, p. 20; June 2, 1951, p. 4; and June 4, 1951, p. 6.

¹³Telephone interview with Nancy Feldman, Tulsa, July 17, 2000. Letter from Nancy G. Feldman, Tulsa, July 19, 2000, to Dr. Bob Blackburn, Oklahoma City.

On Robert Fairchild see: Oral History Interview with Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978, by Scott Ellsworth, a copy of which can be found in the Special Collec tions De part ment, McFarlin Li brary, Uni ver sity of Tulsa; and, Eddie Faye Gates, *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997), pp. 69-72.

¹⁴Feldman letter, *op cit.*

¹⁵Letter from Nancy Dodson, Tulsa, June 4, 2000, to John Hope Franklin, Durham, North Carolina.

¹⁶Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943).

On the “Tulsarama,” see: Bill Butler, ed., “Tulsarama! Historical Souvenir Program,” and Quentin Peters, “Tulsa, I.T.,” two circa-1957 pamphlets located in the Tulsa history vertical subject files at the Oklahoma Historical Society library, Oklahoma City.

¹⁷Mary E. Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster* (N.p., n.p., n.d.). in 1998. A reprint edi tion of Parrish’s book was published by Out on a Limb Publishing in Tulsa.

Tulsa City Directory, 1921 (Tulsa: Polk-Hoffhine Directory Company, 1921).

¹⁸ Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster* (rpt. ed.; Tulsa: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998), pp. 27, 31-77, 115-126.

Prior to the publication of Parrish's book, however, a "booklet about the riot was issued by the Black Dispatch Press of Oklahoma City in July, 1921. Written by Martin Brown, the booklet was titled, "Is Tulsa Sane?" At present, no copies are known to exist.

¹⁹ Loren L. Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot" (M.A. thesis, University of Tulsa, 1946).

²⁰ *Ibid.* According to his thesis adviser, William A. Settle, Jr., Gill was later highly critical of some of his original interpretations. During a visit to Tulsa during the late 1960s, after he had served as a Peace Corps volunteer, Gill told Settle that he had been "too hard" on black Tulsans.

²¹ Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 104-107. Gina Henderson and Marlene L. Johnson, "Black Wall Street," *Emergence* 4 (February, 2000), p. 71.

The lack of public recognition given to the riot during this period was not limited to Tulsa's white community. A survey of back issues of the *Oklahoma Eagle* — long the city's flagship African American newspaper — revealed neither any articles about the riot, nor any mention of any commemorative ceremonies, at the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the riot in 1946. The same also applied to the thirtieth and fortieth anniversaries in 1951 and 1961.

²² *Oklahoma Eagle*, June 2, 1971, pp. 1, 10. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 2, 1971, p. 7A. Sam Howe Verhovek, "75 Years Later, Tulsa Confronts Its Race Riot," *New York Times*, May 31, 1996, p. 12A. Interview with E.L. Goodwin, Sr., Tulsa, November 21, 1976, in Ruth Sigler Avery, *Fear: The Fifth Horseman—A Documentary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot*, unpublished manuscript.

See also: Mable B. Little, *Fire on Mount Zion: My Life and History as a Black Woman in American* (Langston, OK: The Black Think Tank, 1990); Beth Macklin, "'Home' Important in Tulsan's Life," *Tulsa World*, November 30, 1975, p. 3H; and Mable B. Little, "A History of the Blacks of North Tulsa and My Life (A True Story)," typescript dated May 24, 1971.

²³ Telephone interview with Larry Silvey, Tulsa, August 5, 1999. Oral history interview with Ed Wheeler, Tulsa, February 27, 1998, by Scott Ellsworth. See also: Brent Staples, "Unearthing a Riot," *New York Times Magazine*, December 19, 1999, p. 69.

²⁴ Ed Wheeler interview.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Larry Silvey interview. Ed Wheeler, "Profile of a Race Riot," *Impact Magazine*, IV (June-July 1971). Staples, "Unearthing a Riot," p. 69.

²⁶ Avery, *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. William A. Settle, Jr. and Ruth S. Avery, "Report of December 1978 on the Tulsa County Historical Society's Oral History Program," typescript located at the Tulsa Historical Society. Telephone interview with Ruth Sigler Avery, Tulsa, September 14, 2000.

²⁷ Mozella Jones Collection, Tulsa Historical Society. John Hope Franklin and John Whittington Franklin, eds., *My Life and An Era: The Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). John Hope Franklin, "Tulsa: Prospects for a New Millennium," remarks given at Mount Zion Baptist Church, Tulsa, June 4, 2000.

Whitlow also was an authority on the history of Tulsa's African American community. See: Henry C. Whitlow, Jr., "A History of the Greenwood Era in Tulsa," a paper presented to the Tulsa Historical Society, March 29, 1973.

²⁸ During this same period, a number of other Tulsans also endeavored to bring the story of the riot out into the open. James Ault, who taught sociology at the University of Tulsa during the late 1960s, interviewed a number of riot survivors and eyewitnesses. So did Bruce Hartnitt, who directed the evening programs at Tulsa Junior College during the early 1970s. Hartnitt's father, who had managed the truck fleet at a West Tulsa refinery at the time of the riot, later told his son that he had been ordered to help transport the bodies of riot victims.

Telephone interview with James T. Ault, Omaha, Nebraska, February 22, 1999. Oral history interview with Bruce Hartnitt, Tulsa, May 30, 1998, by Scott Ellsworth.

²⁹ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 476. Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Lee E. Williams and Lee E. Williams 11, *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine (Arkansas), Tulsa and Chicago, 1919-1921* (Hattiesburg: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1972).

³⁰ Kay M. Teall, ed., *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971). Arthur Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972* (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1972).

³¹ Rudia M. Halliburton, Jr., *The Tulsa Race War of 1921* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1975).

³²Following the publication of Scott Ellsworth's *Death in a Promised Land* in 1982, a number of books have been published which deal either directly or indirectly with the riot. Among them are: Mabel B. Little, *Fire on Mount Zion* (1990); Robert N. Hower, "Angels of Mercy": *The American Red Cross and the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot* (Tulsa: Homestead Press, 1993); Eddie Faye Gates, *They Came Searching* (1997); Dorothy Moses DeWitty, *Tulsa: A Tale of Two Cities* (Langston, OK: Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, 1997); Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997); and, Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1998).

The riot has inspired some fictionalized treatments as well, including: Ron Wallace and J.J. Johnson, *Black Wall Street. A Lost Dream* (Tulsa: Black Wall Street Publishing, 1992); Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); a children's book, Hannibal B. Johnson and Clay Portis, *Up From the Ashes: A Story About Building Community* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2000); and a musical, "A Song of Greenwood," book and music by Tim Long and Jerome Johnson, which premiered at the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa on May 29, 1998.

And more books, it should be added, are on the way. For as of the summer of 2000, at least two journalists were under contract with national publishers to research and write books about the riot and its legacy. Furthermore, a number of Tulsans are also said to be involved with book projects about the riot.

³³Oklahoma newspapers have, not surprisingly, provided the most expansive coverage of recent riot-related news. In particular, see: the reporting of Melissa Nelson and Christy Watson in the *Daily Oklahoman*; the numerous non-bylined stories in the *Oklahoma Eagle*; and the extensive coverage by Julie Bryant, Rik Espinosa, Brian Ford, Randy Krehbiel, Ashley Parrish, Jimmy Pride, Rita Sherrow, Robert S. Walters, and Heath Weaver in the *Tulsa World*.

For examples of national and international coverage, see: Kelly Kurt's wire stories for the Associated Press (e.g., "Survivors of 1921 Race Riot Hear Their Horror Retold," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 10, 1999, p. A6); V. Dion Haynes, "Panel Digs Into Long-Buried Facts About Tulsa Race Riot," *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 1999, Sec. 1, p. 6-; Frederick Burger "The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot: A Holocaust America Wanted to Forget," *The Crisis*, CVII, 6 (November-December 1999), pp. 14-18; Arnold Hamilton, "Panel Urges Reparations in Tulsa Riot," *Dallas Morning News*, February 5, 2000, pp. 1A, 22A; "The Riot That Never Was," *The Economist*, April 24, 1999, p. 29; Tim Madigan, "Tulsa's Terrible Secret," *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, January 30, 2000, pp. 1G, 6-7G; Rick Montgomery, "Tulsa Looking for the Sparks That Ignited Deadly Race Riot," *Kansas City Star*, September 8, 1999, pp. A1, A10; James Langton, "Mass Graves Hold the Secrets of American Race Massacre," *London Daily Telegraph*, March 29, 1999; Claudia Kolker, "A City's Buried Shame," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1999, pp. A1, A16; Jim Yardley, "Panel Recommends Reparations in Long-Ignored Tulsa Race Riot," *New York Times*, February 5, 2000, pp. A1, A10; Martin Evans, "A Costly Legacy," *Newsday*, November 1, 1999; Gwen Florio, "Oklahoma Recalls Deadliest Race Riot," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 31, 1999, pp. A1, A9; Ben Fenwick, "Search for Race Riot Answers Leads to Graves," Reuter's wire story #13830, September 1999; Warren Cohen, "Digging Up an Ugly Past," *U.S. News and World Report*, January 31, 2000, p. 26; Tom Kenworthy, "Oklahoma Starts to Face Up to '21 Massacre," *USA Today*, February 18, 2000, p. 4A; and Lois Romano, "Tulsa Airs a Race Riot's Legacy," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2000, p. A3.

The riot has also been the subject of a number of television and radio news stories, documentaries, and talk shows during the past two years. The more comprehensive documentaries include: "The Night Tulsa Burned," The History Channel, February 19, 1999; "Tulsa Burning," *60 Minutes II*, November 9, 1999; and, "The Tulsa Lynching of 1921: A Hidden Story", Cinemax, May 31, 2000.



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

The Tulsa Race Riot

By Scott Ellsworth

His tory does not take place in a vac uum.

Historical events, be they great or small, do not exist in isolation, but are a product of the age during which they occurred. Often times, the reasons why a particular historical incident turned out the way it did can be readily located, while for others, the causes may be more difficult to locate. In both cases, one rule still holds true: that the events of the past cannot be separated from the era when they occurred.

The same applies to the Tulsa race riot as well. To understand the riot, one cannot begin with the first shot that was fired, nor even with the seemingly insignificant chain of events that led to the first signs of real trouble. Rather, we must be gin with the spirit of the times. Only seeing the world as Tulsans did in 1921, and by grasping both their passions and their fears, can we comprehend not only how this great tragedy could occur, but why, in the end, that it did.

Of all the qualities that impressed out-of-town visitors about Tulsa in the days before the race riot, one of them was just how new and up-to-date everything seemed. From the modern office buildings that were rising up out of downtown, to the electric trolleys that rumbled back and forth along Main Street, to the rows of freshly painted houses that kept pushing the city limits further and further into the surrounding countryside, compared to other cities, Tulsa was nothing short of an over night sensation. In deed, Tulsa had grown so much and so fast — in a now-you-don't-see-it, now-you-do kind of fashion — that local boosters called it the Magic City.

The elixir which had fueled this remarkable growth was, of course, oil. The discovery of the nearby Glenn Pool — reputed to be the “richest small oil field in the world” — in 1905, and by the farsightedness of local leaders to build a bridge across the Arkansas River one year ear-



A birds eye view of Tulsa in 1918 (Cour tesy Mark Adkinson).

lier, the sleepy rural crossroads known as Tulsa, Indian Territory was suddenly catapulted into the urban age.

By 1910, thanks to the forest of derricks which had risen up over the nearby oil fields, Tulsa had mushroomed into a raucous boomtown of more than 10,000. Astonishingly, its real growth was only beginning. As the word began to spread about Tulsa — as a place where fortunes could be made, lives could be re built, and a fresh start could be had — people literally began to pour in from all over the country. Remarkably enough, by 1920, the population of greater Tulsa had skyrocketed to more than 100,000.

The city that these newcomers had built was, in many ways, equally remarkable. Anchored by the oil industry, and by its new role as the hub of the vast Mid-Continent Field, by 1921 Tulsa was home to not only the offices of more than four-hundred different oil and gas companies, but also to a score of oil field supply companies, tank manufacturers, pipe line companies, and refineries. While the city also enjoyed its role as a regional commercial center, serving nearby farms and ranches, for good

reason it was already being referred to as the Oil Capital of the World.

Despite its youth, Tulsa also had acquired, by 1921, practically all of the trappings of older, more established American cities. Four different railroads — the Frisco, the Santa Fe, the Katy, and the Midland Valley — served the city, as did two separate inter-urban train lines. A new, all-purpose bridge spanned the Arkansas River near Eleventh Street, while street repair, owing to the ever-increasing numbers of automobiles, was practically constant. By 1919, Tulsa also could boast of having its own commercial airport.

A new city hall had been built in 1917, a new federal building in 1915, and a new county courthouse in 1912. New schools and parks also had been dedicated, and in 1914, the city erected a magnificent new auditorium, the 3,500 seat Convention Hall. Tulsa had grown so quickly, in fact, that even the old city cemetery had to be closed to new burials. In its place, the city had designated Oaklawn Cemetery, located at Eleventh Street and Peoria Avenue, as the new city cemetery.²

In 1921, Tulsa could lay claim to two daily newspapers the *Tulsa World*, a morning paper, and a newly renamed afternoon daily, the *Tulsa Tribune* plus a handful of weeklies. Radio had not arrived yet, but the city was connected to the larger world through four different telegraph companies. Telephone service also existed — with some ten-thousand phones in use by 1918 — although long-distance service was still in its infancy. While the city was linked both to nearby towns and to the state capital at Oklahoma City by a network of roads, rail travel was by far the fastest and most reliable mode of transportation in and out of town.

Seven different banks, some of which were capitalized at more than one-million dollars each, were located downtown, as were the offices of dozens of insurance agencies, investment advisers, accounting firms, stock and bond brokerages, real estate agencies, and loan companies. By 1921, more than two-hundred attorneys were practicing in Tulsa, as were more than one-hundred-fifty doctors and sixty dentists.

Frequently awash in money, the citizens of Tulsa had plenty of places to spend it from furniture stores, jewelry shops, and clothing stores to restaurants and cafes, motion picture theaters, billiard halls, and speakeasies. Those who could afford it could find just about anything in Tulsa, from the latest in fashion to the most modern home appliances, including vacuum cleaners, electric washing machines and Victrolas. For those whose luck had run dry, the city had its share of pawnshops and second-hand stores.³

Many Tulsans were especially proud of the city's residential neighborhoods — and with good reason. From the workingman's castles that offered electric lighting, indoor plumbing, and spacious front porches, to the real castles that were being built by the oil barons, the city could boast of block after block of handsome, modern homes. While Tulsa was by no means without its dreary rooming houses and poverty stricken side streets, brand new neighborhoods with names like Maple Ridge, Sunset Park, Glen Acres, College Addition, Gurley Hill,

and Irving Heights were built year after year. Some of the new homes were so palatial that they were regularly featured on picture postcards, chamber of commerce pamphlets, and other publications extolling the virtues of life in Tulsa.⁴

So too, not surprisingly, was downtown. With its modern office buildings, its graceful stone churches, and its busy nightlife, it is easy to see why Tulsans — particularly those who worked, played, or worshiped downtown — were so proud of the city's ever-growing skyline. What the pamphlets and the picture postcards did not reveal was that, despite its impressive new architecture and its increasingly urbane affectations, Tulsa was a deeply troubled town. As 1920 turned into 1921, the city would soon face a crossroads that, in the end, would change it forever.

However, chamber of commerce pamphlets and the picture postcards did not reveal everything. Tulsa was, in some ways, not one city but two. Practically in the shadow of downtown, there sat a community that was no less remarkable than Tulsa itself. Some whites disparagingly referred to it as "Little Africa," or worse, but it has become known in later years simply as Greenwood.⁵ In the early months of 1921, it was the home of nearly ten-thousand African American men, women, and children.

Many had ties to the region that stretched back for generations. Some were the descendants of African American slaves, who had accompanied the Creeks, Cherokees, and Choctaws on the Trail of Tears. Others were the children and grandchildren of runaway slaves who had fled to the Indian nations in the years prior to and during the Civil War. A few elderly residents, some of whom were later interviewed by WPA workers during the 1930s, had been born into slavery.⁶

However, most of Tulsa's African American residents had come to Oklahoma, like their white neighbors, in the great boom years just before and after statehood. Some had come from Mississippi, some from Missouri, and others had journeyed all the way from Georgia. For many, Oklahoma represented not only a chance to escape the harsher racial realities of life in the



B. C. Franklin (Courtesy John Hope Franklin).

for mer states of the Old South, but was literally a land of hope, a place worth sacrificing for, a place to start anew. And come they did, in wagons and on horseback, by train and on foot. While some of the new settlers came directly to Tulsa, many others had first lived in smaller communities — many of which were all-black, or nearly so — scattered throughout the state.

B.C. Franklin was one. Born in a small country crossroads about twenty miles southwest of Pauls Valley, Franklin's family had roots in Oklahoma that stretched back to the days of the old Chickasaw Nation during the Civil War. An intelligent and determined young man, Franklin had attended college in Tennessee and Georgia, but returned to Indian Territory to open up a law practice. He eventually settled in Rentiesville, an all-black town located between Muskogee and Checotah, where he became not only the sole lawyer in town, but also its postmaster, its justice of the peace, and one of its leading businessmen. However, as his son John Hope Franklin later wrote, "there was not a decent living in all those activities." Thus, in February 1921, B.C. Franklin moved to Tulsa in the hopes of setting up a more lucrative practice.⁷

Franklin's experiences, however, were hardly unique, and scattered about Greenwood were other business men and business women who had first tried their luck in smaller communities. In the end, however, their earlier difficulties often proved to be an asset in their new home. Full of energy and well-schooled in entrepreneurialism, these new settlers brought considerable business skills to Tulsa. Aided by the buoyant local economy, they went to work on building business enterprises that rested upon sturdier economic foundations. By early 1921, the community that they built was, by national standards, in many ways quite remarkable.⁸

Running north out of the downtown commercial district — and shaped, more or less, like an elongated jigsaw puzzle piece — Greenwood was bordered by the Frisco railroad yards to the south, by Lansing Street and the Midland Valley tracks to the east, and by Standpipe and Sunset Hills to the west. The section line, now known as Pine Street, had for many years been the northernmost boundary of the African American settlement, but as Tulsa had grown, so had Greenwood. By 1921, new all-black housing developments — such as the Booker T. Washington and Dunbar Additions — now reached past Pine and into the open countryside north of the city.

The backbone of the community, however, was Greenwood Avenue. Running north for more than a mile — from Archer Street and the Frisco yards all the way past Pine — it was not only black Tulsa's primary thoroughfare, but also possessed considerable symbolic meaning as well. Unlike other streets and avenues in Tulsa, which crisscrossed both white and black neighborhoods, Greenwood Avenue was essentially confined to the African American community.⁹

The southern end of Greenwood Avenue, and adjacent side streets, was the home of the African American commercial district. Nicknamed "Deep Greenwood," this several block stretch of handsome one, two, and three-story red brick buildings housed dozens of black-owned and operated businesses, including grocery stores and meat markets, clothing and dry good stores, billiard halls, beauty parlors and barber shops,



Centered along busy Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa's African-American commercial district was a bona fide American success story. Home to literally dozens of black-owned and operated businesses in the days before the riot, "Deep Greenwood" could also lay claim to a public library, a postal sub station, a Y. M. C. A. branch, and the offices of two newspapers (Courtesy Don Ross).

as well as the Economy Drug Company, William Anderson's jewelry store, Henry Lilly's upholstery shop, and A.S. Newkirk's photography studio. A suit of clothes purchased at Elliott & Hooker's clothing emporium at 124 N. Greenwood, could be fitted across the street at H.L. Byars' tailor shop at 105 N. Greenwood, and then cleaned around the corner at Hope Watson's cleaners at 322 E. Archer.

There were plenty of places to eat including late night sandwich shops and barbecue joints to Doc's Beanery and Hamburger Kelly's place. Lilly Johnson's Liberty Cafe, recalled Mabel Little, who owned a beauty shop in Greenwood at the time of the riot, served home-cooked meals at all hours, while at the nearby Little Cafe, "people lined up waiting for their specialty — chicken or smothered steak with rice and brown gravy." A Coca-Cola, a sarsaparilla, or a soda could be bought at Rolly and Ada Huff's confectionery on Archer between Detroit and Cincinnati. Although both the nation and Oklahoma were nominally dry, there were also places where a man or a woman could purchase a shot of bootleg whiskey or a milky-colored glass of Choctaw beer.¹⁰

For a community of its size, the Greenwood business district could boast of a number of impressive commercial structures. John and Loula Williams, who owned the three-story Williams Building at the northwest corner of Greenwood Avenue and Archer Street, also operated the seven-hundred-fifty seat Dreamland Theater, that offered live musical and theatrical revues as well as silent movies accompanied by a piano player. Across the street from the Dreamland sat the white-owned Dixie Theater with seating for one-thousand, which made it the second largest theater in town. In nearby buildings were the offices of nearly all of Tulsa's black lawyers, realtors, and other professionals. Most impressively, there were fifteen African American physicians in Tulsa at the time of the riot, including Dr. A.C. Jackson, who had been described by one of the Mayo brothers as the "most able Negro surgeon in America".¹¹

The overall intellectual life of Greenwood was, for a community of its size, quite striking. There was not one black newspaper but two - the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun*. African Americans were discouraged from utilizing the new Carnegie library downtown, but a smaller, all-black branch library had been opened on Ar-

cher Street. Nationally recognized African American leaders, such as W.E.B. DuBois, had lectured in Tulsa before the riot. Moreover, Greenwood was also home to a local business league, various fraternal orders, a Y.M.C.A. branch, and a number of women's clubs, the last of which were often led by the more than thirty teachers who taught in the city's separate — and, as far as facilities were concerned, decidedly unequal — African American public schools.

The political issues of the day also attracted considerable interest. The *Tulsa Star*, in particular, not only provided extensive coverage of national, state, and local political campaigns and election results, but also devoted significant column space for recording the activities of the local all-black Democratic and Republican clubs. Moreover, the *Star* also paid attention to a number of quasi-political movements as well, including Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, different back-to-Africa movements, and various nationalist organizations. One such group, the African Blood Brotherhood, later claimed to have had a chapter in Greenwood prior to the riot.¹²

When it came to religious activity, however, there was no question at all where Tulsa's African American community stood. Church membership in Tulsa ran high. On a per capita basis, there were more churches in black Tulsa than there were in the city's white community as well as a number of Bible study groups, Christian youth organizations, and chapters of national religious societies. All told, there were more than a dozen African American churches in Tulsa at the time of the riot, including First Baptist, Vernon A.M.E., Brown's Chapel, Morning Star, Bethel Seventh Day Adventist, and Paradise Baptist, as well as Church of God, Nazarene, and Church of God in Christ congregations. Most impressive from an architectural standpoint, perhaps, was the beautiful, brand new home of Mount Zion Baptist Church, which was dedicated on April 10, 1921 — less than eight weeks before the riot.¹³

The new Mount Zion Baptist Church building (constructed of brick and mortar) also was

a tangible symbol, of the fact that African Americans had also shared, to some degree, in Tulsa's great economic boom. While modest in comparison with the fortunes being amassed by the city's white millionaires, Greenwood was home to some highly successful business entrepreneurs. O.W. Gurley, a black real estate developer and the owner of the Gurley Hotel, reportedly suffered some \$65,000 in losses during the riot. Even more impressive was the business resume of J.B. Stradford, whose assets were said to be nearly twice as large. Stradford, a highly successful owner of rental property, had borrowed \$20,000 in order to construct his own hotel. Opened on June 1, 1918, the Stradford Hotel, a modern fifty-four room structure, instantly became not only one of the true jewels of Greenwood Avenue, but was also one of the largest black-owned businesses in Oklahoma.¹⁴

Most of the black-owned businesses in Tulsa were, of course, much more modest affairs.



One of the Mann Grocery stores of the Greenwood district (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

Scattered about the district were numerous small stores, from two-seater barber shops to family-run grocery stores, that helped to make pre-riot Greenwood, on a per capita basis, one of the most business-laden African American communities in the country. Grit, hard work, and determination were the main reasons for this success, as were the entrepreneurial skills that were imported to Tulsa from smaller communities across Oklahoma.

There were other reasons as well. Tulsa's booming economy was a major factor, as was

the fact that, on the whole, Greenwood was not only the place where black Tulsans chose to shop, but was also practically the only place that they could. Hemmed in by the city's residential segregation ordinance, African Americans were generally barred from patronizing white-owned stores downtown — or ran the risk of insult, or worse, if they tried. While many black Tulsans made a conscious decision to patronize African American merchants, the fact of the matter was that they had few other places to go.¹⁵

There was no dearth of African American consumers. Despite the growing fame of its commercial district, the vast majority of Greenwood's adults were neither businessmen nor businesswomen, but worked long hours, under trying conditions, for white employers. Largely barred from employment in both the oil industry and from most of Tulsa's manufacturing facilities, these men and women toiled at difficult, often dirty, and generally menial jobs — the kinds that most whites considered beneath them—as janitors and ditch-diggers, dishwashers and maids, porters and day laborers, domestics and service workers. Unsung and largely forgotten, it was, nevertheless, their paychecks that built Greenwood, and their hard work that helped to build Tulsa.¹⁶

Equally forgotten perhaps, are the housing conditions that these men and women returned to at the end of the day. Although Greenwood contained some beautiful, modern homes — particularly those of the doctors, business owners, and educators who lived in the fashionable 500 block of North Detroit Avenue along the shoulder of Standpipe Hill — most African Americans in pre-riot Tulsa lived in far more meager circumstances. According to a study conducted by the American Association of Social Workers of living conditions in black Tulsa shortly before the riot, some “95 percent of the Negro residents in the black belt lived in poorly constructed frame houses, without conveniences, and on streets which were unpaved and on which the drainage was all surface.”¹⁷

Not all black Tulsans, however, lived in Greenwood. As the city boomed and the newly-minted oil tycoons built mansions, pur-

chased touring cars, and in general sought to mimic the lifestyles of their more established counterparts back East, there was a corresponding boom in the market for domestic help. Such positions were often open to African Americans as well as whites, and by early 1921, upward of two-hundred black Tulsans were residing in otherwise all-white neighborhoods, especially on the city's ever growing south side. Working as maids, cooks, butlers, and chauffeurs, they lived in servant's quarters that, more often than not, were attached to garages located at the rear of their employer's property.

For the men and women who lived and worked in these positions, a visit to Greenwood — be it to attend Sunday services, or simply to visit with family and friends — was often the highlight of the week. Whether they caught a picture show at the Dreamland or the Dixie, or merely window-shopped along Greenwood Avenue, they, too, could take both pride and ownership in what lay before them.¹⁸ Its poverty and lack of services notwithstanding, there was no question that Greenwood was an American success story.

Yet, despite its handsome business district and its brand-new brick church, and the rags-to-riches careers of some of its leading citizens, neither Greenwood's present, nor its future, was by any means secure. By the spring of 1921, trouble — real trouble — had been brewing in Tulsa for some time. When it came to issues of race — not just in Tulsa or in Oklahoma, but all across America — the problems weren't simply brewing. They had, in fact, already arrived.

In the long and often painful history of race relations in the United States, few periods were as turbulent as the years surrounding World War I, when the country exploded into an era of almost unprecedented racial strife. In the year 1919 alone, more than two dozen different race riots broke out in cities and towns across the nation. Unlike the racial disturbances of the 1960s and the 1990s, these riots were characterized by the specter of white mobs invading African American neighborhoods, where they attacked black men and women and, in some cases, set their homes and businesses on fire.¹⁹

These riots were set off in different ways. In Chicago, long-simmering tensions between blacks and whites over housing, recreation, and jobs were ignited one Sunday afternoon in late July 1919. A group of teenaged African American boys, hoping to find some relief from the rising temperatures, climbed aboard a homemade raft out on Lake Michigan. They ended up drifting opposite an all-white beach. The white beach-goers, meanwhile, who were already angered by an attempt by a group of black men and women to utilize that beach earlier that day, began hurling stones at the youths, killing one, and setting off nearly two weeks of racial terror. In the end, more than thirty-eight people — both black and white — were killed in Chicago, and scores and scores of homes were burned to the ground.²⁰

A race riot in Washington, D.C., which broke out earlier that summer, followed a more typical pattern. After rumors had been circulating for weeks that rapists were on the loose, a white woman claimed that she had been sexually assaulted by two young African American men. Although she later admitted that her original story was false, the white press built up the incident, and racial tensions rose. Then, on July 19, the *Washington Post* published yet another story of an alleged assault — “NEGROES ATTACK GIRL” ran the headline, “WHITE MEN VAINLY PURSUE.” The next day, the nation’s capital erupted into racial violence, as groups of white soldiers, sailors, and Marines began to “molest any black person in sight, hauling them off of streetcars and out of restaurants, chasing them up alleys, and beating them mercilessly on street corners.” At least six people were killed and more than a hundred were injured. After whites threatened to set fire to African American neighborhoods, order was finally restored when the secretary of war called out some two-thousand federal troops to patrol the streets.²¹

Alleged sexual assaults played a role in two other race riots that broke out that year. In Knoxville, Tennessee, a white mob gathered outside the jail where a black male was being held for supposedly attacking a white female.

Troops were called in to quell the disturbance, but the soldiers — all of whom were white — instead invaded the African American district and “shot it up.” In Omaha, Nebraska, a similar situation rapidly developed after William Brown, who was black, was arrested for allegedly assaulting a young white girl. A mob of angry whites then stormed the courthouse where Brown was being held, shot him, hung him from a nearby lamppost, and then mutilated his body beyond recognition.²²

The savage attack on William Brown brutally demonstrated just how passionately many white Americans felt about situations involving interracial sexual relations. While this subject — which has a long and complicated history in the United States — cannot be dealt with in a detailed fashion here, suffice it to say that during the post-World War I era, and for many years



African Americans rallied solidly behind the nation’s war effort during World War I, and thousands of black soldiers served in France. Upon their return to the U. S., however, many black vets found that the democracy that they had fought to protect overseas was often unavailable to them back home (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

before and after, perhaps no crime was viewed as more egregious by many whites than the rape, or attempted rape, of a white woman by a black male.²³

Riots, however, were not the only form of extralegal violence faced by African Americans during the World War I era. In 1919 alone, more than seventy-five blacks were lynched by white mobs — including more than a dozen black soldiers, some of whom were murdered while still in uniform. Moreover, many of the so-called lynchings were growing ever more barbaric. During the first year following the war, eleven African Americans were burned — alive — at the stake by white mobs.²⁴

Across the nation, blacks bitterly resisted these attacks, which were often made worse by the fact that in many instances, local police authorities were unable or unwilling to disperse the white mobs. As the violence continued, and the death count rose, more and more African American leaders came to the conclusion that nothing less than the very future of black men and women in America hung in the balance.

World War I had done much to clarify their thinking. In the name of democracy, African Americans had solidly supported the war effort. Black soldiers — who were placed in segregated units — had fought gallantly in France, winning the respect not only of Allied commanders, but also of their German foes. Having risked their lives and shed their blood in Europe, many black veterans felt even more strongly that not only was it time that democracy was practiced back home, but that it was a long time overdue.²⁵

They returned home to a nation not only plagued by race riots and lynchings, but also by a poisonous racial climate that, in many ways, was only growing worse. The very same years that saw the emergence of the United States as a major world power also witnessed, back home, the rise of some aggressive and insidious new forms of white racism.

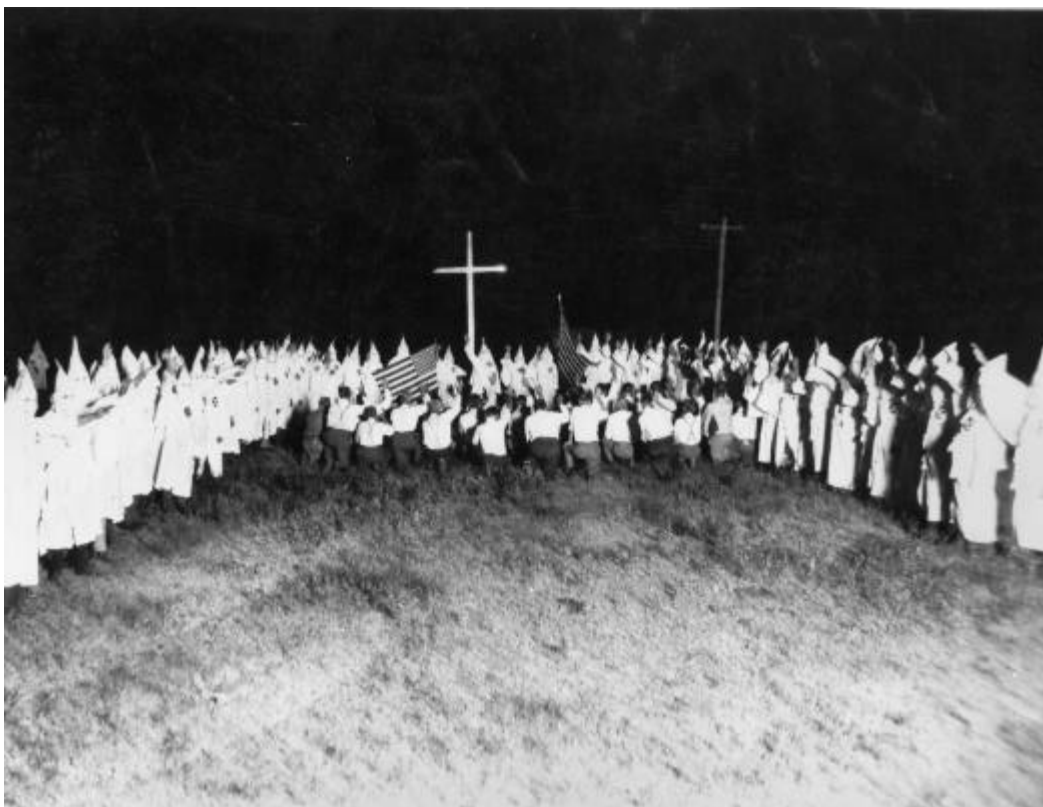
Moreover, the new racial climate was far from limited to the South. Less than fifty years after the Civil War, a number of northern cities began to bar African Americans from restau-

rants and other public establishments, while in the classrooms of Ivy League colleges and universities, a new scientific racism — which held that whites from northern Europe were innately superior to all other human groups — was all the rage. In Washington, the administration of President Woodrow Wilson proposed dozens of laws which mandated discriminatory treatment against African Americans. And across the country, racist white politicians constantly preyed upon racial fear and hostility.²⁶ They soon had a new ally.

Re-established in Atlanta in 1915, the so-called second Ku Klux Klan had adopted both the name and familiar hooded robes of its nineteenth century predecessor, but in many ways was a brand new organization. Launched the same year that D.W. Griffith's anti-black blockbuster, *The Birth of a Nation*, was released in movie theaters nationwide, Klan organizers fanned out across the country, establishing powerful state organizations not only in the South, but also in places like New Jersey, Indiana, and Oregon. While African Americans were often the recipients of the political intimidation, beatings, and other forms of violence meted out by klansmen, they were not the only targets of the new reign of terror. Klan members also regularly attacked Jews, Catholics, Japanese Americans, and immigrants from southern Europe, as well as suspected bootleggers, adulterers, and other alleged criminals.²⁷

Although still a young state, many of these national trends were well-represented in Oklahoma. Like their counterparts elsewhere, black Oklahomans had rallied strongly behind the war effort, purchasing Liberty Bonds, holding patriotic rallies and taking part in home front conservation efforts. More than a few African American men from Oklahoma — including a large number of Tulsans — had enlisted in the army. Some, like legendary Booker T. Washington High School football coach Seymour Williams, had fought in France.²⁸

But when Oklahoma's black World War I veterans finally returned to civilian life, they, too, came home to a state where, sadly enough, anti-black sentiments were alive and well. In 1911, the Oklahoma state legislature passed the



The Ku Klux Klan gripped Oklahoma in the 1920s, this ceremony was in Lone Grove (Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

infamous “Grandfather Clause”, which effectively ended voting by African Americans statewide. While the law was ruled unconstitutional by a unanimous vote by the U.S. Supreme Court four years later, other methods were soon employed to keep black Oklahomans from the polls. Nor did the Jim Crow legislation stop there. In the end, the state legislature passed a number of segregation statutes, including one which made Oklahoma the first state in the Union to segregate its telephone booths.²⁹

Racial violence, directed against black Oklahomans, also was a grim reality during this period. In large part owing to conditions of frontier lawlessness, Oklahoma had long been plagued by lynchings, and during the territorial days, numerous suspected horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and outlaws, the vast majority of whom were white, had been lynched by white mobs. However, from 1911 onward, all of the state’s lynching victims, save one, were African American. And during the next decade,

twenty-three black Oklahomans — including two women — were lynched by whites in more than a dozen different Oklahoma communities, including Anadarko, Ardmore, Eufaula, Holdenville, Idabel, Lawton, Madill, Mannford, Muldrow, Norman, Nowata, Okemah, Oklahoma City, Purcell, Shawnee, Wagoner, and Wewoka.³⁰

The Sooner State also proved to be fertile ground for the newly revived Ku Klux Klan. Estimates vary, but at the height of its power in the mid-1920s, it is believed that there were more than 100,000 klansmen in Oklahoma. Chapters existed statewide, and the organization’s membership rolls included farmers, ranchers, miners, oil field workers, small town merchants, big city businessmen, ministers, newspaper editors, policemen, educators, lawyers, judges, and politicians. Most Klan activities — including cross burnings, parades, night riding, whippings, and other forms of violence and intimidation — tended to be local in nature, although at one point the political clout of the state organization

was so great that it managed to launch impeachment proceedings against Governor John C. Walton, who opposed the Klan.³¹

Tulsa, in particular, became a lively center of Klan activity. While membership figures are few and far between — one estimate held that there were some 3,200 members of the Tulsa Klan in December 1921 — perhaps as many as six-thousand white Tulsans, at one time or another, became members of the Klan including several prominent local leaders. At one Klan initiation ceremony, that took place in the countryside south of town during the summer of 1922, more than one-thousand new members were initiated, causing a huge traffic jam on the road to Broken Arrow. Tulsa also was home to a thriving chapter of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan as well as being one of the few cities in the country with an active chapter of the organization's official youth affiliate, the Junior Ku Klux Klan. There were Klan parades, Klan funerals, and Klan fund-raisers including one wildly successful 1923 benefit that netted some \$24,000, when 13 Ford automobiles were raffled off. In time, the Tulsa Klan grew so solvent that it built its own brick auditorium, Beno Hall — short, it was said, for “Be No Nigger, Be No Jew, Be No Catholic” — on Main Street just north of downtown.

The local Klan also was highly active in politics in Tulsa. It regularly issued lists of Klan-approved candidates for both state and local political offices, that were prominently displayed in Tulsa newspapers. According to one student of the Klan in Tulsa Country during the 1920s, “mayors, city commissioners, sheriffs, district attorneys, and many other city and county office holders who were either klansmen or Klan supporters were elected, and reelected, with regularity.” In 1923, three of the five members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives from Tulsa Country were admitted klansmen.³³

In addition to cross burnings, Tulsa Klan members also routinely engaged in acts of violence and intimidation. Richard Gary, who lived off Admiral Boulevard during the early 1920s, still has vivid memories of hooded klansmen, a soon-to-be horsewhipped victim

sitting between them, heading east in open touring cars. Suspected bootleggers, wife-cheaters, and automobile thieves were among the most common victims — but they weren't the only ones. In May 1922, black Deputy sheriff John Henry Smitherman was kidnaped by klansmen, who sliced off one of his ears. Fifteen months later, Nathan Hantaman, a Jewish movie projectionist, was kidnaped by Klan members, who nearly beat him to death. The city's Catholic population also was the target of considerable abuse, as Tulsa klansmen tried to force local businessmen to fire their Catholic employees.³⁴

Not all white Tulsans, of course, or even a majority, belonged to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Among the city's white Protestants, there were many who disdained both the Klan's tactics and beliefs. Nonetheless, at least until the mid-1920s, and in some ways all the way until the end of the decade, there is no doubt but that the Ku Klux Klan was a powerful force in the life of the city.³⁵

Less easy to document, however, is whether the Klan was organized in Tulsa prior to the 1921 race riot. While there have been a number of allegations over the years claiming that the Klan was directly involved in the riot, the evidence is quite scanty — in either direction — as to whether or not the Klan had an actual organizational presence in the city prior to August 1921, some two months after the riot. However, since this is an area of continuing interest, it may prove helpful to examine this evidence a bit more closely.

According to the best available scholarship, the first Klan organizers to officially visit Oklahoma—George Kimbro, Jr. and George C. McCarron, both from Houston — did not arrive until the summer of 1920. Setting up headquarters in the Baltimore Building in downtown Oklahoma City, McCarron stayed on in the state capital, and began looking for future klansmen among the membership of the city's various white fraternal orders. According to Carter Blue Clark, whose 1976 doctoral dissertation remains the standard work on the history of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma, McCarron “shortly had twelve Kleagles [assistant organizers] working out of his office selling memberships through-

out the city, and very soon throughout the state.” While Clark concluded that the Klan “could not be credited with precipitating the riot” — a finding shared by most scholars of the riot — he also determined that Klan organizers had been active in the Tulsa region beforehand.

The fact that Tulsa would have been an early destination for Klan organizers — who, like their counterparts elsewhere, were paid on a commission basis — is entirely reasonable. Not only did Tulsa itself offer a large base of potential members, but the city was a likely jumping-off place for organizing the nearby oil fields.³⁷

Other evidence also points toward there being members of the Klan in Tulsa prior to the riot. In the sermon he delivered on Sunday evening, June 5, 1921 — only four days after the riot — Bishop E.D. Mouzon told parishioners at Boston Avenue Methodist Church that, “There may be some of you here tonight who are members of the Ku Klux Klan.” Furthermore, research conducted by Ruth Avery in the 1960s and 1970s also points toward pre-riot Klan membership in Tulsa.³⁸

However, other evidence suggests that, if anything, the Klan had a very limited presence in Tulsa before the riot. Throughout the first five months of 1921, for example, the *Tulsa Tribune* did not hesitate to print stories about Ku Klux Klan activities elsewhere, but gave no hint of there being any in Tulsa.³⁹

Moreover, only one week before the riot, on May 22, 1921, the *Tribune* carried an advertisement for the May Brothers clothing store which poked fun at the Klan. Announcing that the downtown men’s clothiers had created its own “Kool Klad Klan,” the advertisement went on to explain that this was a “hot weather society” whose members would receive discounts on their purchases of summer clothing. “Men who join the K.K.K. pay less for their summer clothes and get more out of them,” ran the ad copy, “Palm Beach is the favorite suit of most members.” What went unspoken, however, is that the May brothers were Jewish immigrants from Russia, something that made them likely candidates for Klan harassment.

The fact the brothers ran the advertisement would seem to suggest that on the eve of the riot, the existence of the Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa was far from common knowledge, perhaps reflecting membership numbers that were still low.⁴⁰

The riot would change all of that. Beginning with what one student of the history of the Klan described as “the first open sign of the Klan’s presence in Tulsa” in early August 1921, more than two months after the riot, the Klan literally exploded across the city. On August 10, more than two-thousand people attended a lecture at Convention Hall by a Klan spokesman from Atlanta. Three weeks later, on the evening of August 31, some three-hundred white Tulsa men were initiated into the Klan at a ceremony held outside of town. Three days later, masked klansmen kidnaped an alleged boot legger named J.E. Frazier and took him to a remote spot outside of Owasso and whipped him severely. After the county attorney subsequently announced that he would take no action against the klansmen, and intimated that the victim probably got what he deserved, more whippings soon followed. With the attack on J.E. Frazier, Tulsa’s Klan era began in earnest.

Despite the lack of convincing evidence linking the Klan to the outbreak of the riot in the months that followed, Klan organizers used the riot as a recruiting tool. The Klan lecturer from Atlanta who visited Tulsa in August 1921 declared that “the riot was the best thing that ever happened to Tulsa,” while other Klan spokesmen preyed upon the heightened emotional state of the white community after the riot. However the pitch was made, it soon became abundantly clear that Tulsa was prime recruiting territory for the Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, it had been for quite some time.⁴¹

Despite the fact that segregation appeared to be gaining ground state wide, in the months leading up to the riot, more than a few white Tulsans instead feared, at least in Tulsa itself, that the opposite was true. Many were especially incensed when black Tulsans disregarded, or challenged, Jim Crow practices. Others were both enraged at, and jealous of, the material success of some of Greenwood’s leading citi-

zens — feelings that were no doubt increased by the sharp drop in the price of crude oil, and the subsequent layoffs in the oil fields, that preceded the riot. Indeed, an unidentified writer for one white Tulsa publication, the *Exchange Bureau Bulletin*, later listed “niggers with money” as one of the so-called causes of the catastrophe. During the weeks and months leading up to the riot, there were more than a few white Tulsans who not only feared that the color line was in danger of being slowly erased, but believed that this was already happening.⁴²

Adding to these fears was the simple reality that, at the time, the vast majority of white Tulsans possessed almost no direct knowledge of the African American community whatsoever. Although a handful of whites owned businesses in Greenwood, and a few others occasionally visited the area for one reason or another, most white Tulsans had never set foot in the African American district, and never would. Living in all-white neighborhoods, attending all-white schools and churches, and working for the most part in all-white work environments, the majority of white Tulsans in 1921 had little more than fleeting contact with the city’s black population. What little they knew, or thought they knew, about the African American community was susceptible not only to racial stereotypes and deeply-ingrained prejudices, but also to rumor, innuendo, and, as events would soon prove, what was printed in the newspaper.

Such conditions, it turned out, proved helpful to the Klan, and both before and after the riot, Klan organizers exploited the racial concerns of white Tulsans as a method of boosting membership. However, the organizers also used something else. Race relations was not the only major societal issue that weighed heavily on the minds of many Tulsans during the months that led up to the riot. Rather, they were also deeply concerned about something else — something that, in the end, proved to be a gateway to catastrophe.

Of all the visitors who came to Tulsa in the months preceding the riot, not everyone left town with a positive image. Despite the city’s

new skyscrapers and impressive mansions, its booming oil industry and its rags-to-riches millionaires, some visitors — like the federal agent who spent five days undercover in Tulsa in late April, 1921 — saw a far different side of local life. In his “Report on Vice Conditions in Tulsa”, the agent had found that:

Gambling, bootlegging and prostitution are very much in evidence. At the leading hotels and rooming houses the bell hops and porters are pimping for women, and also selling booze. Regarding violations of the law, these prostitutes and pimps solicit without any fear of the police, as they will invariably remind you that you are safe in these houses.

The agent concluded, “Vice conditions in this city are extremely bad.”⁴⁸

Few Tulsans, in those days, would have been surprised by the agent’s findings. In addition to the city’s growing fame as the Oil Capital, Tulsa also was gaining something of a reputation — and not just regionally, but also among New York bankers and insurance men — as a wide-open town, a place where crime and criminals were as much a part of the oil boom as well logs and drilling rigs.

Most certainly, there was plenty of evidence to support such a conclusion. Well-known gambling dens — like Dutch Weete’s place three miles east of the fairgrounds, or Puss Hall’s roadhouse along the Turley highway — flourished on the outskirts of town, while within the city, both a fortune in oil royalties, or a roughneck’s wages, could be gambled away, night after night, in poker games in any number of hotels and rooming houses.

During the Prohibition era, both Oklahoma and the nation were supposedly dry, although one would not know it from a visit to Tulsa. One well-known local watering hole flourished in the Boston Building, less than two blocks from police headquarters, while scattered across the city were a number of illegal bars offering corn whiskey, choc beer, or the latest rage, “Jake” or jamaica ginger. In Greenwood, customers with a taste for live music with their whiskey might frequent Pretty Belle’s place, while on the south side of town, the well-to-do oil set, it was said,

purchased their liquor from a woman living at Third and Elgin. Hotel porters and bellhops regularly delivered pints and quarts to their guests, while an active bootlegging network operated out of the city's drug stores and pharmacies. For customers who placed a premium on discretion, both bootleggers and taxi drivers alike would also make regular home deliveries.⁴⁴

Illegal drugs were also present. Morphine, cocaine, and opium could all be purchased in Tulsa, apparently without much difficulty. Indeed, one month before the riot, federal narcotics officer Charles C. Post, declared, "Tulsa is overrun with narcotics."⁴⁵

Hand-in-hand with this illegal consumption came a plenitude of other crime. Automobile theft was said to be so common in Tulsa prior to the riot, it was claimed, that "a number of companies have canceled all policies on cars in Tulsa." Petty crimes, from housebreaking to traffic violations, were common fodder in the city's newspapers during this period — but so were more serious offenses. In the year preceding the riot, two Tulsa police officers had been killed on duty, while less than six weeks before the riot, Tulsa police officers were involved in a spectacular shoot-out with armed bandits at an east side rooming house. State Assistant Attorney General George F. Short, who visited Tulsa during this same period, even went so far as to describe the local crime conditions as "apparently grave."⁴⁶

While not everyone in town would have agreed with such a bleak assessment, there was no denying the fact that, on the eve of the race riot, the city had a serious crime problem. However, it was equally true that, in many ways, this was not only nothing new, but had more or less been a constant since the first heady days of the Glenn Pool and its attendant land swindles and get-rich-quick schemes. "Tulsans on the whole have had enough of the slime and crime that characterize a new community which draws much of the bad with the good in a rich strike," mused one local editorial writer, "But Tulsa has outgrown that stage."⁴⁷

A number of Tulsans had attempted, seemingly without a great deal of success, for years

to do something about the local crime conditions. In 1914, the Ministerial Alliance had mounted a campaign against gambling and other forms of vice. Five years later, a group of well-known white leaders formed a "Committee of One Hundred" to combat local crime problems. Two years after that, in early 1921, the group was revived, vowing to see that a "clean sweep of criminals is made here and that the laws are enforced."⁴⁸

However, there was a dark side to local anti-crime efforts as well. As young as the city of Tulsa was in the spring of 1921, it could already claim a long history of vigilante activity. In 1894, a white man known as "Dutch John," who was suspected of being a cattle rustler, was reportedly lynched in Tulsa. Ten years later, in 1904, a mob of whites gathered outside of the local jail, intending to lynch an African American prisoner held inside, but were turned away by the mayor, a local banker, and, not the least, by the city marshal, who had drawn both of his guns on the mob.⁴⁹

Although violence had been averted, that was far from the end of vigilantism in Tulsa. In 1917, after the United States had entered World War I, a secret society calling itself the Knights of Liberty unleashed a local campaign of terror and intimidation against suspected slackers, Mennonites and other pacifists, as well as political radicals. The group's most infamous action — that gained the attention of the national press — came in November 1917 when, with the encouragement of the white press and the apparent cooperation of the local authorities, masked members of the Knights tarred and feathered more than a dozen local members of the Industrial Workers of the World, a radical union movement, and forced them out of town at gunpoint.⁵⁰

Even though the Knights of Liberty/I.W.W. incident had been an all-white affair, it proved to be an important step along the road to the race riot. Not only did local law enforcement refuse to actively investigate the incident, but the secret society was praised by the white press for taking the law into its own hands, an important precedent for more such activities in the future.⁵¹

Nevertheless, it would not be until nearly three years later, during the late summer of 1920, that Tulsa would experience an incident that would prove to be the single most important precursor to the race riot. While all of its participants also were white, it, too, would have profound reverberations on both sides of the color line.

It began on Saturday night, August 21, 1920, when a Tulsa cab driver named Homer Nida was hired by two young men and one young woman to drive them to a dance in Sapulpa. Along the way, in the countryside past Red Fork, one of the men pulled out a revolver and forced Nida to pull over. Striking the terrified cab driver with the pistol, the gunman demanded money. When Nida could not produce a sufficient amount of cash, the gunman shot Nida in the stomach and kicked him out onto the highway, as the trio sped off in the now-stolen taxi. A passing motorist discovered Nida a short while later, and rushed the severely wounded driver to a hospital.⁵²

The next day, police in Nowata, acting on a tip, arrested an eighteen-year-old one-time telephone company employee named Roy Belton, who denied having had anything to do with the affair. Belton was taken to Homer Nida's hospital room in Tulsa, where the cab driver identified him as his assailant. Again, Belton denied the accusation.

Two days later, however, Roy Belton who was now being held in the jail located on the top floor of the Tulsa County Courthouse changed his story. He admitted that he had been in the taxicab, and that he and his accomplices had planned on robbing the driver. He insisted the shooting had been accidental. Belton claimed that the gun had been damaged when he struck Nida in the head with it, and that it had gone off accidentally while he was trying to repair it.⁵³

Belton's dubious account, however, only added fuel to the already inflamed emotions that many Tulsans already held about the shooting, a situation made even more tense by the fact that Homer Nida lay languishing in a Tulsa hospital. Less than forty-eight hours after Belton's so-called "confession," Tulsa

County Sheriff Jim Woolley had heard rumors that if the cab driver died, the courthouse would be mobbed and Roy Belton would be lynched.⁵⁴

Two days later, on Saturday, August 28, 1920, Homer Nida finally succumbed to his wounds and died. In reporting the news of his death in that afternoon's edition, the *Tulsa Tribune* quoted the driver's widow as saying that Belton deserved "to be mobbed, but the other way is better."⁵⁵

Other Tulsans thought otherwise. By 11:00 p.m. that same evening, hundreds of whites had gathered outside of the courthouse. Soon, a delegation of men carrying rifles and shotguns, some with handkerchiefs covering their faces, entered the building and demanded of Sheriff Woolley that he turn Belton over to them. The sheriff later claimed that he tried to dissuade the intruders, but he appears to have done little to stop them. For a little while later, the men appeared on the courthouse steps with Roy Belton. "We got him boys," they shouted, "We've got him."⁵⁶

Belton was then placed in Homer Nida's taxicab which had been stolen from the authorities — and was driven out past Red Fork, followed by a line of automobiles "nearly a mile long." Not far from where Nida had been shot, the procession stopped, and Belton was taken from the cab and interrogated. But when a rumor spread that a posse was in hot pursuit, everyone returned to their cars and set out along the road to Jenks.

The lynch mob had little to fear. Tulsa police did not arrive at the courthouse in any appreciable numbers until after Belton had been kidnapped and the caravan of cars had left downtown. "We did the best thing," Police Chief John Gustafson later claimed, "[we] jumped into cars and followed the ever increasing mob."

By the time police officers finally caught up with the lynching party, it had reassembled along the Jenks road about three miles southwest of Tulsa. Once again, Roy Belton was taken from the cab, and then led to a spot next to a roadside sign. A rope was procured from a nearby farmhouse, a noose was thrown around his neck, and he was lynched. Among the crowd

— estimated to be in the hundreds — were members of the Tulsa police, who had been instructed by Chief Gustafson not to intervene. “Any demonstration from an officer,” he later claimed, “would have started gun play and dozens of innocent people would have been killed and injured.”⁵⁷

In the days that followed, however, Gustafson practically applauded the lynching. While claiming to be “absolutely opposed” to mob law, the police chief also stated “it is my honest opinion that the lynching of Roy Belton will prove of real benefit to Tulsa and the vicinity. It was an object lesson to the hijackers and auto thieves.” Sheriff Woolley echoed the chief, claiming that the lynching showed criminals “that the men of Tulsa mean business.”⁵⁸

Nor were Tulsa’s top lawmen alone in their sentiments. The *Tulsa Tribune*, the city’s afternoon daily, also claimed to be opposed to mob law, but offered little criticism of the actual lynching party. The *Tulsa World*, the morning daily, went even further. Calling the lynching a “righteous protest,” the newspaper added: “There was not a vestige of the mob spirit in the act of Saturday night. It was citizenship, outraged by government inefficiency and a too tender regard for the professional criminal.” The *World* went on to blast the current state of the criminal justice system, ominously adding, “we predict that unless conditions are speedily improved,” that the lynching of Roy Belton “will not be the last by any means.”⁵⁹

With the death of Roy Belton, Tulsa had not simply joined the list of other Oklahoma cities and towns where, sadly enough, a lynching had occurred. Of equal importance was the fact that, as far as anyone could tell, the local law enforcement authorities in Tulsa had done precious little to stop the lynching. Thus, the question arose, if another mob ever gathered in Tulsa to lynch someone else, who was going to stop them?

The lynching of Roy Belton cast a deep pall over black Tulsa. For even though Homer Nida, Roy Belton, and the lynching party itself had all been white, there was simply no escaping the conclusion that if Belton had been

black, he would have been lynched just the same, and probably sooner. What about the next time that an African American was charged with a serious crime in Tulsa, particularly if it involved a white victim? What would happen then?

A.J. Smitherman, the outspoken editor of the *Tulsa Star*, the city’s oldest and most popular African American newspaper, was absolutely resolute on the matter of lynching. “There is no



W. H. Twine and A. J. Smitherman at Twine’s law office in Muskogee (Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

crime, however atrocious,” he wrote following the lynching of Roy Belton, “that justifies mob violence.”⁶⁰ For Smitherman, lynching was not simply a crime to be condemned, but was literally a “stain” upon society.⁶¹

Nor was Smitherman alone in his sentiments. If there was one issue which united African Americans all across the nation, it was opposition to mob law. Moreover, that opposition was particularly strong in Oklahoma, as many blacks had immigrated to the state in no small measure to escape the mob mentality that was far from uncommon in some other parts of the country.

However, both the lynching of Roy Belton in Tulsa, and that of a young African American in

Oklahoma City that same week, brought to the surface some dire practical issues. In a situation where a black prisoner was being threatened by a white mob, what should African Americans do? Smitherman was quite clear on the answer. As early as 1916, it has been reported, “a group of armed blacks prevented the lynching of one of their number in Muskogee.”⁶² In a similar situation, which happened only five months prior to the Tulsa riot, Smitherman had strongly praised a group of black men who had first armed themselves, and then set out in pursuit of a white mob that was en route to lynch an African American prisoner at Chandler. “As to the Colored men of Shawnee,” Smitherman wrote,

. . . they are the heroes of the story. If one set of men arm themselves and chase across the country to violate the law, certainly another set who arm themselves to uphold the supremacy of the law and prevent crime, must stand out prominently as the best citizens. Therefore, the action of the Colored men in this case is to be commended. We need more citizens like them in every community and of both races.⁶³

Five months later, when a group of African Americans in the state capital had not gathered until after a black youth had been lynched by a white mob, Smitherman was unsparing in his criticism. “It is quite evident,” he wrote, “that the proper time to afford protection to any prisoner is BEFORE and during the time he is being lynched.”⁶⁴

It also was clear that there were black Tulsans who were prepared to do just that. A little more than a year before Roy Belton was lynched, an incident occurred in Tulsa that — while it received little press coverage at the time — gave a clear indication as to what actions some black Tulsans would take if they feared that an African American was in danger of becoming the victim of mob violence.

The incident began on the evening of March 17, 1919, when a white ironworker was shot by two armed stick-up men on the outskirts of downtown. The ironworker died of his wounds some twelve hours later, but before he succumbed, he told Tulsa police detectives that

his assailants were black, and he provided the officers with a rather sketchy description of each man. “Violence is feared,” wrote the *Tulsa Democrat* of the shooting, “if the guilty pair is taken in charge.”⁶⁵

Some forty-eight hours later, Tulsa police officers arrested not two, but three, African American men in connection with the shooting. Despite proclamations by the police that the accused men would be protected, concerns for their safety quickly spread across the black community, and rumors began to circulate that the trio might be in danger of being lynched. The rumors reached a crescendo the day after the iron worker’s funeral, when a delegation of African American men — some of them armed — led by Dr. R.T. Bridgewater, a well-known physician, paid an evening visit to the city jail, where the accused men were being held.⁶⁶

“We understand there is to be some trouble here,” Dr. Bridgewater reportedly informed a police captain.

The police officer was adamant that nothing of the kind was going to occur. “There is not going to be any trouble here,” the captain allegedly replied, “and the best thing you fellows can do is beat it back and drop the firearms.” Despite his confidence, however, the officer allowed a small contingent to visit with the prisoners in their cells. Apparently satisfied with the situation, Dr. Bridgewater and the other African American men returned to Greenwood. There was no lynching.⁶⁷

Whatever relief black Tulsans may have felt following this affair did not last long. With the lynching of Roy Belton some seventeen months later, the door to mob violence in Tulsa was suddenly pushed wide open. If a white could be lynched in Tulsa, why would a black not suffer the same fate? Moreover, as editor Smitherman observed, the Belton lynching had also clarified another matter — one that would prove to be of vital importance on May 31, 1921. “The lynching of Roy Belton,” Smitherman wrote in the *Tulsa Star*, “explodes the theory that a prisoner is safe on the top of the Court House from mob violence.”⁶⁸

The death of Roy Belton shattered any confidence that black Tulsans may have had in the

ability, or the willingness, of local law enforcement to prevent a lynching from taking place in Tulsa. It also had done something else. For more than a few black Tulsans, the bottom line on the matter had become clearer than ever. Namely, the only ones who might prevent the threatened lynching of an African American prisoner in Tulsa would be black Tulsans themselves.

Despite the clarity of these conclusions, it is important to note that white Tulsans were utterly unaware of what their black neighbors were thinking. Although A.J. Smitherman's editorials regarding lynching were both direct and plainspoken, white Tulsans did not read the *Tulsa Star*, and Smitherman's opinions were not reported in the white press. As dramatic and as significant as the visit of Dr. Bridgewater and the others was to the city jail during the 1919 incident, it received little coverage in the city's white newspapers at the time, and was no doubt quickly forgotten.

Rather, when it came to the matter of lynching, black Tulsa and white Tulsa were like two separate galaxies, with one quite unaware of what the other was thinking. However, as the year 1921 began to unfold, events would soon bring them crashing into one another.

In 1921, most Tulsans received their news through either one or both of the city's two daily newspapers — the *Tulsa World*, which was the morning paper, or the *Tulsa Tribune*, which came out in the afternoon. While the *World* went all the way back to 1905, the *Tribune* was only two years old. It was the creation of Richard Lloyd Jones, a Wisconsin born newspaperman who had also worked as a magazine editor in New York. Hoping to challenge the more established — and, in many ways, more restrained — *Tulsa World*, Jones had fashioned the *Tribune* as a lively rival, unafraid to stir up an occasional hornet's nest.⁶⁹ As it turned out, Tulsa's vexing crime problem proved to be an ideal local arena in which the *Tribune* could hope to make a name for itself.

Sensing just how frustrated many Tulsans were with the local crime conditions, the *Tribune* launched a vigorous anti-crime campaign that ran throughout the early months of 1921.

In addition to giving broad coverage to both local criminal activity, and to sensational murders from across the state, the *Tribune* also published a series of hard-hitting editorials. Using titles such as "Catch the Crooks," "Go After Them," "Promoters of Crime," "To Make Every Day Safe," "The City Failure," and "Make Tulsa Decent," the editorials called for nothing less than an aggressive citywide clean-up campaign.⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, the *Tribune's* campaign ruffled the feathers of some local law enforcement figures along the way, including the county attorney, the police commissioner, and several members of the Tulsa Police Department. While it is uncertain as to how much of the *Tribune's* campaign had been motivated by partisan political concerns, both the paper's news stories and its editorials caused considerable commotion. Allegations of police corruption — particularly regarding automobile theft — received a great amount of attention, and ultimately led to formal investigations of local law enforcement by both the State of Oklahoma and the City of Tulsa.⁷¹

By mid-May 1921, the *Tribune's* anti-crime and anti-corruption campaign seemed to be on the verge of reaching some sort of climax. Branding the city government's investigation of the police department as a "whitewash," the newspaper kept hammering away at the alleged inability of, or refusal by, local law enforcement to tackle Tulsa's crime problem. "The people of Tulsa are becoming awake to conditions that are no longer tolerable," argued a May 14 editorial. Two days later, in an editorial titled "Better Get Busy," the *Tribune* warned that if the mayor and the city commission did not fulfill their campaign pledges to "clean up the city," and "do it quick," that "an awakened community conscience will do it for them."⁷²

Just what that might entail was also becoming clearer and clearer. The very same months during which the *Tribune* waged its anti-crime campaign, the newspaper also gave prominent attention to news stories involving vigilante activities from across the Southwest. Front-page coverage was given to lynching threats made against African Americans in Okmulgee in March, Oktaha in April, and Hugo in May. The horsewhipping of an alleged child molester in

Dallas by a group of masked men believed to be members of the Ku Klux Klan that also took place in May, was also given front-page treatment. Not surprisingly, the specter of Tulsa's own recent lynching also re-emerged in the pages of the *Tribune* in a May 26 editorial. While asserting that "Lawlessness to fight lawlessness is never justified," the editorial went on to claim "Tulsa enjoyed a brief respite following the lynching of Roy Belton." Moreover, the *Tribune* added that Belton's guilt had been "practically established . . ."⁷³

A revived discussion of the pros and cons of vigilante activity was not the only new element to be added to the ongoing conversation about crime that was taking place in Tulsa in late May. Despite latter claims to the contrary, for much of early 1921, race had not been much of a factor in the *Tribune's* vigorous anti-crime and anti-corruption campaign. Crimes in Greenwood had not been given undue coverage, nor had black Tulsans been singled out for providing the city with a disproportionate share of the city's criminal element.

But beginning on May 21, 1921, only ten days before the riot, all that was to change. In a lengthy, front-page article concerning the ongoing investigation of the police department, not only did racial issues suddenly come to the foreground, but more importantly, they did so in a manner that featured the highly explosive subject of relations between black men and white women. Commenting on the city's rampant prostitution industry, a former judge flatly told the investigators that black men were at the root of the problem. "We've got to get to the hotels," he said, "We've got to kick out the Negro pimps if we want to stop this vice."

Echoing these sentiments was the testimony of Reverend Harold G. Cooke, the white pastor of Centenary Methodist Church. Accompanied by a private detective, Cooke had led a small group of white men on an undercover tour of the city's illicit nightlife — and had been, it was reported, horrified at what he had discovered. Not only was liquor available at every place that they visited, but at hotels and room-

ing houses across the city. It was said, African American porters rather routinely offered to provide the men with the services of white prostitutes. Just beyond the city limits, the *Tribune* reported, the group visited a roadhouse where the color lines seemed to have disappeared entirely. "We found whites and Negroes singing and dancing together," one member of Reverend Cooke's party testified, "Young, white girls were dancing while Negroes played the piano."⁷⁵

Considering Oklahoma's social, political, and cultural climate during the 1920s, the effect of this testimony should not be taken lightly. Many white Tulsans no doubt found Reverend Cooke's revelations to be both shocking and distasteful. Perhaps even more importantly, they now had a convenient new target for their growing anger over local crime conditions. African American men who, at least as far as they were concerned, had far too much contact with white women.

As it turned out however, Tulsans did not have much time to digest the new revelations. Only five days later, on May 26, 1921, the city was rocked by the news of a spectacular jailbreak at the county courthouse. Sawing their way through their cell doors and through the one-inch steel bars that were set in an outer window, and then lowering themselves four stories to the ground on a rope that they had made by tying their blankets together, no less than twelve prisoners had escaped from the top floor jail. Remarkably, however, that was not the last jailbreak that month. Four days later, early on the morning of Memorial Day, May 30, 1921, six more prisoners — sawing through the same hastily repaired cell doors and window bars also escaped from the courthouse jail.⁷⁷

Although some of the escapees were quickly apprehended, the jailbreaks were one more ingredient in what had become, by the end of May 1921, an unstable and potentially volatile local atmosphere. For more than a few white Tulsans, local conditions regarding crime and punishment were fast becoming intolerable. Frustrated over the amount of lawbreaking in the city, and by the apparent inability of the police to do anything about it, they had helped turn the city into a

ticking time bomb, where anger and frustration sat just beneath the surface, waiting to explode. Moreover, during the last ten days of the month, they also had been presented with, however fleetingly, a compelling new target for their fury, namely, black men who, to their eyes, had an undue familiarity with white women.

As Tulsa prepared to celebrate Memorial Day, May 30, 1921, something else was in the air. As notions of taking the law into their own hands began to once again circulate among some white Tulsans, across the tracks in Greenwood, there were black Tulsans who were more determined than ever that in their city, no African American would fall victim to mob violence. World War I veterans and newspaper editors, common laborers and businessmen, they were just as prepared as they had been two years earlier to make certain that no black person was ever lynched in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Precisely at this moment, in this highly charged atmosphere, that two previously unheralded Tulsans, named Dick Rowland and Sarah Page, walked out of the shadows, and onto the stage of history.

Although they played a key role in the events which directly led to Tulsa's race riot, very little is known for certain about either Dick Rowland or Sarah Page. Rumors, theories, and unsubstantiated claims have been plentiful throughout the years, but hard evidence has been much more difficult to come by.

Dick Rowland, who was black, was said to have been nineteen-years-old at the time of the riot. At the time of his birth, he was given the name Jimmie Jones. While it is not known where he was born, by 1908 he and his two sisters had evidently been orphaned, and were living "on the streets of Vinita, sleeping wherever they could, and begging for food." An African American woman named Damie Ford, who ran a tiny one-room-grocery store, took pity on young Jimmie and took him in. "That's how I became Jimmie's 'Mama,'" she told an interviewer decades afterwards.

Approximately one year later, Damie and her adopted son moved to Tulsa, where they were reunited with Damie's family, the Rowlands. Eventually, little Jimmie took Rowland as his own last name, and selected his favorite first name, Dick, as his own. Growing up in Tulsa, Dick attended the city's separate all-black schools, including Booker T. Washington High School, where he played football.⁷⁸

Dick Rowland dropped out of high school to take a job shining shoes in a white-owned and white-patronized shine parlor located downtown on Main Street. Shoe shines usually cost a dime in those days, but the shoe shiners — or bootblacks, as they were sometimes called — were often tipped a nickel for each shine, and sometimes considerably more. Over the course of a busy working day, a shoe shiner could pocket a fair amount of money — especially if he was a teenaged African American youth with few other job prospects.

There were no toilet facilities, however, for blacks at the shine parlor where Dick Rowland worked. The owner had arranged for his African American employees to be able to use a "Colored" restroom that was located, nearby, in the Drexel Building at 319 S. Main Street. In order to gain access to the washroom, located on the top floor, Rowland and the other shoe shiners would ride in the building's sole elevator. Elevators were not automatic, requiring an operator. A job that was usually reserved for women.⁷⁹

In late May 1921, the elevator operator at the Drexel Building was a seventeen-year-old white woman named Sarah Page. Thought to have come to Tulsa from Missouri, she apparently lived in a rented room on North Boston Avenue. It also has been reported that Page was attending a local business school, a good career move at the time. Although Tulsa was still riding upon its construction boom, some building owners were evidently hiring African American women to replace their white elevator operators.⁸⁰

Whether - and to what extent — Dick Rowland and Sarah Page knew each other has long been a matter of speculation. It seems reasonable that they would have at least been able to

recognize each other on sight, as Rowland would have regularly rode in Page's elevator on his way to and from the restroom. Others, however, have speculated that the pair might have been lovers — a dangerous and potentially deadly taboo, but not an impossibility. Damie Ford later suggested that this might have been the case, as did Samuel M. Jackson, who operated a funeral parlor in Greenwood at the time of the riot. "I'm going to tell you the truth," Jackson told riot historian Ruth Avery a half century later, "He could have been going with the girl. You go through life and you find that somebody likes you. That's all there is to it." However, Robert Fairchild, who shined shoes with Rowland, disagreed. "At that time," Fairchild later recalled, "the Negro had so much fear that he didn't bother with integrated relationship[s]."⁸¹

Whether they knew each other or not, it is clear that both Dick Rowland and Sarah Page were downtown on Monday, May 30, 1921 — although this, too, is cloaked in some mystery. On Memorial Day, most — but not all — stores and businesses in Tulsa were closed. Yet, both Rowland and Page were apparently working that day. A large Memorial Day parade passed along Main Street that morning, and perhaps Sarah Page had been required to work in order to transport Drexel Building employees and their families to choice parade viewing spots on the building's upper floors. As for Dick Rowland, perhaps the shine parlor he worked at may have been open, if nothing else, to draw in some of the parade traffic. One post-riot account suggests another alternative, namely, that Rowland was making deliveries of shined shoes that day. What is certain, however, is that at some point on Monday, May 30, 1921, Dick Rowland entered the elevator operated by Sarah Page that was situated at the rear of the Drexel Building.⁸²

What happened next is anyone's guess. After the riot, the most common explanation was that Dick Rowland tripped as he got onto the elevator and, as he tried to catch his fall, he grabbed onto the arm of Sarah Page, who then screamed. It also has been suggested that Rowland and Page had a lover's quarrel. How-

ever, it simply is unclear what happened. Yet, in the days and years that followed, everyone who knew Dick Rowland agreed on one thing: that he would never have been capable of rape.⁸³

A clerk from Renberg's, a clothing store located on the first floor of the Drexel Building, however, reached the opposite conclusion. Hearing what he thought was a woman's scream, and apparently seeing Dick Rowland hurriedly flee the building, the clerk rushed to the elevator, where he found a distraught Sarah Page. Evidently deciding that the young elevator operator had been the victim of an attempted sexual assault, the clerk then summoned the police.

While it appears that the clerk stuck to his interpretation that there had been an attempted rape — and of a particularly incendiary kind — no record exists as to what Sarah Page actually told the police when they initially interviewed her. Whatever she said at the time, however, it does not appear that the police officers who interviewed her necessarily reached the same potentially explosive conclusion as that made by the Renberg's clerk, namely, that a black male had attempted to rape a white female in a downtown office building. Rather than issue any sort of an all-points bulletin for the alleged assailant, it appears that the police launched a rather low-key investigation into the affair.⁸⁴

Whatever had or had not happened in the Drexel Building elevator, Dick Rowland had become a justly terrified young man. For of all the crimes that African American men would be accused of in early twentieth century America, none seemed to bring a white lynch mob together faster than an accusation of the rape, or attempted rape, of a white woman. Frightened and agitated, Rowland hastened to his adopted mother's home, where he stayed inside with blinds drawn.⁸⁵

The next morning, Tuesday, May 31, 1921, Dick Rowland was arrested on Greenwood Avenue by two Tulsa police officers, Detective Henry Carmichael, who was white, and by Patrolman Henry C. Pack, who was one of a handful of African Americans on the city's approximately seventy-five man police force. Rowland was booked at police headquarters,

and then taken to the jail on the top floor of the Tulsa County Courthouse. Informed that her adopted son was in custody, Damie Ford seems to have lost no time in hiring a prominent white attorney to defend him.⁸⁶

Word of both the alleged incident in the Drexel Building, and of the subsequent arrest of the alleged perpetrator, quickly spread throughout the city's legal circles. Black attorney B.C. Franklin was sitting in the courtroom during a recess in a trial when he overheard some other lawyers discussing what he later concluded was the alleged rape attempt. "I don't believe a damn word of it," one of the men said, "Why I know that boy and have known him a good while. That's not in him."⁸⁷

Not surprisingly, word of both the alleged incident and of the arrest of Dick Rowland had also made it to the offices of Tulsa's two daily newspapers, the *Tribune* and the *World*. Due to the timing of the events, the *Tulsa Tribune* would have the first crack at the story. Not only had the alleged Drexel Building incident gone without notice in that morning's *Tulsa World* — perhaps, one is tempted to surmise, because word of the alleged incident had not yet made it to the paper's news desk, which may have been short-staffed due to the holiday — but Rowland's arrest had apparently occurred after that morning's edition had already been printed.⁸⁸ Being an afternoon paper, however, the *Tulsa Tribune* had enough time to break the news in its regular afternoon editions — which is exactly what it did.

Precisely what the *Tulsa Tribune* printed in its May 31, 1921 editions about the Drexel Building incident is still a matter of some conjecture. The original bound volumes of the now defunct newspaper apparently no longer exist in their entirety. A microfilm version is, however, available, but before the actual microfilming was done some years later, someone had deliberately torn out of the May 31, 1921 city edition both a front-page article and, in addition, nearly all of the editorial page.

We have known what the front-page story, titled "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator", said for some time. In his 1946 master's thesis on the riot, Loren Gill printed the entire

text of the missing — and what he believed was no less than "inflammatory" — story, which read:

Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator

A Negro delivery boy who gave his name to the public as "Diamond Dick" but who has been identified as Dick Rowland, was arrested on South Greenwood Avenue this morning by Officers Carmichael and Pack, charged with attempting to assault the 17-year-old white elevator girl in the Drexel Building early yesterday.

He will be tried in municipal court this afternoon on a state charge.

The girl said she noticed the Negro a few minutes before the attempted assault looking up and down the hallway on the third floor of the Drexel Building as if to see if there was anyone in sight but thought nothing of it at the time.

A few minutes later he entered the elevator she claimed, and attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes. Her screams brought a clerk from Renberg's store to her assistance and the Negro fled. He was captured and identified this morning both by the girl and the clerk, police say.

Tenants of the Drexel Building said the girl is an orphan who works as an elevator operator to pay her way through business college.⁸⁹

Since Gill's thesis first appeared, additional copies of this front-page article have surfaced. A copy can be found in the Red Cross papers that are located in the collections of the Tulsa Historical Society. A second copy, apparently from the "State Edition" of the *Tulsa Tribune*, could once be found in the collections of the Oklahoma Historical Society, but has now evidently disappeared.⁹⁰

This front page article was not, however, the only thing that the *Tulsa Tribune* seems to have printed about the Drexel Building incident in its May 31, edition. W.D. Williams, who later taught for years at Booker T. Washington High

School in Tulsa, had a vivid memory that the *Tribune* ran a story titled “To Lynch Negro Tonight.”⁹¹ In fact, however, what Williams may be recalling is not another news article, but an editorial from the missing editorial page.

Other informants, both black and white, buttress Williams’s account. Specifically, they recalled that the *Tribune* mentioned the possibility of a lynching — something that is entirely absent from the “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator” story, and thus must have appeared elsewhere in the May 31, edition. Robert Fairchild later recalled that the *Tribune* “came out and told what happened. It said to the effect that ‘there is likely to be a lynching in Tulsa tonight.’” One of Mary Parrish’s informants, whom she interviewed shortly after the riot, provided a similar account:

The *Daily Tribune*, a white newspaper that tries to gain its popularity by referring to the Negro settlement as “Little Africa,” came out on the evening of Tuesday, May 31, with an article claiming that a Negro had experienced some trouble with a white elevator girl at the Drexel Building. It also said that a mob of whites was forming in order to lynch the Negro.

Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett, who led National Guard troops from Oklahoma City into Tulsa the next day, recalled that there had been a “fantastic write-up of the [Drexel Building] incident in a sensation-seeking newspaper.”⁹²

Given the fact that the editorial page from the May 31, *Tulsa Tribune* was also deliberately removed, and that a copy has not yet surfaced, it is not difficult to conclude that whatever else the paper had to say about the alleged incident, and what should be done in response to it, would have appeared in an editorial. “To Lynch Negro Tonight” certainly would have fit as the title to a *Tribune* editorial in those days. Moreover, given the seriousness of the charges against Dick Rowland, the aggressiveness of the paper’s anti-crime campaign, and the fact that a *Tribune* editorial had mentioned the lynching of Roy Belton only four days earlier, it is highly likely that any edi-

torial the paper would have run concerning the alleged Drexel Building incident would have surely mentioned lynching as a possible fate for Dick Rowland. Exactly what the newspaper would have said on the matter, however, can only be left to conjecture.

The Tuesday, May 31, 1921 edition of the *Tulsa Tribune* hit the streets at about 3:15 p.m. And while the “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator” was far from being the most prominent story on the front page of the city edition, it was the story that garnered the most attention. Making his way through downtown toward his office in Greenwood shortly after the *Tribune* rolled off the presses, attorney B.C. Franklin later recalled that “as I walked leisurely along the sidewalk, I heard the sharp shrill voice of a newsboy, ‘A Negro assaults a white girl.’”⁹³

Indeed, lynch talk came right on the heels of the *Tribune*’s sensational reporting. Ross T. Warner, the white manager of the downtown offices of the Tulsa Machine and Tool Company, wrote that after the *Tribune* came out that afternoon, “the talk of lynching spread like a prairie fire.” Similar memories were shared by Dr. Blaine Waynes, an African American physician and his wife Maude, who reported that after the *Tribune* was issued that day, that rumors of the “intended lynching of the accused Negro” spread so swiftly and ominously that even “the novice and stranger” could readily sense the fast-approaching chain of events that was about to unfold. By 4:00 p.m., the talk of lynching Dick Rowland had already grown so ubiquitous that Police and Fire Commissioner J.M. Adkison telephoned Sheriff Willard McCullough and alerted him to the ever-increasing talk on the street.⁹⁴

Talk soon turned into action. As word of the alleged sexual assault in the Drexel Building spread, a crowd of whites began to gather on the street outside of the Tulsa County Courthouse, in whose jail Dick Rowland was being held. As people got off of work, and the news of the alleged attack reported in the *Tribune* became more widely dispersed across town, more and more white Tulsans, infuriated by what had supposedly taken place in the Drexel Building, began to gather outside the court house at Sixth and



Tulsa County Court house where alleged murder Roy Belton was handed to an angry mob. This event helped black leaders decide to offer assistance to Tulsa officials when Dick Rowland was held in the same position (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

Boulder. By sunset — which came at 7:34 p.m. that evening — observers estimated that the crowd had grown into the hundreds. Not long afterwards, cries of “Let us have the nigger” could be heard echoing off of the walls of the massive stone courthouse.⁹⁵

Willard M. McCullough, who had recently been sworn in as the new sheriff of Tulsa County, however, had other ideas. Determined that there would be no repeat of the Roy Belton affair during his time in office, he quickly took steps to ensure the safety of Dick Rowland. Organizing his small force of deputies into a defensive ring around his now terrified prisoner, McCullough positioned six of his men, armed with rifles and shotguns, on the roof of the courthouse. He also disabled the building’s elevator, and had his remaining men barricade themselves at the top of the stairs with orders to shoot any intruders on sight.

McCullough also went outside, on the courthouse steps, and tried to talk the would-be lynch mob into going home, but was “hooted down” when he spoke. At approximately 8:20

p.m., in a near replay of the Belton incident, three white men entered the courthouse and demanded that the sheriff turn over Rowland, but were angrily turned away. Even though his small force was vastly outnumbered by the ever-increasing mob out on the street, McCullough, unlike his predecessor, was determined to prevent another lynching.⁹⁶

Word of the alleged incident at the Drexel Building, and of the white mob that was gathering outside of the courthouse, meanwhile, also had raced across Greenwood. After reading the stories in the afternoon’s *Tribune*, Willie Williams, a popular junior at Booker T. Washington High School, had hurried over to his family’s flagship business, the Dreamland Theater, at 127 N. Greenwood. Inside, he found a scene of tension and confusion. “We’re not going to let this happen,” declared a man who had leapt onto the theater’s stage, “We’re going to go downtown and stop this lynching. Close this place down.”

Outside, similar discussions were taking place up and down Greenwood Avenue, as black Tulsans debated how to respond to the in-

creasingly dire threat to Dick Rowland. B.C. Franklin later recalled two army veterans out in the street, urging the crowd gathered about them to take immediate action, while perhaps the most intense discussions were held in the offices of the *Tulsa Star*, the city's premier African American newspaper.

What went unspoken was the fact an African American had never been lynched in Tulsa. How to prevent one from taking place now was no easy matter. It was not simply the crime that Dick Rowland had been charged with — although that, by itself, made the situation particularly dire. Rather, with the lynching of Roy Belton only nine months earlier, there was now no reason at all to place much confidence in the ability of the local authorities to protect Dick Rowland from the mob of whites that was gathering outside the courthouse. However, exactly how to respond was of utmost concern.

For A.J. Smitherman, the editor of the *Tulsa Star*, there was no question whatsoever that a demonstration of resolve was necessary. Black Tulsans needed to let the white mob know that they were determined to prevent this lynching from taking place, by force of arms if necessary. Others, including a number of war veterans as well as various local leaders, the most prominent being hotel owner J.B. Stradford, vigorously agreed. Moreover, when Dr. Bridgewater had led a group of armed men downtown to where three accused African American men were being held only two years later, a rumored lynching did not take place. "Come on boys," Smitherman is said to have urged his audience, "let's go downtown."

Not everyone agreed with the plan of action. O.W. Gurley, the owner of the Gurley Hotel, seems to have argued for a more cautious approach. So, too, apparently, did Barney Cleaver, a well-respected African American deputy sheriff, who had been trying to keep in telephone contact with Sheriff McCullough, and therefore have something of a handle on the actual conditions down at the courthouse.⁹⁷

Despite some entreaties to the contrary, at about 9:00 p.m. a group of approximately twenty-five African American men decided to cast their lot not only with an endangered fel-

low member of the race, but also, literally, upon the side of justice. Leaving Greenwood by automobile, they drove down to the courthouse, where the white mob had gathered. Armed with rifles and shotguns, the men got out of their automobiles, and marched to the courthouse steps. Their purpose, they announced to the no doubt stunned authorities, was to offer their services toward the defense of the jail — an offer that was immediately declined. Assured that Dick Rowland was safe, the men then returned to their automobiles, and drove back to Greenwood.⁹⁸

The visit of the African American veterans had an electrifying effect, however, on the white mob, now estimated to be more than one thousand strong. Denied Rowland by Sheriff McCullough, it had been clear for some time that this was not to be an uncomplicated repetition of the Belton affair. The visit of the black veterans had not at all been foreseen. Shocked, and then outraged, some members of the mob began to go home to fetch their guns.⁹⁹

Others, however, made a beeline for the National Guard Armory, at Sixth and Norfolk, where they intended to gain access to the rifles and ammunition stored inside. Major James A. Bell, an officer with the local National Guard units — "B" Company, the Service Company, and the Sanitary Detachment, all of the Third Infantry Regiment of the Oklahoma National Guard — had already been notified of the trouble brewing down at the courthouse, and had telephoned the local authorities in order to better understand the overall situation. "I then went to the Armory and called up the Sheriff and asked if there was any indications of trouble down there," Bell later wrote, "The sheriff reported that there were some threats but did not believe it would amount to any thing, that in any event he could protect his prisoner." Bell also phoned Chief Gustafson, who reported, "Things were a little threatening."¹⁰⁰

Despite such vague answers, Major Bell took the initiative and began to quietly instruct local guardsmen — who were scheduled to depart the next day for their annual summer encampment — to report down at the armory in case they were needed that evening. Meanwhile, a

guardsman informed Bell that a mob of white men was attempting to break into the armory. As Bell later reported:

Grabbing my pistol in one hand and my belt in the other I jumped out of the back door and running down the west side of the Armory building I saw several men apparently pulling at the window grating. Commanding these men to get off the lot and seeing this command obeyed I went to the front of the building near the southwest corner where I saw a mob of white men about three or four hundred strong. I asked them what they wanted. One of them replied, "Rifles and ammunition," I explained to them that they could not get anything here. Someone shouted, "We don't know about that, we guess we can." I told them that we only had sufficient arms and ammunition for our own men and that not one piece could go out of there without orders from the Governor, and in the name of the law demanded that they disperse at once. They continued to press forward in a threatening manner when with drawn pistol I again demanded that they disperse and explained that the men in the Armory were armed with rifles loaded with ball ammunition and that they would shoot promptly to prevent any unauthorized person entering there.

"By maintaining a firm stand," Bell added, "... this mob was dispersed."¹⁰¹

Major Bell's actions were both courageous and effective but as the night wore on, similar efforts would be in exceedingly short supply. With each passing minute, Tulsa was a city that was quickly spinning out of control.

By 9:30 p.m., the white mob outside the courthouse had swollen to nearly two-thousand persons. They blocked the sidewalks as well as the streets, and had spilled over onto the front lawns of nearby homes. There were women as well as men, youngsters as well as adults, curiosity seekers as well as would-be lynchers. A handful of local leaders, including the Reverend Charles W. Kerr of the First Presbyterian Church as well as a local

judge had tried unsuccessfully to talk the crowd into going home.¹⁰²

Police Chief John A. Gustafson later claimed that he tried to talk the lynch mob into dispersing. However, at no time that afternoon or evening did he order a substantial number of Tulsa policemen to appear, fully armed, at the courthouse. Gustafson, in his defense, would later claim that because there was a regular shift change that very day, that only thirty-two officers were available for duty at eight o'clock on the evening of May 31. As subsequent testimony — as recorded in handwritten notes to a post-riot investigation — later revealed, there were apparently only "5 policemen on duty between courthouse & Brady hotel notwithstanding lynching imminent." Moreover, by 10:00 p.m., when the drama at the courthouse was approaching its climax, Gustafson was no longer at the scene, but had returned to his office at police headquarters.¹⁰³

In the city's African American neighborhoods, meanwhile, tension continued to mount over the increasingly ugly situation down at the courthouse. Alerted to the potentially dangerous conditions, both school and church groups broke up their evening activities early, while parents and grandparents tried to reassure themselves that the trouble would quickly blow over. Down in Deep Greenwood, a large crowd of black men and women still kept their vigil outside of the offices of the *Tulsa Star*, awaiting word on the latest developments downtown.¹⁰⁴

Some of the men, however, decided that they could wait no longer. Hopping into cars, small groups of armed African American men began to make brief forays into downtown, their guns visible to passersby. In addition to reconnaissance, the primary intent of these trips appears to have been to send a clear message to white Tulsans that these men were determined to prevent, by force of arms if necessary, the lynching of Dick Rowland. Whether the whites who witnessed these excursions understood this message is, however, an open question. Many, apparently, thought that they were instead witnessing a "Negro uprising," a conclusion that others would soon share.

In the midst of all of this activity, rumors began to circulate, particularly with regards to what might or might not be happening down at the courthouse. Possibly spurred on by a false report that whites were storming the courthouse, moments after 10:00 p.m., a second contingent of armed African American men, perhaps seventy-five in number this time, decided to make a second visit to the courthouse. Leaving Greenwood by automobile, they got out of their cars near Sixth and Main and marched, single file, to the courthouse steps. Again, they offered their services to the authorities to help protect Dick Rowland. Once again, their offer was refused.¹⁰⁵

Then it happened. As the black men were leaving the courthouse for the second time, a white man approached a tall African American World War I veteran who was carrying an army-issue revolver. "Nigger," the white man said, "What are you doing with that pistol?" "I'm going to use it if I need to," replied the black veteran. "No, you give it to me." Like hell I will." The white man tried to take the gun away from the veteran, and a shot rang out.¹⁰⁶ America's worst race riot had begun.

While the first shot fired at the courthouse may have been unintentional, those that followed were not. Almost immediately, members of the white mob — and possibly some law enforcement officers — opened fire on the African American men, who returned volleys of their own. The initial gunplay lasted only a few seconds, but when it was over, an unknown number of people — perhaps as many as a dozen — both black and white, lay dead or wounded.¹⁰⁷

Outnumbered more than twenty-to-one, the black men began a retreating fight toward the African American district. With armed whites in close pursuit, heavy gunfire erupted again along Fourth Street, two blocks north of the courthouse.¹⁰⁸

Dr. George H. Miller, a white physician who was working late that evening in his office at the Unity Building at 21 W. Fourth Street, rushed outside after hearing the gun shots, only to come upon a wounded black man, "shot and bleeding, writhing on the street," surrounded

by a group of angry whites. As Dr. Miller later told an interviewer:

I went over to see if I could help him as a doctor, but the crowd was gathering around him and wouldn't even let the driver of the ambulance which just arrived to even pick him up. I saw it was an impossible situation to control, that I could be of no help. The crowd was getting more and more belligerent. The Negro had been shot so many times in his chest, and men from the onlookers were slashing him with knives.

Unable to help the dying man, Dr. Miller got into his car and drove home.¹⁰⁹

A short while later, a second, deadlier, skirmish broke out at Second and Cincinnati. No longer directly involved with the fate of Dick Rowland, the beleaguered second contingent of African American men were now fighting for their own lives. Heavily outnumbered by the whites, and suffering some casualties along the way, most were apparently able, however, to make it safely across the Frisco railroad tracks,



A typical member of the white mob. Not only did they set African-American homes and businesses on fire, but looted their possessions as well (Courtesy Bob Hower).



Following the outbreak of violence at the courthouse, crowds of angry whites took to the streets downtown. There, according to white eye witnesses, a number of blacks were killed in the riots early hours. And even though the fighting soon moved north to ward Greenwood, groups of whites—including these at Main and Archer—were still roaming the streets of downtown the next morning (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

and into the more familiar environs of the African American community.¹¹⁰

At the courthouse, the sudden and unexpected turn of events had a jolting effect on the would-be lynch mob, and groups of angry, vengeance-seeking whites soon took the streets and sidewalks of downtown. “A great many of these persons lining the sidewalks,” one white eye-witness later recalled, “were holding a rifle or shotgun in one hand, and grasping the neck of a liquor bottle with the other. Some had pistols stuck into their belts.”¹¹¹

Some were about to become, at least temporarily, officers of the law. Shortly after the fighting had broken out at the courthouse, a large number of whites—many of whom had only a little while earlier been members of the would-be lynch mob—gathered outside of police headquarters on Second Street. There, perhaps as many as five-hundred white men and boys were sworn-in by police officers as “Special Deputies.” Some were provided with badges or ribbons indicating their new status. Many, it appears, also were given specific instructions. According to Laurel G. Buck, a white bricklayer who was sworn-in as one of these “Special Deputies,” a police officer bluntly told him to “Get a gun and get a nigger.”¹¹²

Shortly thereafter, whites began breaking into downtown sporting goods stores, pawnshops, and hardware stores, stealing—or “borrowing” as some would later claim—guns and ammunition. Dick Bardon’s store on First Street was particularly hard hit as well as the J.W. McGee Sporting Goods shop at 22 W. Second Street, even though it was located literally across the street from police headquarters. The owner later testified that a Tulsa police officer helped to dole out the guns that were taken from his store.¹¹³

More bloodshed soon followed, as whites began gunning down any African Americans that they discovered downtown. William R. Holway, a white engineer, was watching a movie at the Rialto Theater when someone ran into the theater, shouting “Nigger fight, nigger fight.” As Holway later recalled:

Everybody left that theater on high, you know. We went out the door and looked across the street, and there was Younkman’s drug store with those big pillars. There were two big pillars at the entrance, and we got over behind them. Just got there when a Negro ran south of the alley across the street, the minute his head showed outside, somebody shot him.

“We stood there for about half-an-hour watching,” Holway added, “which I shall never



Groups of whites gathered throughout the city (Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

forget. He wasn't quite dead, but he was about to die. He was the first man that I saw shot in that riot."¹¹⁴

Not far away, at the Royal Theater — that was showing a movie called "One Man in a Million" that evening — a similar drama played itself out. Among the onlookers was a white teenager named William "Choc" Phillips, who later became a well-known Tulsa police officer. As described by Phillips in his unpublished memoir of the riot:

The mob action was set off when several [white] men chased a Negro man down the alley in back of the theater and out onto Fourth Street where he saw the stage door and dashed inside. Seeing the open door the Negro rushed in and hurried forward in the darkness hunting a place to hide.

Suddenly he was on the stage in front of the picture screen and blinded by the bright flickering light coming down from the operator's booth in the balcony. After shielding his eyes for a moment he regained his vision enough to locate the steps leading from the stage down past the orchestra pit to the aisle just as the pursuing men rushed the stage. One of them saw the Negro and yelled, "there he is, heading

for the aisle." As he finished the sentence, a roaring blast from a shotgun dropped the Negro man by the end of the orchestra pit.¹¹⁵

Not all of the victims of the violence that broke out downtown were white. Evidence suggests that after the fighting broke out at the courthouse, carloads of black Tulsans may have exchanged gunfire with whites on streets downtown, possibly resulting in casualties on both sides. At least one white man in an automobile was killed by a group of whites, who had mistaken him to be black.¹¹⁶

Around midnight, a small crowd of whites gathered — once again — outside of the courthouse, yelling "Bring the rope" and "Get the nigger." But they did not rush the building, and nothing happened. Because the truth of the matter was that, by then, most of Tulsa's rioting whites no longer particularly cared about Dick Rowland anymore. They now had much bigger things in mind.

While darkness slowed the pace of the riot, sporadic fighting took place throughout the nighttime hours of May 31 and June 1. The heaviest occurred alongside the Frisco railroad tracks, one of the key dividing lines between Tulsa's black and white commercial districts. From approximately midnight until around 1:30

a.m., scores of blacks and whites exchanged gunfire across the Frisco yards. At one point during the fighting, an inbound train reportedly arrived, its passengers forced to take cover on the floor as the shooting continued, raking both sides of the train.

A few carloads of whites also made brief excursions into the African American district, firing indiscriminately into houses as they roared up and down streets lined with black residences. there were deliberate murders as well. As Walter White, who visited Tulsa immediately after the riot, later reported:

Many are the stories of horror told to me - not by colored people - but by white residents. One was that of an aged colored couple, saying their evening prayers before retiring in their little home on Greenwood Avenue. A mob broke into the house, shot both of the old people in the backs of their heads, blowing their brains out and spattering them over the bed, pillaged the home, and then set fire to it.¹²⁰

It appears that the first fires set by whites in black neighborhoods began at about 1:00 a.m. African American homes and businesses along Archer were the earliest targets, and when an engine crew from the Tulsa Fire Department arrived and prepared to douse the flames, white rioters forced the firemen away at gunpoint. By 4:00 a.m., more than two-dozen black-owned businesses, including the Midway Hotel, had been torched.¹²¹

The nighttime hours of May 31, and June 1, also witnessed the first organized action taken by the Tulsa units of the National Guard. While evidence indicates that Sheriff McCullough may have requested local guard officers that they send men down to the courthouse at around 9:30 p.m.,¹²² it was not until more than an hour later — about the time that the fighting broke out at the courthouse — that the local National Guard units were specifically ordered to take action with regards to the riot. According to the after action report later submitted by Major James Bell to local National Guard commander Lieutenant Colonel L.J.F. Rooney:



During the nighttime hours of May 31 and June 1, groups of armed whites made “drive-by” shootings in black residential neighborhoods, firing into African-American homes (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

About 10:30 o’clock, I think it was, I had a call from the Adj. General asking about the situation. I explained that it looked pretty bad. He directed that we continue to use every effort to get the men in so that if a call came we would be ready. I think it was only a few minutes after this, another call from the Adj. General directed that “B” Co., the Sanitary Det. and the Service Co. be mobilized at once and render any assistance to the civil authorities we could in the maintenance of law and order and the protection of life and property. I think this was about 10:40 o’clock and while talking to the General you appeared and assume command.¹²³

At approximately 11:00 p.m., perhaps as many as fifty local National Guardsmen — nearly all of whom had been contacted at their homes — had gathered at the armory on Sixth Street. Some were World War I veterans. It is unclear whether any of the men had been trained in riot control. Although various official and unofficial manuals were available in 1921 on the use of National Guard soldiers during riots, it is uncertain whether the Tulsa units had received any training in this area.¹²⁴

Another interesting aspect regarding the guardsmen who gathered at the armory exists. Not only were the Tulsa units of the National Guard exclusively white, but as the evening wore on, it became increasingly clear that they



Some of the most intense fighting during the riot took place alongside the Frisco Railroad yards, as African-American defenders tried to keep the white rioters away from Greenwood. But when dawn broke on the morning of June 1, the black defenders were simply overwhelmed (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

would not play an impartial role in the “maintenance of law and order.” Like many of their white neighbors, a number of the local guardsmen also came to conclude that the race riot was, in fact, a “Negro uprising,” a term used throughout their various after action reports. At least one National Guard officer went even further, using the term “enemy” in reference to African Americans. Given the tenor of the times, it is hardly surprising that Tulsa’s all-white National Guard might view black Tulsans antagonistically. As the riot continued to unfold, this also would prove to be far from irrelevant.¹²⁵

Initially, the local guardsmen were deployed downtown. Sometime before midnight, one detachment was stationed in front of police headquarters, where they blocked off Second Street. Guardsmen also led groups of armed whites on “patrols” of downtown streets, an activity that was later taken over by members of the — similarly all-white — local chapter of

the American Legion. Tulsa police officials also presented the guardsmen with a machine gun, which guard officers then had mounted on the back of a truck. This particular gun, possibly a war trophy, it turned out, was in poor operating condition, and could only be fired one shell at a time.¹²⁶

Taking the machine gun along with them, about thirty guardsmen then headed north, and positioned themselves along Detroit Avenue between Brady Street and Standpipe Hill, along one of the borders separating the city’s white and black neighborhoods. Their deployment was far from impartial, for the “skirmish line” that the National Guard officers established was set-up facing - or soon would be — the African American district. Moreover, the guardsmen also began rounding up black Tulsans, whom they handed over — as prisoners — to the police, and they also briefly exchanged fire with gunmen to the east. Far from being utilized as a neutral force, Tulsa’s local National Guard unit



North Tulsa burns while a white audience views the destruction from a safe distance (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

along Detroit Avenue were, even in the early hours of the riot, being deployed in a manner which would eventually set them in opposition to the black community.¹²⁷

In Tulsa's black neighborhoods, meanwhile, word of what had happened at the courthouse was soon followed by even more disturbing news. A light-complexioned African American man, who could "pass" for white, had mingled with the crowds of angry whites downtown, where he overheard talk of invading the African American district. Carefully making his way back home, the man then related what he had heard to Seymour Williams, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School. Williams, who had served with the army in France, grabbed his service revolver and began to spread the news among his neighbors living just off of Standpipe Hill.¹²⁸

All along the southern edge of Greenwood, in fact, a great amount of activity was in progress. Alerted to the news of the violence that had broken out downtown, garage and theater owner John Wesley Williams wasted no time in preparing for the possibility of even greater trouble. Loading his 30-30 rifle and a repeating shotgun, he positioned himself along a south-facing window of his family's second floor apartment at the corner of Greenwood and Archer. Later telling his son that he was

"defending Greenwood," he was one of scores of other African American residents who were preparing to do exactly the same.¹²⁹

Other black Tulsans, however, reached a different conclusion on what was the best course of action. Despite the fact that many of the city's African American residents undoubtedly hoped that daylight would bring an end to the violence, others decided not to wait and find out. In the early hours of June 1, a steady stream of black Tulsans began to leave the city, hoping to find safety in the surrounding countryside. "Early in the evening when there was first talk of trouble," Irene Scofield later told the *Black Dispatch*, "I and about forty others started out of the town and walked to a little town about fifteen miles away." Others joining the exodus, however, were not as fortunate. Billy Hudson, an African American laborer who lived on Archer, hitched up his wagon as conditions grew worse, and set out — with his grandchildren by his side — for Nowata. He was killed by whites along the way.¹³⁰

Adding to the confusion over what to do was the simple reality that, for most black Tulsans, it was by no means clear as to what, exactly, was going on throughout the city. This was particularly the case during the early hours of June 1. Intermittent gunfire continued along the southernmost edges of the African American district



Street by street, block by block, the white invaders moved northward across Tulsa's African-American district, looting homes and setting them on fire (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

throughout the night, while down along Archer Street, the fires had not yet burned themselves out. Yet, as far as anyone could determine, Dick Rowland was still safe inside the courthouse. There had been no lynching.

At approximately 2:00 a.m., the fierce fighting along the Frisco railroad yards had ended. The white would-be invaders still south of the tracks. As a result, some of Greenwood's defenders not only concluded that they had "won" the fight, but also that the riot was over. "Nine p.m. the trouble started," A.J. Smitherman later wrote, "two a.m. the thing was done."¹³¹

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Regardless of whatever was, or was not, happening down by the Frisco tracks, crowds of angry, armed whites were still very much in evidence on the streets and sidewalks of downtown Tulsa. Stunned, and then outraged, by what had occurred at the courthouse, they had only begun to vent their anger.

Like black Tulsans, whites were not exactly certain as to what exactly was happening in the city, a situation that was, not surprisingly, tai-

lor-made for rumors. Indeed, at about 2:30 a.m., the word spread quickly across downtown that a train carrying five-hundred armed blacks from Muskogee was due to arrive shortly at the Midland Valley Railway passenger station off Third Street. Scores of armed whites including a National Guard patrol rushed to the depot, but nothing happened. There was no such train.¹³²

Approximately 30 minutes later, reports reached the local National Guard officers that African American gunman were firing on white residences on Sunset Hill, north of Standpipe Hill. Moreover, it was said that a white woman had been shot and killed. Responding to the news, guardsmen including the crew manning the semi-defective machine gun were deployed along Sunset Hill, an area that overlooked black homes to the east.¹³³

In other white neighborhoods across Tulsa, a different kind of activity was taking place, particularly during the first hours following midnight. As word of what some would later call the "Negro uprising" began to spread across the white community, groups of armed whites began to gather at hastily-arranged meeting places, to discuss what to do next.¹³⁴



White rioters began setting black homes and businesses on fire around mid night, largely along Archer Street. There were atrocities as well. One elderly African-American couple, it was later reported, was shot in the back of the head by whites as they knelt in prayer inside their home (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

For “Choc” Phillips and his other young companions, word of this activity came while they were sitting in an all-night restaurant. “Everybody,” they were told, “go to Fifteenth and Boulder.” Phillips wrote:

Many people were drifting out of the restaurant so we decided to go along and see what happened at the meeting place. Driving south on Boulder we realized that many trucks and automobiles were headed for the same location, and near Fifteenth Street people had abandoned their vehicles because the streets and intersections were filled to capacity. We left the car more than a block away and began walking toward the crowded intersection. There were already three or four hundred people there and more arriving when we walked up.

Once there, a man stood up on top of a touring car and announced, “We have decided to go out to Second and Lewis Streets and join the crowd that is meeting there.”¹³⁵

Returning to their automobiles, Phillips and his companions blended in with the long line

of cars headed east. He later estimated, the crowd that had gathered was about six-hundred strong. Once again, men stood up on top of cars and began shouting instructions to the crowd. “Men,” once man announced, “we are going in at daylight.” Another man declared that they would be having, right then and there, an ammunition exchange. “If any of you have more ammunition than you need, or if what you have doesn’t fit your gun, sing out,” he said. “Be ready at daybreak,” another man insisted, claiming that meetings like this were taking place all over town. “Nothing can stop us,” he added, “for there will be thousands of others going in at the same time.”¹³⁶

The Tulsa police also appear to have been scattered all over town. No doubt responding to rumors that armed blacks were supposedly en route to Tulsa from various towns across eastern Oklahoma, Tulsa police officers had been dispatched to guard various roads leading into the city. Indeed, no less than a half-dozen officers that by Chief Gustafson’s subsequent calculations, was nearly one-fifth of the regularly scheduled available police force that evening, had apparently been posted at the ice plant over-



Sweeping past the black business district, now aflame, the white rioters entered the heart of Tulsa's African-American residential area (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

looking the Eleventh Street bridge. Some local guardsmen also were deployed to stand guard at various public works as well including the city water works along the Sand Springs road, and the Public Service Company's power plant off First Street.¹³⁷

Word of what was happening in Tulsa was also making its way to state officials in Oklahoma City. At 10:14 p.m., Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett, the commandant of the Oklahoma National Guard, had received a long distance telephone call from Major Byron Kirkpatrick, a Tulsa guard officer, advising him of the worsening conditions in Tulsa. Kirkpatrick phoned again at 12:35 a.m. At that point he was instructed by Governor J.B.A. Robertson to prepare and send a signed telegram, as required by Oklahoma state law, by the chief of police, the county sheriff, and a local judge, requesting that state troops be sent to Tulsa. Kirkpatrick, however, ran into some problems as he tried to collect the necessary signatures, particularly that of Sheriff McCullough, who was still barricaded with his men and Dick Rowland on the top floor of the courthouse. However, Kirkpatrick persevered,

and at 1:46 a.m., the needed telegram arrived at the state capital.¹³⁸ It read:

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

Tulsa, Okla

June 1, 1921

Governor J.B.A. Robertson Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Race riot developed here. Several killed. Unable handle situation. Request that National Guard forces be sent by special train. Situation serious.

Jno. A. Gustafson,
Chief of Police
Wm. McCullough,
Sheriff
V.W. Biddison
District Judge

Twenty-nine minutes later, at 2:15 a.m., Major Kirkpatrick spoke again by phone with Adjutant General Barrett, who informed him that the governor had authorized the calling out of the state troops. A special train, carrying approximately one-hundred National Guard soldiers would leave Oklahoma City, bound for Tulsa, at 5:00 a.m. that morning.¹⁴⁰

Tulsa's longest night would finally be ending, but its longest day would have only begun.

In the pre-dawn hours of June 1, thousands of armed whites had gathered in three main clusters along the northern fringes of downtown, opposite Greenwood. One group had assembled behind the Frisco freight depot, while another waited nearby at the Frisco and Santa Fe passenger station. Four blocks to the north, a third crowd was clustered at the Katy passenger depot. While it is unclear how many people were in each group, some contemporary observers estimated the total number of armed whites who had gathered as high as five or ten thousand.¹⁴¹

Smaller bands of whites also had been active. One group hauled a machine gun to the top of the Middle States Milling Company's grain elevator off of First Street, and set it up to fire to the north of Greenwood Avenue.¹⁴² Shortly before daybreak, five white men in a green Franklin automobile pulled up alongside the crowd of whites who were massed behind the Frisco freight depot. "What the hell are you waitin' on?," one of the men hollered, "let's go get



The looting and burning of African-American homes was indiscriminate, both poor and wealthy families lost their homes (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

‘em.” But the crowd would not budge, and the men in the car set off alone toward Deep Greenwood. Their bodies, and the bullet-ridden Franklin, were later seen in the middle of Archer Street, near Frankfort.¹⁴³

Across the tracks in Greenwood, considerable activity also had been taking place. While some black Tulsans prepared themselves to face the onslaught, others decided that it was time to go. “About this time officers Pack and Lewis pushed up to us and said it would not be safe for us to remain any longer,” recalled Mrs. Dimple Bush, who was with her husband at the Red Wing Hotel. “So,” she added, “We rushed out and found a taxi which took us straight north on Greenwood.”¹⁴⁴

Not far away, along North Elgin, Julia Duff, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, faced a similar crisis. Awakened by loud voices outside of her rented room shortly before dawn, the young teacher was soon nearly overcome with fear. As later described in a letter published in the *Chicago Defender*:

Mrs. S. came into her room and told her to dress—there was something wrong for soldiers were all around, and she looked out the window and saw them driving the men out of the houses on Detroit. Saw Mr.

Woods running with both hands in the air and their 3-month-old baby in one hand and three brutes behind him with guns.

“She said her legs gave way from under her,” the letter continued, “and she had to crawl about the room, taking things from her closet, putting them in her trunk, for she thought if anything happened she’d have her trunk packed, and before she got everything in they heard footsteps on their steps and there were six out there and they ordered Mr. Smart to march, hands up, out of the house.”¹⁴⁵

Several eyewitnesses later recalled that when dawn came at 5:08 a.m. that morning, an unusual whistle or siren sounded, perhaps as a signal for the mass assault on Greenwood to begin. Although the source of this whistle or siren is still unknown, moments later, the white mobs made their move. While the machine gun in the grain elevator opened fire, crowds of armed whites poured across the Frisco tracks, headed straight for the African American commercial district.¹⁴⁶ As later described by one eye witness:

With wild frenzied shouts, men began pouring from behind the freight depot and the long string of boxcars and evidently from behind the piles of oil well easing

which was at the other end and on the north side of the building. From every place of shelter up and down the tracks came screaming, shouting men to join in the rush toward the Negro section. Mingled with the shouting were a few rebel-yells and Indian gobblings as the great wave of humanity rushed forward totally absorbed in thoughts of destruction.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, over at the Katy depot, the other crowd of armed whites also moved forward. Heading east, they were soon joined by dozens of others in automobiles, driving along Brady and Cameron Streets. As one unidentified observer later told reporter Mary Parrish, "Tuesday night, May 31, was the riot, and Wednesday morning, by daybreak, was the invasion."¹⁴⁸

While black Tulsans fought hard to protect their homes and businesses, the sheer numerical advantage of the invading whites soon proved to be overwhelming. After a valiant, night long effort, John Wesley Williams had to flee from his family's apartment once whites began to riddle the building with gunfire. Squeezing off a few final rounds a little further up Greenwood Avenue, Williams then faced the inevitable, and began walking north along the Midland Valley tracks, leaving his home and businesses behind.¹⁴⁹

He was hardly alone. Not far away, in her apartment in the Woods Building at 105 N. Greenwood, Mary E. Jones Parrish and her young daughter Florence Mary had sat up much of the night, uncertain of what to do. "Finally," she later wrote,

My friend, Mrs. Jones, called her husband, who was trying to take a little rest. They decided to try to make for a place of safety, so called to me that they were leaving. By this time the enemy was close upon us, so they ran out of the south door, which led out onto Archer Street, and went east toward Lansing. I took my little girl, Florence Mary, by the hand and fled out of the west door on Greenwood. I did not take time to get a hat for myself or Baby, but started out north on Greenwood, running amidst showers of bullets from the

machine gun located in the granary and from men who were quickly surrounding our district. Seeing that they were fighting at a disadvantage, our men had taken shelter in the buildings and in other places out of sight of the enemy. When my daughter, Florence Mary, and I ran into the street, it was vacant for a block or more. Someone called to me to "Get out of the street with that child or you both will be killed." I felt that it was suicide to remain in the building, for it would surely be destroyed and death in the street was preferred, for we expected to be shot down at any moment. So we placed our trust in God, our Heavenly Father, who seeth and knoweth all things, and ran out of Greenwood in the hope of reaching a friend's home who lived over the Standpipe Hill in Greenwood Addition.¹⁵⁰

For Dimple Bush, the flight from Greenwood had bordered upon the indescribable. "It was just dawn; the machine guns were sweeping the valley with their murderous fire and my heart was filled with dread as we sped along," she recalled, "Old women and men, children were running and screaming everywhere."¹⁵¹

Soon, however, new perils developed. As the mobs of armed whites rushed into the southern end of the African American district, airplanes — manned by whites — also appeared overhead. As Dr. R.T. Bridgewater, a well-respected black Tulsa physician, later described what happened:

Shortly after we left a whistle blew. The shots rang from a machine gun located on Standpipe Hill near my residence and aeroplanes began to fly over us, in some instances very low to the ground. A cry was heard from the women saying, "Look out for the aeroplanes, they are shooting upon us."¹⁵²

Numerous other eyewitnesses — both black and white — confirm the presence of an unknown number of airplanes flying over Greenwood during the early daylight hours of June 1. While certain other assertions made over the years such as that the planes dropped streams of "liquid fire" on top of African American homes

and businesses appear to have been technologically improbable, particularly during the early 1920s, there is little doubt but that some of the occupants of the airplanes fired upon black Tulsans with pistols and rifles. Moreover, there is evidence, to suggest that men in at least one airplane dropped some form of explosives, probably sticks of dynamite, upon a group of African American refugees as they were fleeing the city.¹⁵³

Gunfire soon erupted along the western boundary of the black community. Sharp fighting broke out along Standpipe Hill, where the local guardsmen positioned there traded fire with armed African Americans, who had set up defensive lines off Elgin and Elgin Place. Nearby, on Sunset Hill, the white guardsmen opened fire on the black neighborhood to the east, using both their standard issue thirty-caliber 1906 Springfield rifles as well as the semi-defective machine gun provided to them by the Tulsa police.¹⁵⁴

As the waves of white rioters descended upon the African American district, a deadly pattern soon emerged. First, the armed whites broke into the black homes and businesses, forcing the occupants out into the street, where they were led away at gunpoint to one of a growing number of internment centers. Anyone who resisted was shot. Moreover, African American men in homes where firearms were discovered met the same fate. Next, the whites looted the homes and businesses, pocketing small items, and hauling away larger items either on foot or by car or truck. Finally, the white rioters then set the homes and other buildings on fire, using torches and oil-soaked rags. House by house, block by block, the wall of flame crept northward, engulfing the city's black neighborhoods.¹⁵⁵

Atrocities occurred along the way. According to one account, published ten days after the riot in a Chicago newspaper,

Another cruel instance was when they [white rioters] went to the home of an old couple and the old man, 80 years old, was paralyzed and sat in a chair and they told him to march and he told them he was crippled, but he'd go if someone would take

him, and they told his wife (old, too) to go, but she didn't want to leave him, and he told her to go on anyway. As she left one of the damn dogs shot the old man and then they fired the house.¹⁵⁶

There were near-atrocities as well. After armed whites had led his mother away at gunpoint, five-year-old George Monroe was hiding beneath his parents' bed with his two older sisters and his one older brother when white men suddenly entered the room. After rifling through the dresser, the men set the curtains on fire. As the men began to leave, one of them stepped on George's hand. George started to cry out, but his sister Lottie threw her hand over his mouth, preventing their discovery. A few minutes later, the children were able to escape from their home before it burst into flame.¹⁵⁷

Some of the fires in Greenwood appear to have been set by whites wearing khaki uniforms. The actual identity of these men remains unclear. Most likely, they were World War I veterans who had donned their old army uniforms when the riot erupted, rather than an officially organized group.¹⁵⁸

They were not, however, the only uniformed whites observed setting fires in Tulsa's African American neighborhoods. According to black Deputy Sheriff V.B. Bostic, a white Tulsa police officer "drove him and his wife from his home," and then "poured oil on the floor and set a lighted match to it."¹⁵⁹

Deputy Sheriff Bostic was not, however, the only eyewitness to report acts of criminal misconduct by Tulsa police officers during the course of the riot. According to one white eyewitness, a "uniformed [white] policeman on East Second Street went home, changed his uniform to plain clothes, and went to the Negro district and led a bunch of whites into Negro houses, some of the bunch pilfering, never offered to protect men, women or children, or property." This particular account was buttressed by the testimony of an African American witness, who reported that he had seen the same officer in question "on the morning of the riot, June 1, kicking in doors of Negro homes, and assisting in the destruction of property."¹⁶⁰



Dedicated only weeks before the riot, the Mount Zion Baptist Church was a great source of pride for many black Tulsans. But after a prolonged battle, the white rioters burned it—as well as more than a half dozen other African American churches—to the ground (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

Despite the daunting odds against them, black Tulsans valiantly fought back. African American riflemen had positioned themselves in the belfry of the newly-built Mount Zion Baptist Church, whose commanding view of the area just below Standpipe Hill allowed them to temporarily stem the tide of the white invasion. When white rioters set up a machine gun—probably the same weapon that had been used earlier that morning at the grain elevator, and unleashed its deadly fire on the church belfry, the black defenders were quickly overwhelmed. As “Choc” Phillips later described what happened:

In a couple of minutes pieces of brick started falling, then whole bricks began tumbling from the narrow slits in the cupola. Within five or six minutes the openings were large jagged holes with so many bricks flying from that side of the cupola wall that it seemed ready to fall.

The men stopped firing the machine gun and almost immediately the houses on the outer rim of the area that had been protected by the snipers, became victims of the arsonists. We watched the men take the machine gun from the tripod, wrap it in

a canvas cover then lay it on the bed of the truck. They rolled up the belts with the empty shell casings, put away those that were still unused, and in what seemed less than ten minutes from the time the truck was parked at the location, drove away.

While standing on the high ground where the machine gun had been firing, we watched the activity below for a few minutes. Most of the houses were beginning to burn and smoke ascended slowly in to the air while people flitted around as busy as bees down there. From the number that ran in and out of the houses and the church, there had evidently been a couple of hundred who remained behind when the mob bypassed the area.

A short while later, Mount Zion was torched.¹⁶¹

Attempts by black Tulsans to defend their homes and property were undercut by the actions of both the Tulsa police and the local National Guard units, who, rather than focus on disarming and arresting the white rioters, took steps that led to the eventual imprisonment of practically all of the city’s African American citizens. Guardsmen deployed on Standpipe

Hill made at least one eastward march in the early hours of June 1, rounding up African Americans along the way, before they were fired upon, apparently by whites as well as blacks, near Greenwood Avenue. The guardsmen then marched to Sunset Hill, where they handed over their black prisoners to local police officers.¹⁶²

An arrest by a white officer was not a guarantee of safety for black Tulsans. According to Thomas Higgins, a white resident of Wichita, Kansas who happened to be visiting Tulsa when the riot broke out, "I saw men of my own race, sworn officers, on three occasions search Negroes while their hands were up, and not finding weapons, extracted what money they found on them. If the Negro protested, he was shot."¹⁶³

White civilians also took black prisoners. When the invasion began, Carrie Kinlaw, an African American woman who lived out toward the Section Line, had to run toward the fighting in order to help her sisters retrieve their invalid mother. Reaching the elderly woman in a "rain of bullets," Kinlaw later wrote:

My sisters and I gathered her up, placed her on a cot, and three of us carried the cot and the other one carried a bundle of clothes; thus we carried Mother about six blocks, with bullets falling on all sides. About six squads of rioters overtook us, asked for men and guns, made us hold up our hands.

Not all of her captors, however, were adults. "There were boys in that bunch," she added, "from about 10 years upward, all armed with guns."¹⁶⁴

Black Tulsans also faced dangers while in the custody of white civilians. James T. West a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, was arrested by whites at his home on Easton Street that morning. "Some men appeared with drawn guns and ordered all of the men out of the house," he recalled immediately after the riot,

I went out immediately. They ordered me to raise my hands, after which three or

four men searched me. They told me to line up in the street. I requested them to let me get my hat and best shoes, but they refused and abusively ordered me to line up. They refused to let one of the men put on any kind of shoes. After lining up some 30 or 40 of us men, they ran us through the streets to Convention Hall, forcing us to keep our hands in the air all the while. While we were running, some of the ruffians would shoot at our heels and swore at those who had difficulty keeping up. They actually drove a car into the bunch and knocked down two or three men.¹⁶⁵

Harold M. Parker, a white bookkeeper for the Oklahoma Producing and Refining Corporation at the time of the riot, later corroborated how armed whites sometimes shot at the heels of their black prisoners. "Sometimes they missed and shot their legs," Parker recalled a half century later, "It was sheer cruelty coming out."¹⁶⁶

The most infamous incident involving white civilians imprisoning African Americans was that which concerned Dr. A.C. Jackson, Tulsa's noted black surgeon. Despite the increasing gunfire, Dr. Jackson had decided to remain inside of his handsome home at 523 N. Detroit, along the shoulder of Standpipe Hill. But when a group of armed whites arrived on his front lawn, Jackson apparently walked out the side door of his home with his hands up, saying, "Here I am boys, don't shoot."¹⁶⁷ What happened next was later recounted by John A. Oliphant, a white attorney who lived nearby, in testimony he provided after the riot:

Q. About what time in the morning did you say it was Dr. Jackson was shot?

A. Right close to eight o'clock, between seven thirty and eight o'clock.

Q. Dr. Jackson was a Negro?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And he was coming toward you and these other men at the time he was shot?

A. Yes, Sir, coming right between his house, right in his yard between his home and the house below him.

Q. What did these men say at the time he was shot?

A. They didn't say anything but they pulled down on him; I kept begging him not to shoot him, I held him a good bit and I thought he wouldn't shoot but he shot him twice and the other fellow on the other side-and he fell-shot him and broke his leg.

Q. One man shot him twice?

A. Yes, sir, this is my recollection now.

Q. Then another one shot him through the leg?

A. Yes, I didn't look at that fellow.

Q. These same men that shot him carried him to the hospital?

A. No, they didn't.

Q. What did they do?

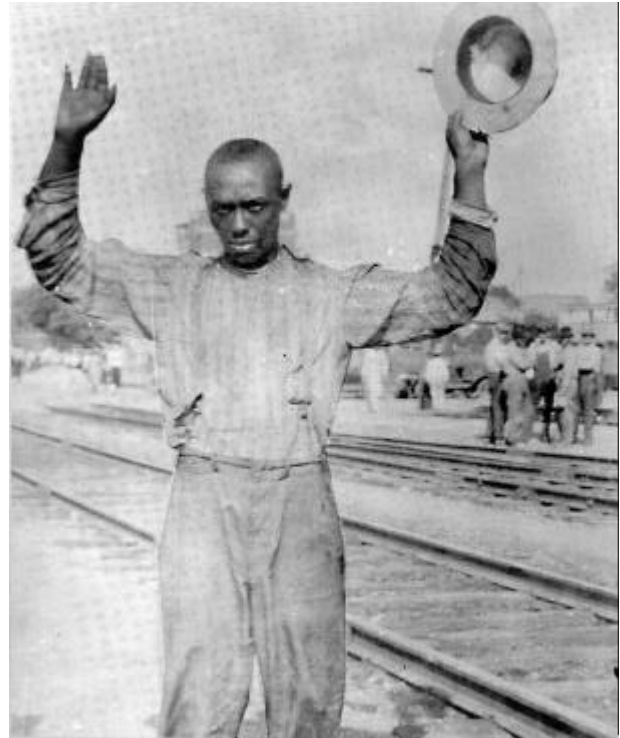
A. I have never seen them after that, I don't know a thing about what became of them.

Dr. Jackson died of his wounds later that day.¹⁶⁸

Not all black Tulsans, however, countenanced surrender. In the final burst of fighting off of Standpipe Hill that morning, a deadly firefight erupted at the site of an old clay pit, where several African American defenders were said to have gone to their deaths fighting off the white invaders. Stories also have been passed down over the years regarding the exploits of Peg Leg Taylor, a legendary black defender who is said to have singlehandedly fought off more than a dozen white rioters. Along the northern face of Sunset Hill, the white guardsmen posted there found themselves, at least for a while, under attack.¹⁶⁹

Black Tulsa, it was clear, was not going without a fight.

Despite their gallant effort, however, Tulsa's African American minority was simply outgunned and outnumbered. As the white mobs continued to move northward, into the heart of the black residential district, some of the worst violence of the riot appears to have taken place. "Negro men, women and children were killed in great numbers as they ran, trying to flee to safety," one unidentified informant later told Mary E. Parrish, "... the most horrible scenes of this occurrence was to see women dragging their children while running to safety, and the dirty white rascals firing at them as they ran."¹⁷⁰



While the white rioters continued their assault upon the African-American community, black Tulsans soon found themselves subject to arrest by Tulsa officials and "special deputies" (Courtesy Bob Hower).

In the wake of the invasion came a wall of flame, steadily moving northward. "Is the whole world on fire?" asked a young playmate of eight-year-old Kinney Booker, who was fleeing with his family from their home on North Frankfort. Not far away, a fiery horror was underway. As later recounted by Walter White in *The Nation* magazine:

One story was told to me by an eyewitness of five colored men trapped in a burning house. Four burned to death. A fifth attempted to flee, was shot to death as he emerged from the burning structure, and his body was thrown back into the flames.

Humans, however, were not the only victims of the conflagration. More than a few black Tulsans kept pigs and chickens in their backyards in those days. They too perished in the flames, as did some dogs and other family pets.¹⁷¹

Efforts made by the Tulsa Fire Department to halt the burning were of little effect. The earliest attempts by firemen to put out fires in the Afri-



While only the authorities detained a handful of white rioters, most black Tulsans soon found themselves held under guard. Even in the predominantly white neighborhoods on the city's south side, African-American domestic workers were rounded up and taken to the various internment centers (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

can American district were halted, at gunpoint, by crowds of white rioters. Thereafter, what efforts that were made appear to have been directed towards keeping the flames away from nearby white neighborhoods. This may also have played a role in how another new black church, the First Baptist Church located at Archer and Jackson, was spared. "Yonder is a nigger church, why ain't they burning it?" a white woman allegedly asked on the morning of June 1. Because, she was told, "It's in a white district."¹⁷²

As the morning wore on, and the fighting moved northward across Greenwood, there was a startling new development. On the heels of their brief gun battle with African American riflemen to their north, the guardsmen who were positioned along the crest of Sunset Hill then joined in the invasion of black Tulsa, with one detachment heading north, the other to the northeast. As later described by Captain John W. McCuen in the after action report he submitted to the commander of Tulsa's National Guard units:

We advanced to the crest of Sunset Hill in skirmish line and then a little further north to the military crest of the hill where our men were ordered to lie down because of the intense fire of the blacks who had formed a good skirmish line at the foot of

the hill to the northeast among the out-buildings of the Negro settlement which stops at the foot of the hill. After about 20 minutes "fire at will" at the armed groups of blacks the latter began falling back to the northeast, thus getting good cover among the frame buildings of the Negro settlement. Immediately we moved forward, "B" Company advancing directly north and the Service company in a north-easterly direction.¹⁷³

More remarkable, the guardsmen came upon a group of African Americans barricaded inside a store, who were attempting to hold off a mob of armed white rioters. Rather than attempt to get the white invaders and the black defenders to disengage, the guardsmen joined in on the attack. Again, as described by Captain McCuen:

At the northeast corner of the Negro settlement 10 or more Negroes barricaded themselves in a concrete store and dwelling and a stiff fight ensued between these Negroes on one side and guardsmen and civilians on the other. Several whites and blacks were wounded and killed at this point. We captured, arrested and disarmed a great many Negro men in this settlement and then sent them under guard to the convention hall and other points where they were being concentrated.¹⁷⁴



Whites detained fleeing African Americans as well as those that stayed near their homes and businesses (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

No longer remotely impartial, the men of “B” Company, Third Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, had now joined in on the assault on black Tulsa.

As African Americans fled the city, new dangers sometimes appeared. Mary Parrish later reported that as the group of refugees she was with “had traveled many miles into the country and were turning to find our way to Claremore,” they were warned to stay clear of a nearby town, where whites were “treating our people awfully mean as they passed through.”¹⁷⁵ Similar stories have persisted for decades.

Not all white Tulsans, however, shared the racial views of the white rioters. Mary Korte, a white maid who worked for a wealthy Tulsa family, hid African American refugees at her family’s farm east of the city.¹⁷⁶ Along the road to Sand Springs, a white couple named Merrill and Ruth Phelps hid and fed black riot victims in the basement of their home for days. The Phelps home, which still stands, became something of a “safe house” for black Tulsans who had managed not to be imprisoned by the white authorities. Traveling through the woods and along creek beds at night, dozens of African

American refugees were apparently hidden by the Phelps during the daylight hours.¹⁷⁷

Other white Tulsans also hid blacks, or directly confronted the white rioters. Mary Jo Erhardt, a young stenographer who roomed at the Y.W.C.A. Building at Fifth and Cheyenne, did both. After a sleepless night, punctuated by the sounds of gunfire, Erhardt arose early on the morning of June 1. Heading downstairs, she then heard a voice she recognized as belonging to the African American porter who worked there. “Miss Mary! Oh, Miss Mary!” he said, “Let me in quick.” Armed whites, he told her, were chasing him. Quickly secreting the man inside the building’s walk-in refrigerator, Erhardt later recalled,

Hardly had I hidden him behind the beef carcasses and returned to the hall door when a loud pounding at the service entrance drew me there. A large man was trying to open the door, fortunately securely locked, and there on the stoop stood three very rough-looking middle-aged white men, each pointing a revolver in my general direction!

“What do you want?” I asked sharply. Strangely, those guns frightened me not at

The Zarrow Family. The parents of Jack and Henry Zarrow, founder of Sooner Pipeling, owned a grocery store in the riot-torn area. It was spared because they were white. The Zarrow's hid many of the fleeing blacks in their business (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).



all. I was so angry I could have torn those ruffians apart—three armed white men chasing one lone, harmless Negro. I cannot recall in all my life feeling hatred toward any person, until then. Apparently my feelings did not show, for one answered, “Where did he go?” “Where did WHO go?” I responded.

“That nigger,” one demanded, “did you let him in here?”

“Mister,” I said, “I’m not letting ANYBODY in here!,” which was perfectly true. I had already let in all I intended.

“It was at least ten minutes before I felt secure enough to release Jack,” Erhardt added, “He was nearly frozen, dressed thinly as he was for the hot summer night, but he was ALIVE!”¹⁷⁸

Some whites, in their efforts to protect black Tulsans from harm put themselves at risk. None, perhaps, more so than a young Hispanic woman named Maria Morales Gutierrez. A recent immigrant from Mexico, she and her husband were living, at the time of the riot, in a small house off Peoria Avenue, near Independence Street. Hearing a great deal of noise and commotion on the morning of June 1, Morales ventured outside, where she saw two small Af-

rican American children, who had evidently been separated from their parents, walking along the street. Suddenly, an airplane appeared on the horizon, bearing down on the two frightened youngsters. Morales ran out into the street, and scooped the little ones into her arms, and out of danger.

A group of armed whites later demanded that Morales hand the two terrified children over to them. “In her English, she told them ‘No’,” her daughter Gloria Lough, later recalled. “Somehow or other,” she added, “they didn’t shoot her.” The youngsters were safe.¹⁷⁹

As the battle for black Tulsa continued to rage, it soon became evident, even in neighborhoods far removed from the fighting, that on June 1, 1921, there would be very little business as usual in the city of Tulsa. When Guy Ashby, a young white employee at Cooper’s Grocery on Fourteenth Street, showed up for work that morning, his boss was on his way out the door. “The boss told me there would be no work that day as he was declaring it ‘Nigger Day’ and he was going hunting niggers,” Ashby later remembered, “He took a rifle and told me to lock up the store and go home.”¹⁸⁰

Downtown, normal activities were even more in disarray, as business owners found themselves shorthanded, and crowds of onlookers took to the streets, or climbed up on rooftops, to stare at the great clouds of smoke billowing over



Any fleeing families were denied freedom by whites positioned on escape routes (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

the north end of town. At the all-white Central High School, several male students bolted from class when gunfire was heard nearby. One of the students later recalled, “struck out for the riot area.” Along the way, he added, they were met by a white man who handed them a new rifle and a box of shells. “You can have it,” the man told them, “I’m going home and going to bed.”¹⁸¹

The riot was felt along the southern edge of the city as well, particularly in the well-to-do white neighborhoods off of 21st Street, as carloads of armed white vigilantes went door to door, rounding up live-in African American cooks, maids, and butlers at gunpoint, and then hauling them off toward downtown. A number of white homeowners, however, fearing for the safety of their black employees, stood in the way of this forced evacuation. When Charles and Amy Arnold refused to hand over their housekeeper, cries of being “nigger lovers” were followed by a brick being thrown through their front window.¹⁸²

Even out in the countryside, miles from town, people knew that something was happening in Tulsa. Since daybreak, huge columns of black smoke had been rising up, hundreds of feet into the air, over the north end of the city.

The smoke was still there, some four hours later, when the State Troops finally arrived in town.

The special train from Oklahoma City, carrying Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett and the



Shortly after the outbreak of violence, the Tulsa police presented the local National Guardsmen with a machine gun—only it proved to be defective. A second machine gun that was in the hands of white civilians, however, was used to considerable effect during the attack on Greenwood (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).



As more and more African Americans were detained the "protective custody" alternate holding locations had to be used including McNulty baseball Park (Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

approximately 109 soldiers and officers under his command, pulled into Tulsa's bullet-scarred Frisco and Santa Fe passenger depot at approximately 9:15 a.m. on the morning of June 1, 1921. The soldiers, who arrived armed and in uniform, were all-members of an Oklahoma City based National Guard unit. In Tulsa, they soon became known, by both blacks and whites, as the "State Troops," a term which had the intrinsic benefit of helping to distinguish the out-of-towners from the local National Guard units. Like the local guardsmen, the State Troops were also all-white.¹⁸³

By the time the State Troops arrived, Tulsa's devastating racial conflagration was already ten-and-one-half hours old. Dozens of blacks and whites had been killed, while the wards of the city's four remaining hospitals — the all-black Frissell Memorial Hospital had already been burned to the ground by white rioters — were filled with the wounded. Most of the city's African American district had already been torched, while looting continued in those black homes and businesses that were still standing. "One very bad thing was the way whites delved into the personal belongings of the Negroes, throwing their possessions from trunks and otherwise damaging them," reported M.J. White, a Denver dental

supply dealer who was visiting Tulsa at the time of the riot. "This lawless looting continued from about 9 until 11 o'clock," he added, "when martial law prevented further spoilation."¹⁸⁴

There were ongoing horrors as well. "One Negro was dragged behind an automobile, with a rope around his neck, through the business district," reported the *Tulsa World* in its "Second Extra" edition on the morning of June 1. Decades later, both former Tulsa mayor L.C. Clark, and E.W. "Gene" Maxey of the Tulsa County Sheriff's Department, confirmed this report. "About 8:00 a.m. on the morning of June 1, 1921, Maxey told riot chronicler Ruth Avery,

I was downtown with a friend when they killed that good, old, colored man that was blind. He had amputated legs. His body was attached at the hips to a small wooden platform with wheels. One leg stub was longer than the other, and hung slightly over the edge of the platform, dragging along the street. He scooted his body around by shoving and pushing with his hands covered with baseball catcher mitts. He supported himself by selling pencils to passersby, or accepting their donations for his singing of songs.

The street car tracks ran north and south on Main Street, and the tracks were laid on pretty rough bricks. The fellow that was driving the car I knew—an outlaw and a bootlegger. But I won't give his name because he has some folks here. There were two or three people with him. They got that old colored man that had been here for years. He was helpless. He'd carry an old tin cup, sing, and mooched for money. One of them thuggy, white people had a new car, so he went to the depot, and came back up Main Street between First and Second Streets. We were on the east side of the street. These white thugs had roped this colored man on the longer stump of his one leg, and were dragging him behind the car up Main Street. He was hollering. His head was being bashed in, bouncing on the steel rails and bricks.

"They went on all the speed that the car could make," Maxey added, "... a new car, with the top down, and 3 or 4 of them in it,

dragging him behind the car in broad daylight on June 1, right through the center of town on Main Street."¹⁸⁵

When the State Troops arrived in Tulsa, the majority of the city's black citizenry had either fled to the countryside, or were being held — allegedly for their own protection — against their will in one of a handful of hastily set-up internment centers, including Convention Hall, the fairgrounds, and McNulty baseball park. There were still, however, some pockets of armed black resistance to the remnants of the white invasion, especially along the northern reaches of the African American district. In certain borderline areas such as the residential neighborhood that lay just to the east of the Santa Fe tracks where the Jim Crow line ran right down the center of the street, a number of African American homes had escaped destruction, sometimes through the efforts of sympathetic white neighbors.¹⁸⁶

Upon their arrival in Tulsa, the State Troops apparently did not proceed immediately to where the fighting was still in progress, al-



Remarkably, a handful of Tulsa's finest African-American homes were still standing when the State Troops arrived in town. But about one-hour later, a small group of white men were seen entering the houses, and setting them on fire. By the time the State Troops marched up Standpipe Hill, it was too late, the homes were gone (Courtesy Tulsa Historical Society).

though it is uncertain how long this delay lasted. The reasons for this seeming hold-up appear to be largely due to the fact that certain steps needed to be fulfilled — either through pro to col or by law — in or der for mar tial law to be declared in Tulsa. Accordingly, after de-training at the Frisco and Santa Fe station, Ad-jutant General Barrett led a detachment of soldiers to the courthouse, where an unsuccessful attempt was made to contact Sheriff McCullough. Barrett then went to city hall, where, after conferring with city officials, he contacted Governor Robertson in Oklahoma City and asked to be granted the authority to proclaim martial law in Tulsa County. Other detachments of State Troops, meanwhile, appear to have begun taking charge of black Tulsans who were being held by armed white civilians.¹⁸⁷ However, another account of the riot, published a decade later, alleges that upon their arrival in Tulsa, the State Troops wasted valuable minutes by taking time to prepare and eat breakfast.¹⁸⁸

As it turned out, while the State Troops were occupied downtown, not far away, some of the finest Afri can Amer i can homes in the city were still standing. Located along North Detroit Avenue, near Easton, they included the homes of some of Tulsa's most prominent black citizens, among them the residences of *Tulsa Star* editor A.J. Smitherman, Booker T. Washington High School principal Ellis W. Woods, and businessman Thomas R. Gently and his wife, Lottie.¹⁸⁹

For several hours that morning, John A. Oliphant a white attorney who lived nearby, had been tele phoning po lice head quar ters in an effort to save these homes, that had been looted but not burned. Oliphant believed that a handful of officers, if sent over immediately, could see to it that the homes were spared. As he later recounted in sworn testimony:

Q. Judge, when you phoned the police station what reply did you get?

A. He said, somebody in there, I thought I knew the voice but I am not certain, he said, I will do the best I can for you." I told him who I was, I wanted some policemen, I says, "If you will send me ten

policemen I will protect all this property and save a million dollars worth of stuff they were burning down and looting." I asked the fire department for the fire department to be sent over to help protect my property and they said they couldn't come, they wouldn't let them.¹⁹⁰

Oliphant's hopes were raised, however, when he observed the arrival of the State Troops, figuring that they might be able to save the homes along North Detroit. "I sent for them," he testified, I sent for the militia to come, send over fifteen or twenty of them, that is all I wanted." But, instead, at around 10:15 a.m. or 10:30 a.m., a party of three or four white men, probably so-called 'Special Deputies," each wearing badges arrived, and then set fire to one of the very homes that Oliphant had been trying to protect. By the time the State Troops arrived in the neighborhood later that morning, it was too late. Most of the homes were already on fire.¹⁹¹

One of the few that was not belonged to Dr. Robert Bridgewater and his wife, Mattie, at 507 N. Detroit. Returning to his home — after being held at Convention Hall — in order to retrieve his medicine cases, Dr. Bridgewater later wrote,

On reaching the house, I saw my piano and all of my elegant furniture piled in the street. My safe had been broken open, all of the money stolen, also my silverware, cut glass, all of the family clothes, and everything of value had been removed, even my family Bible. My electric light fixtures were broken, all of the window lights and glass in the doors were broken, the dishes that were not stolen were broken, the floors were covered (literally speaking) with glass, even the phone was torn from the wall.¹⁹²

The Bridgewaters, as they well knew, were among the fortunate few. Most black Tulsans no longer had homes anymore.

By the time that marital law was declared in Tulsa County at 11:29 a.m. on June 1, the race riot had nearly run its course. Scattered bands of white riot ers, some of whom had been awake for more than twenty-four hours straight, continued to loot and burn, but most had already gone

As the riot wore on, African-American families frequently became separated, as black men were often the first to be led away at gunpoint. For many black Tulsans, it was hours—and, in some cases, much longer—before they learned the fate of their loved ones (Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).



home. Along the northern and eastern edges of black Tulsa, where homes were mixed in with stretches of farmland, it had become difficult for the rioters to distinguish the homes of African Americans from those of their white neighbors. The home that riot survivor Nell Hamilton shared with her mother out near the Section Line was, perhaps, spared for just that reason.¹⁹³

A final skirmish appears to have occurred a little after Noon, when the remaining members of the white mob exchanged fire with a group of African Americans not far from where the Santa Fe railroad tracks cut across the Section Line, just off of Peoria Avenue. The black de-

fenders had apparently held off the whites who were gathered along the railroad embankment. When a second group of whites, armed with high-powered rifles, arrived on the scene, the African Americans were soon overrun.¹⁹⁴

Most of the city's black population, meanwhile, was being held under armed guard. Many families had been sent, at first, to Convention Hall, but as it filled to capacity, black Tulsans were taken to the baseball park and to the fairgrounds. As the day wore on, hundreds would soon join them. As the men, women, and children who had fled to the countryside, or had taken refuge at Golden Gate Park, began to wander back toward town, they too, were taken into



From their positions along Standpipe and Sunset Hills, members of the Tulsa-based units of the Oklahoma National Guard also took black Tulsans into "protective custody." And as the local guardsmen began making forays into the African-American district, they actively took black prisoners (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).



On the morning of June 1, most black Tulsans who were taken into custody were brought to Convention Hall, on Brady Street. But as the day wore on, and more and more African Americans were placed under arrest, new internment centers had to be established (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

custody. While the white authorities would later argue, and not without some validity, that this was a protective measure designed to save black lives, other reasons including a lingering white fear of a “Negro uprising” undoubtedly played a role in their rationale. In any event, following the destruction of their homes and businesses on May 31 and June 1, black Tulsa now found itself, for all practical purposes, under arrest.¹⁹⁵

Following the declaration of martial law, the State Troops began to move into what little remained of Tulsa’s African American neighborhoods, disarming whites and sending them away from the district. After the riot, a number of black Tulsans, strongly condemned, in no uncertain terms, the actions of both the Tulsa Police Department and the local National Guard units during the conflict. However, the State Troops were largely praised. “Everyone with whom I met was loud in praise of the State Troops who so gallantly came to the rescue of stricken Tulsa,” wrote Mary Parrish, “They used no partiality in quieting the disorder. It is the general belief that if they had reached the scene sooner, many lives and valuable property would have been saved.”¹⁹⁶

Additional detachments of State Troops from other Oklahoma cities and towns arrived in Tulsa through out June 1, and with their help, the streets were eventually cleared. All businesses were ordered to close by 6:00 p.m. One hour later, only members of the military or civil authorities, physicians, or relief workers were allowed on the streets. It was later claimed that by 8:00 p.m. on the evening of June 1, order had been restored.¹⁹⁷ The Tulsa race riot was over.

Doctors, relief workers, and members of the military and civil authorities were not, however, the only ones who were active in Tulsa on Wednesday evening, June 1, 1921. As Walter White later reported:

O.T. Johnson, commandant of the Tulsa Citadel of the Salvation Army, stated that on Wednesday and Thursday the Salvation Army fed thirty-seven Negroes employed as grave diggers and twenty on Friday and Saturday. During the first two days these men dug 120 graves in each of which a dead Negro was buried. No coffins were used. The bodies were dumped into the holes and covered over with dirt.¹⁹⁸

Scene in front of Convention Hall as African Americans are being incarcerated on June 1 (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).



Other written evidence, including funeral home records that had lain unseen for more than seventy-five years, would later confirm that African American riot victims were buried in unmarked graves at Oaklawn Cemetery.¹⁹⁹ But oral sources would also point to additional unmarked burial sites for riot victims in Tulsa County, including Newblock Park, along the Sand Springs road, and the historic Booker T. Washington Cemetery, located some twelve miles southeast of the city.²⁰⁰

Conducted, no doubt, under trying circumstances, the burial of Tulsa's African American riot dead would nevertheless bear little in common with the interment of white victims. Largely buried by strangers, there would be no headstones or graveside services for most of black Tulsa's riot dead. Nor would family members be present at the burials, as most of them were still being held under armed guard at the various detention centers. It appears that in some cases, not only did some black Tulsa families not learn how their loved ones died, but not even where they were buried.

In the week following the riot, nearly all of Tulsa's African American citizenry had managed to win their freedom, by one way or another, from the internment centers. Largely homeless, and in many cases now penniless, they made their way back to Greenwood. However, Greenwood was gone.

What they found was a blackened landscape of vacant lots and empty streets, charred timbers and melted metal, ashes and broken dreams. Where the African American commercial district once stood was now a ghost town of crumbling brick storefronts and the burned-out bulks of automobiles. Gone was the Dreamland and the Dixie, gone was the *Tulsa Star* and the black public library, gone was the Liberty Cafe and Elliott & Hooker's clothing store, H.L. Byars' cleaners and Mabel Little's beauty salon. Gone were literal lifetimes of sweat and hard work, and hard-won rungs on the ladder of the American Dream.

Gone, too, were hundreds of homes, and more than a half-dozen African American churches, all torched by the white invaders. Nearly



As black Tulsans won their release from the various internment centers, and returned to Greenwood, most discovered that they no longer had homes anymore (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).



Stone and brick walls were all that were left of most of the homes in the Greenwood section (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

ten-thousand Tulsans, practically the entire black community, was now homeless.

Across the tracks and across town, in Tulsa's white neighborhoods, no homes had been looted and no churches had been burned. From the outside, life looked much the same as it had been prior to the riot, but even here, beneath the surface, there was little normalcy.

In one way or another, white Tulsans had been stunned by what had happened in their city. More than a few whites, including those whose homes now featured stolen goods, had undeniably, taken great joy in what had occurred, particularly the destruction of Greenwood. Some whites had even applauded as black families had been led through the streets,

at gunpoint, toward the various internment centers.²⁰¹ Some would soon find a new outlet for their racial views in the hooded order that was about to sweep across the white community.

Other white Tulsans were horrified by what had taken place. Immediately following the riot, Clara Kimble, a white teacher at Central High School opened up her home to her black counterparts at Booker T. Washington High School, as did other white families.²⁰² Others donated food, clothing, money, and other forms of assistance. For many whites, the riot was a horror never to be forgotten, a mark of shame upon the city that would endure forevermore.

However, for black Tulsans, the trials and tribulations had only just begun. Six days after the riot, on June 7, the Tulsa City Commission passed a fire ordinance designed to prevent the rebuilding of the African American commercial district where it had formerly stood, while the so-called Reconstruction Commission, an organization of white business and political leaders, had been fuming away offers of outside aid. In the end, black Tulsans did rebuild their community, and the fire ordinance was declared unconstitutional by the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Yet, the damage had been done, and the tone of the official local response to the disaster had already been set. Despite the Herculean efforts of the American Red Cross, thousands of black Tulsans were forced to spend the winter of

Many African Americans were forced to spend the winter after the riot in tents (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).





Iron bed frames were all that remained of many residences in North Tulsa (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

1921-22 living in tents. Others simply left. They had had enough of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

For some, staying was not an option. It soon became clear, both in the grand jury that had been impaneled to look into the riot, and in various other legal actions that, by and large, languished in the courts, that African Americans would be blamed for causing the riot. Nowhere, perhaps, was this stated more forcefully than in the June 25, final report of the grand jury, which stated:

We find that the recent race riot was the direct result of an effort on the part of a certain group of colored men who appeared at the courthouse on the night of May 31, 1921, for the purpose of protecting one Dick Rowland then and now in the custody of the Sheriff of Tulsa County for an alleged assault upon a young white woman. We have not been able to find any evidence either from white or colored citizens that any organized attempt was made or planned to take from the Sheriff's custody any prisoner; the crowd assembled about the courthouse being purely spectators and curiosity seekers resulting from rumors circulated about the city.

"There was no mob spirit among the whites, no talk of lynching and no arms," the report added, "The assembly was quiet until the arrival

of armed Negroes, which precipitated and was the direct cause of the entire affair."²⁰⁵

A few other court cases, largely involving claims against the city and various insurance companies, lingered on for a number of years afterward. In the end, while a handful of African Americans were charged with riot-related offenses, no white Tulsan was ever sent to prison for the murders and burnings of May 31, and June 1, 1921. In the 1920s Oklahoma courtrooms and halls of government, there would be no day of reckoning for either the perpetrators or the victims of the Tulsa race riot. Now, some seventy-nine years later, the aged riot survivors can only wonder if, indeed, that day will ever come.



Commemoration of the riot conducted by Ben Hooks (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

Endnotes

¹ A number of general histories of Tulsa have been written over the years, the most recent being Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oaks Books, 1997). In addition, also see: William Butler, *Tulsa 75: A History of Tulsa* (Tulsa: Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, 1974); Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); Clarence B. Douglas, *The History of Tulsa, Oklahoma: A City With a Personality* (3 vols.; Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921); Nina Dunn, *Tulsa's Magic Roots* (Tulsa: Oklahoma Book Publishing Company, 1979); James Monroe Hall, *The Beginning of Tulsa* (Tulsa: Scott-Rice Company, 1928); and Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson and Glen Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984).

² John D. Porter, comp., *Tulsa County Handbook*, 1920 (Tulsa: Banknote Printing Company, 1920). Dr. Fred S. Clinton, "Interesting Tulsa History," a 1918 pamphlet, a copy of which is located in the Tulsa History vertical files in the library of the Oklahoma Historical Society. [Federal Writers' Project], *Tulsa: A Guide to the Oil Capital* (Tulsa: Mid-West Printing Company, 1938), pp. 23-25, 32, 50, 54. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921* (Tulsa: Polk-Hoffhine Directory Company, 1921). Vaughn-Roberson and Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, p. 199.

On the old Tulsa city cemetery, which was located near what is now the intersection of Second Street and Frisco Avenue, see: Jim Downing, "Bulldozers Disturb Pioneers' Final Rest," *Tulsa World*, February 17, 1970, pp. 113, 613; Mrs. J.O. Misch, "Last Resting Places Not Always Final" and other undated clippings located in the Tulsa Cemeteries subject files at the Tulsa Historical Society; and, interview with S.R. Lewis, Indian Pioneer History Collection, Federal Writers' Project, vol. CVI, pp. 351-352, Oklahoma Historical Society.

³ *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Clinton, "Interesting Tulsa History". Porter, *Tulsa County Handbook*, 1920. Goble, *Tulsa!* pp. 78-111.

⁴ While a complete architectural history of Tulsa has not yet been written, the homes of the oil barons have been the subject of careful study. See: Marilyn Inhofe, Kathleen Reeves, and Sandy Jones, *Footsteps Through Tulsa* (Tulsa: Liberty Press, 1984); and, especially, John Brooks Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes* (Tulsa: HCE Publications, 2000).

⁵ On the history of Greenwood, see: Eddie Faye Gates, *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997); Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Greenwood's Historic Greenwood District* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997); Henry C. Whitlow, Jr., "A History of the Greenwood Era in Tulsa", a paper presented to the Tulsa Historical Society, March 29, 1973; Francis Dominic Burke, "A Survey of the Negro Community of Tulsa, Oklahoma" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1936); and, [National Urban League], *A Study of the Social and Economic Condition of the Negro Population of Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: National Urban League, 1945).

⁶ The standard work on the history of African Americans in Oklahoma is Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).

⁷ On B.C. Franklin, see: John Hope Franklin and John Whittington Franklin, eds., *My Life and An Era: The Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). The John Hope Franklin quote is from his Foreword to Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. xv.

⁸ On the transfer of entrepreneurial experience from the all black towns to Greenwood, credit is due to Professor D.F.G. Williams, an urbanist at Washington University in St. Louis. Professor Williams is currently preparing a scholarly article about Tulsa's African American community at the time of the riot, and was kind enough to share an early version of this work, titled "Economic Dualism, Institutional Failure, and Racial Violence in a Resource Boom Town: A Reexamination of the Tulsa Riot of 1921."

⁹ Mary E. Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster* (rpt; Tulsa: Out on a Limb Publishing, 1998), pp. 11, 17. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Tulsa Historical Society. "Tulsa's Industrial and Commercial District," 1921 map published by the Dean-Brumfield Company, Tulsa. *Daily Oklahoman*, June 2, 1921. Oral history interview with Nell Hamilton Hampton, Tulsa, September 16, 1998. Oral history interview with Edward L. Goodwin, Sr., Tulsa, November 21, 1976, by Ruth Sigler Avery in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman — A Documentary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot*, unpublished manuscript.

¹⁰ Mabel B. Little, "A History of the Blacks of North Tulsa and My Life", typescript, dated May 24, 1971. Tulsa Star, April 11, 1914. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 115-126. Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, p. 193. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Oral history interviews with: Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978; V.H. Hodge, Tulsa, June 12, 1978; W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; B.E. Caruthers, Tulsa, July 21, 1978; Elwood Lett, Tulsa, May 28, 1998; and Otis Clark, Tulsa, June 4, 1999.

¹¹ [State Arts Council of Oklahoma], "A Century of African-American Experience — Greenwood: From Ruins to Renaissance", exhibition brochure. Oral history interviews with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, by: Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear*:

The Fifth Horseman; and Scott Ellsworth, June 7, 1978. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. *Tulsa Star*, January 4, 1919. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. *William Redfearn vs. American Central Insurance Company*, Case 15851, Oklahoma Supreme Court.

¹²*Tulsa Star*: May 30, 1913; June 13, 1913; February 7, 1914; March 7, 1914; April 4, 1914; April 11, 1914; September 12, 1914; February 16, 1918; May 4, 1918; and January 4, 1919. *Tulsa World*, June 6, 1921. *Daily Oklahoman*, June 2, 1921. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 83, 89-90. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Kavin Ross, "Booker T. Washington High School—Ellis Walker Woods Historical Marker/Memorial Proposal", c1999. James M. Mitchell, "Politics in a Boom Town: Tulsa from 1906 to 1930" (M.A. thesis, University of Tulsa, 1950).

On the African Blood Brotherhood, see: the July and November 1921 issues of *The Crusader*, the official journal of the organization; "Negroes Brand Story Race Initiated Riot as Fake", *New York Call*, June 5, 1921; and, in interviews with Binkley Wright, Los Angeles, California, February and August 25, 2000, by Eddie Faye Gates; and *Tulsa World*, March 26, 2000.

On the intellectual and political life of Greenwood prior to the riot, additional credit is due to the most helpful insights of Mr. Paul Lee, a journalist and filmmaker who is currently working on a documentary on early black migration to Oklahoma.

¹³*Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 41, 78-80. Gates, *They Came Searching*, pp. 165-167. *Tulsa Star*, March 6, 1915.

On the education of the new Mount Zion Baptist Church building, see the *Tulsa World*, April 10, 1921, p. B-8.

¹⁴*Tulsa Star*: May 30, 1913; May 29, 1915; June 26, 1915; July 10, 1915; and February 13, 1919. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 115. Walter F. White, "The Eruption of Tulsa", *The Nation*, June 29, 1921, pp. 909-910. [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, June 13, 1921", 1, A, 1, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Oral history interview with Seymour Williams, Tulsa, June 2, 1978.

J.B. Stradford, who was forced to flee Tulsa after the riot, was cleared of any wrongdoing in the affair at a 1996 ceremony. See: "Black Man Cleared of 1921 Tulsa Riot", *Arizona Republic*, October 27, 1996, p. A14; Mary Wisniewski Holden, "75 Years Later: Vindication in Tulsa", *Chicago Lawyer*, December 1996; and Jonathan Z. Larsen, "Tulsa Burning", *Civilization*, IV, I (February/March 1997), pp. 46-55.

Significantly, Stradford wrote a memoir — a few pages of which have turned up in Tulsa — which, if published, promises to be a most important historical document.

¹⁵Williams, "Economic Dualism, Institutional Failure, and Racial Violence in a Resource Boom Town". Whitlow, "A History of the Greenwood Era in Tulsa". *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 82-83. Gates, *They Came Searching*, pp. 102-103. *Tulsa Star*: March 7, 1914; and January 4, 1919. Oral history interview with Mabel B. Little, Tulsa, May 24, 1971, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

African Americans who tried to shop downtown were often the targets of discriminatory and derogatory behavior by white merchants and customers. See, for example, "Colored Woman Insulted", in the *Tulsa Star*, July 11, 1913.

At least one white merchant in an otherwise all-white block of stores did, however, actively seek black customers. See the advertisements for the North Main Department Store in the *Tulsa Star*, March 27 and April 17, 1920.

¹⁶[National Urban League], *A Study of the Social and Economic Condition of the Negro Population of Tulsa, Oklahoma*, pp. 37-39, 87-89. [Oklahoma Writers' Project], "Racial Elements", typescript, dated January 17, 1938, in the Federal Writers' Project topical files, 81.05, Archives and Manuscript Division, Oklahoma Historical Society. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Gates, *They Came Searching*, pp. 62-64, 83-86. Oral history interviews with Kinney Booker, Tulsa, May 30, 1998; and, Elwood Lett, Tulsa, May 28, 1998.

For a longer term perspective, see also the comments of Marian Ramsey Jones, Bertha Black McIntyre, and Walter "Pete" Williams following Hannibal Johnson's article, "Greenwood: Birth and Rebirth", *Tulsa People Magazine*, July 2000, pp. 12-18.

¹⁷*Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. On the lives of the African American men and women who lived in the "Professor's Row" off of Standpipe Hill, see the forthcoming article by Paul Lee in *Essence* magazine.

While a complete copy of the study conducted by the American Association of Social Workers has not been located, this report — and its findings — was cited in subsequent publications. The quote is from *The Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work*, 56th Annual Session, June 26 to July 3, 1929 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1929), pp. 393-394. The study is also cited in Jesse O. Thomas, "American Cities — Tulsa", an unidentified 1924 article, a copy of which is located in the Oklahoma subject file of the Schomburg Center Clipping File 1925-1974, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

¹⁸Kathy Callahan, "Mozelle May Recalls Early Tulsa History", *Tulsa World*, April 29, 1974. *Tulsa City Directory, 1921*. Gates, *They Came Searching*, pp. 62-65, 139-140. Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*. Oral history

interviews with: Henry C. Whitlow, Jr., Tulsa, June 6, 1978; and Kinney Booker, Tulsa, May 30, 1998. Telephone interviews with Jewel Smitherman Rogers, Perris, California, 1998-2000.

¹⁹John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), pp. 346-354. Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966). John Higharn, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955). Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

²⁰The classic study of the Chicago riot is William M. Tuttle, Jr.'s *Race Riot. Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

Following the riot, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations conducted an extensive investigation of what had occurred. Its report, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), is still quite useful.

²²Tuttle, *Race Riot*, pp. 29-30.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 244-245. Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, p. 351.

A number of other World War I era riots have also been the subject of extensive study. See, for example: Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964); U.S. House of Representatives, Sixty-Fifth Congress, 2nd Session, "Report of the Special Committee Authorized by Congress to Investigate the East St. Louis Riots" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918); and, Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

²³The literature on interracial sexual relations in America — including historical, sociological, and psychological analyses, as well as the work of some of the country's finest novelist — is voluminous. For a historical perspective, two places to begin are: Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); and Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

²⁴Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pp. 348-349. Classic studies of lynching include: Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982); and James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000).

²⁵Robert T. Kerlin, *The Voice of the Negro, 1919* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920). Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pp. 323-360. Emmett J. Scott, *History of the American Negro, in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919).

²⁶LA. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965). Mary Frances Berry, *Black Resistance/White Law: A History of Constitutional Racism in America* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971). C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

²⁷David A. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965). Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

²⁸*Tulsa Star*, November 11, 1916; February 16, 1918; May 4, 1918; and November 23, 1918. Interview with Seymour Williams, Tulsa, June 2, 1978. Goble, *Tulsa!*, pp. 120-121.

²⁹Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 102-104. Arrell M. Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries* (Norman: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1965), p. 353. Kay M. Teall, ed., *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), pp. 172, 202-204, 225.

³⁰Mary Elizabeth Estes, "An Historical Survey of Lynchings in Oklahoma and Texas!" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1942), pp. 130-134.

³¹Carter Blue Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma?" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1976), pp. vii-xi, 36-80, 169-219. Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965). W.C. Witcher, *The Reign of Terror in Oklahoma* (Ft. Worth, n.p., c 1923). Marion Monteal, *The Klan Inside Out* (Claremore: Monarch Publishing Company, 1924). Howard A. Tucker, *History of Governor Walton's War on the Klan* (Oklahoma City: Southwest Publishing Company, 1923).

³²Charles Oquin Meyers, Jr., "The Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa County During the Early 1920s" (Honor's paper, Department of History, University of Tulsa, 1974), pp. 6, 12-19. Laurie Jane (Barr) Croft, "The Women of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma" (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1984), p. 51. Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma", pp. 36, 47, 52, 65, 71, 89.

³³*Tulsa World*, July 30, 1922. Meyers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa Country", pp. 9-12. Ku Klux Klan Papers, Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa.

³⁴Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, pp. 66, 142-58, 228. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, pp. 52-55. Meyers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa County", pp. 20-22, 26-35. Bruce Bliven, "From the Oklahoma Front", *New Republic*, October 17, 1923, p. 202. Jewel Smitherman Rogers, "John Henry Smitherman: A Profile of The Father, The Man, and The Officer of the Law", typescript, November 1999. Interview with Willa Catherine Smitherman, Tulsa, February 14, 1978, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Oral history interviews with: William M. O'Brien, Tulsa, March 2, 1998; and Richard Gary, Tulsa, March 16, 1999.

³⁵Meyers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa County", pp. 33-38. Tulsa Man membership register/ledger, 1928-1929, Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa. Oral history interview with Ed Wheeler, Tulsa, February 27, 1998.

³⁶Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma", pp. 42-45.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 36-38

³⁸*Tulsa World*, June 6, 1921. Ruth Sigler Avery, *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

³⁹*The Tribune*, in particular, paid close attention to Klan activities in Dallas. See the *Tulsa Tribune*: January 29, 1921, p. 8; February 4, 1921, p. 1; April 2, 1921, p. 1; April 3, 1921, p. 5; May 22, 1921, p. 1; and May 24, 1921, p. 1.

⁴⁰*Tulsa Tribune*, May 22, 1921, p. 2. On the May brothers, see also the March 27, 1921 issue, p. 2.

⁴¹Meyers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa County", pp. 3-7. Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma", pp. 46-47.

⁴²*Tulsa Tribune*, April 17, 1921, p. 5. *Tulsa World*: April 10, 1921, p. 4; April 14, 1921, p. 4; April 18, 1921, p. 4; April 20, 1921, p. 4; and April 23, 1921, p. 4. [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, June 13, 1921," NAACP Papers, Library of Congress. *Exchange Bureau Bulletin*, I, 26 (July 7[?], 1921).

On economic conditions in Tulsa prior to the riot, see: *Harlow's Weekly*, December 17, 1920 and September 16, 1921; *Tulsa Tribune*, April 14, 1921, p. 6; *Tulsa World*, May 19, 1921, p. 4; Tulsa City Commission, Record of Commission Proceedings, August 26, 1921; Ralph Cassady, Jr., *Price Making and Price Behavior in the Petroleum Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 136; and, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), Volume 2, p. 208.

⁴³"Federal Report on Vice Conditions in Tulsa," April 21-26, 1921, by Agent T.G.F., a copy of which is located in the Attorney General Civil Case Files, Record Group 1-2, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

⁴⁴Abundant evidence on the illegal consumption of alcohol in Tulsa County can be found in the Attorney General's Civil Case Files, Record Group 1-2, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. See, in particular: the testimony of E.S. McQueen, L. Medlen, and Mrs. W.H. Clark; "Statement of John Burnett"; "Memo to Major Daily"; and, "Special Report on Vice Conditions in and Around the City of Tulsa, by H.H. Townsend", Tulsa, May 18, 1921.

Oral history interview with Elwood Lett, Tulsa, May 28, 1998. *Tulsa Tribune*: February 7, 1921, p. 1; February 11, 1921, p. 5; February 12, 1921, p. 1; February 13, 1921, p. 3; and April 15, 1921, p. 13.

⁴⁵The quote from Charles C. Post is from the *Tulsa Tribune*, May 8, 1921, p. 1. See also: *Tulsa World*, April 22, 1921, p. 1; *Tulsa Tribune*, May 18, 1921, p. 2; and, "Statement of Barney Cleaver," Attorney General's Civil Case Files, Record Group 1-2, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

⁴⁶White, "The Eruption of Tulsa", p. 909. *Tulsa World*: April 23, 1921, pp. 1,3; and May 13, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa Tribune*: January 13, 1921, p. 12; February 12, 1921, p. 1; March 5, 1921, p. 1; March 9, 1921, p. 10; March 13, 1921, p. 7; March 14, 1921, p. 1; March 21, 1921, p. 1; April 5, 1921, p. 1; April 13, 1921, p. 1; May 1, 1921, p. B-14; May 2, 1921, p. 1; May 11, 1921, p. 1; May 18, 1921, p. 1; May 20, 1921, p. 1; and May 28, 1921, p. 1.

⁴⁷*Tulsa World*. April 4, 1921, p. 4; April 15, 1921, p. 4; May 13, 1921, p. 4; May 18, 1921, pp. 1, 13; May 19, 1921, pp. 1, 4; May 20, 1921, pp. 1, 2; May 21, 1921, pp. 1, 4,17; and May 22, 1921, pp. 1, 17. *Tulsa Tribune*, May 1, 1921, p. B-14. 4. *Tulsa Tribune*: April 17, 1921, p. 1; April 19, 1921, p. 16; and May 25, 1921, p. 16.

⁴⁹Estes, "Historical Survey of Lynchings in Oklahoma and Texas," p. 131. Interview with George B. Smith, Red Fork, Oklahoma, August 24, 1937, by W.T. Holland, Volume LXIX, pp. 470-475, Indian Pioneer History Collection, Federal Writers' Project, Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁵⁰William T. Lampe, *Tulsa County and the World War* (Tulsa: Tulsa Historical Society, 1918). [National Civil Liberties Bureau], "The 'Knights of Liberty' Mob and the I.W.W. Prisoners at Tulsa, Okla., November 9, 1917", pamphlet, 1918. Goble, *Tulsa!*, pp. 118-122.

⁵³*Tulsa Times*: November 10, 1917, p. 6; and November 12, 1917, p. 7. *Tulsa Democrat*: November 10, 1917, p. 8; and November 11, 1917, pp. 1, 3. *Tulsa World*: November 10, 1917, p. 1; November 11, 1917, p. 1; November 12, 1917, p. 4; and November 13, 1917, p. 4.

⁵²*Tulsa World*: August 22, 1920, p. 1; and August 24, 1920, p. 1. *Tulsa Tribune*: August 22, 1920, p. 1; August 24, 1920, pp. 1, 4; August 25, 1920, p. 1; and August 28, 1920, p. 1.

⁵³*Tulsa Tribune*: August 23, 1920, p. 1; and August 27, 1920, p. 1. *Tulsa World*: August 25, 1920, pp. 1, 12; August 28, 1920, pp. 1, 9; August 29, 1920, p. 9; August 30, 1920, p. 1; September 1, 1920, p. 12; and September 2, 1920, pp. 1, 9.

⁵⁴*Tulsa World*, August 25, 1920, p. 12; and August 31, 1920, p. 4. *Tulsa Tribune*, August 28, 1920, p. 1.

⁵⁵*Tulsa Tribune*, August 28, 1920, p. 1.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, August 29, 1920, pp. 1-2. *Tulsa World*: August 29, 1920, p. 1; and August 30, 1920, p. 3.

⁵⁷*Tulsa Star*, September 4, 1920, p. 1. *Tulsa Tribune*, August 29, 1920, pp. 1, 2. *Tulsa World*: August 29, 1920, p. 1; and August 30, 1920, pp. 1-3. See also: White, "The Eruption of Tulsa", p. 909.

⁵⁸*Tulsa World*, August 30, 1920, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁹Both the lynching of Roy Belton, and how Tulsans responded to the event, was covered extensively in both of Tulsa's daily newspapers. See: *Tulsa Tribune*: August 31, 1920, p. 12; September 6, 1920, p. 1; September 9, 1920, p. 1; September 10, 1920, p. 1; September 21, 1920, p. 2; September 24, 1920, p. 1; and September 29, 1920, p. 4. *Tulsa World*: August 30, 1920, p. 4; August 31, 1920, pp. 1, 4; September 1, 1920, pp. 1, 4, 12; September 2, 1920, pp. 1, 4; September 3, 1920, pp. 1, 18; September 5, 1920, p. A-1; September 6, 1920, p. 1; and September 10, 1920 pp. 1, 13.

⁶⁰*Tulsa Star*, September 4, 1920, pp. 1, 4.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, March 6, 1920, p. 8.

⁶²Clark, "History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma", p. 17.

⁶³*Tulsa Star*, March 6, 1920, p. 8.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, September 4, 1920, pp. 1, 4.

⁶⁵*Tulsa Democrat*, March 18, 1919, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, March 18, 1919, p. 1. *Tulsa Times*, March 18, 1919, p. 1.

⁶⁶*Tulsa Times*: March 20, 1919, p. 1; March 21, 1919, p. 1; and March 22, 1919, p. 3. *Tulsa World*, March 21, 1919, p. 1; *Tulsa Democrat*: March 19, 1919, p. 11; March 20, 1919, p. 9; and March 21, 1919, pp. 10, 16.

⁶⁷*Tulsa Tribune*, June 12, 1921, p. 1.

⁶⁸*Tulsa Star*, September 4, 1920, pp. 1, 4.

⁶⁹Biographical sketch of Richard Lloyd Jones by Hazel S. Hone, May 10, 1939; "Richard Lloyd Jones" from *Who's Who in Tulsa*, 1950, by Clarence Allen; and, miscellaneous newspaper clippings on Jones, all located in the "Tulsa" vertical subject files, Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁷⁰*Tulsa Tribune*: January 13, 1921, p. 12; February 12, 1921, p. 8; March 5, 1921, p. 10; April 5, 1921, p. 16; April 7, 1921, p. 16; May 1, 1921, p. B-14; May 3, 1921, p. 18; and May 13, 1921, p. 24.

⁷¹*Ibid.*: January 3, 1921, p. 12; March 2, 1921, p. 1; March 4, 1921, p. 1; March 5, 1921, p. 1; March 28, 1921, p. 1; March 29, 1921, p. 1; March 31, 1921, p. 1; April 4, 1921, p. 1; April 5, 1921, p. 1; April 13, 1921, p. 1; May 8, 1921, p. 1; May 16, 1921, p. 12; May 17, 1921, p. 1; May 19, 1921, pp. 1, 2; May 20, 1921, pp. 1, 2, 22; May 21, 1921, pp. 1, 2; May 22, 1921, p. B-14; May 24, 1921, pp. 1, 18; and May 25, 1921, pp. 1, 3, 16.

The *Tulsa World* painted a somewhat rosier portrait of crime conditions in Tulsa. See, for example: April 15, 1921, p. 4; April 17, 1921, p. 16; May 19, 1921, pp. 1, 3; May 19, 1921, pp. 1, 4; May 20, 1921, pp. 1, 2; May 21, 1921, pp. 1, 4, 17; and May 22, 1921, pp. 1, 17.

On political issues which may have influenced the *Tribune's* campaign, as well as the subsequent investigations of the Tulsa Police Department, see: Ronald L. Trekell, *History of the Tulsa Police Department, 1882 - 1990* (N.p., n.p., n.d.); Mitchell, "Politics in a Boom Town"; Randy Krehbiel, "Root of the Riot", *Tulsa World*, January 30, 2000, pp. A-1, A-2; and, John R. Woodard, *In Re Tulsa* (N.p., n.p., 1935).

⁷²*Tulsa Tribune*: May 14, 1921, p. 10; May 16, 1921, p. 12; and May 25, 1921, p. 16.

⁷³*Ibid.*: March 3, 1921, p. 1; April 17, 1921, p. 1; May 24, 1921, p. 1; May 26, 1921, p. 14; and May 27, 1921, p. 1.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, June 4, 1921, p. 8.

⁷⁵*Tulsa Tribune*, May 21, 1921, pp. 1, 2. Typescript reports by members of Cooke's party can be found in the Attorney General's Civil Case Files, Record Group 1-2, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

⁷⁶*Tulsa Tribune*: May 26, 1921, p.1; and May 27, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*: May 26, 1921, p. 1; and May 27, 1921, p. 8.

⁷⁷*Tulsa Tribune*, May 30, 1921, p. 1.

⁷¹Oral history interview with Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, p. 199. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; and Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978. Booker T. Washington High School Alumni Roster, 1916-1929. Loren L. Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot" (M.A. thesis, University of Tulsa, 1946), p. 22. "Mob Fury and Race Hatred as a National Danger", *Literary Digest*, LXIX (June 18, 1921). Interview with Alice Andrews in Gates, *They Came Searching*, pp. 41-42.

Dick Rowland's last name is sometimes spelled "Roland". Similarly, Sarah Page's surname is sometimes given as "Paige".

⁷⁹Oral history interviews with: Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978; and W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921. *Tulsa Tribune*, May 22, 1921, p. 4.

⁸⁰*Tulsa Tribune*: April 17, 1921, p. 5; May 31, 1921, p. 1; and June 1, 1921, p. 4. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", pp. 909-910.

⁸¹Oral history interviews with: Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972; S.M. Jackson and Eunice Cloman Jackson, Tulsa, June 26, 1971; and Robert L. Fairchild, Tulsa, April 18, 1971; all by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Oral history interview with Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978.

⁸²*Tulsa World*, May 29, 1921, p. A-1. *Tulsa Tribune*: May 29, 1921, pp. 2, 8, B-1, B-10, B-12; and May 30, 1921, p. 1. Oral history interview with Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Tulsa, Tulsa Historical Society.

⁸³*New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", p. 910. "Mob Fury and Race Hatred", *Literary Digest*, *op cit.* *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 2. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 18. Oral history interviews with: Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972; Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, April 18, 1976; Mabel B. Little, Tulsa, May 24, 1971; S.M. Jackson and Eunice Cloman Jackson, Tulsa, June 26, 1971; all by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

⁸⁴*Tulsa Tribune*, May 31, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, pp. 1-5. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", p. 909. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; and Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978.

⁸⁵Oral history interview with Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. On lynching, see also, "The Ideology of Lynching", in Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), pp. 1-14.

⁸⁶*Tulsa Tribune*, May 31, 1921, p. 1. Oral history interview with Damie Rowland Ford, Tulsa, July 22, 1972, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

In early May 1921, the *Tulsa Tribune* reported that the Tulsa Police Department had eighty-eight officers; *Tulsa Tribune*, May 2, 1921, p. 1. *The Tulsa City Directory*, 1921, however, lists only fifty-seven of ficers, four of whom are identified as African American.

⁸⁷Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, pp. 195-196.

⁸⁸*Tulsa World*, May 31, 1921.

⁸⁹Gill, "The Tulsa Race Riot", pp. 21-22.

⁹⁰Red Cross Collection, Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, Tulsa Historical Society. The State Edition copy of "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator" was uncovered by Bruce Hartnitt, a Tulsa-based researcher, in the collections of the Oklahoma Historical Society sometime prior to 1996.

⁹¹Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978.

⁹²Oral history interview with Robert L. Fairchild, Tulsa, April 18, 1971, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Statement of "A.H." in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 62. Charles F. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years: A History of the Sooner State and Its People, 1889-1939* (Hopkinsville, Kentucky: Historical Record Association, 1941), p. 206.

⁹³Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and Era*, p. 196.

⁹⁴Ross. T. Warner, *Oklahoma Boy* (N.p., n.d., n.d.), p. 136. Petition No. 23325, B.A. Waynes and M.E. Waynes vs. T.D. Evans *et al.*, Tulsa County District Court. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. Testimony of John A. Gustafson, State of Oklahoma vs. John A. Gustafson, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

⁹⁵*Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", pp. 1, 8. Major James A. Bell to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Report on Activities of the National Guard on the Night of May 31 and June 1, 1921", Testimony of John A.

Gustafson; and Laurel Buck testimony; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. A. J. Smitherman, "A Descriptive Poem of the Tulsa Riot and Massacre", undated pamphlet, Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁹⁶*Tulsa Tribune*: June 3, 1921, p. 1; and June 6, 1921, p. 3. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 8. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. Typescript notes on the testimony of A.B. Nesbitt; and miscellaneous handwritten notes; both in the Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interview with Dave Faulkner, Tulsa, May 7, 1971, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

⁹⁷Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978. Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, pp. 96-97. Oral history interview with Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, by Eddie Faye Gates, in *They Came Searching*, p. 71. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 1. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", pp. 909-910. Smitherman, "Me Tulsa Riot and Massacre". Handwritten notes on the testimony of O.W. Gurley; and typescript notes on the testimony of Henry Jacobs; both in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

⁹⁸Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 7; June 3, 1921, p. 1; June 6, 1921, p. 3; June 9, 1921, p. 4; and June 10, 1921, p. 8. Major James A. Bell to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Report on the Activities of the National Guard", typescript notes on the testimony of John Henry Potts; and miscellaneous handwritten notes; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", pp. 909-910. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; and Seymour Williams, Tulsa, June 1, 1978.

⁹⁹Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, p. 207. Laurel Buck testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁰⁰Bell, "Report on the Activities of the National Guard", *op cit. Tulsa Tribune*: January 16, 1921, p. 5; and March 20, 1921, Magazine Section, p. 2.

¹⁰¹Bell, "Report on Activities of the National Guard." See also: Major Paul R. Brown to the Adjutant General of Oklahoma, "Work of the Sanitary Detachment During the Riot in Tulsa", Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries; and, Robert D. Norris, Jr., "The Oklahoma National Guard in the Tulsa Race Riot: Tentative Summary of Finding", typescript, 1999.

¹⁰²John A. Gustafson testimony; and handwritten notes to the testimony of W. M. Ellis; both in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Stephen P. Kerr, "*Tulsa Race War, 31, May 1921: An Oral History*," unpublished manuscript, 1999. St. Louis Argus, June 10-1921.

¹⁰³John A. Gustafson testimony; and miscellaneous handwritten notes; both in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries

¹⁰⁴Oral history interviews with Ernestine Gibbs, Augusta Mann, Rosa Davis Skinner, Robert Fairchild, and Alice Andrews, all by Eddie Faye Gates, in *They Came Searching*, pp. 42-43, 71, 85-86, 151, 165-166. Handwritten notes to the testimony of O. W. Gurley; typescript notes to the testimony of W.C. Kelley; and John A. Gustafson testimony; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁰⁵Following the riot, some claimed that Sheriff McCullough had actually requested that this second contingent of African American men come down to the Court house, a highly unlikely possibility. It is, however, possible to envision a scenario whereby a telephone call by McCullough to Deputy Sheriff Barney Cleaver - perhaps made to the offices of the *Tulsa Star* - might have been misinterpreted, in the heat of the moment, as a request for assistance. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 3, 1921, pp. 1, 3. *Tulsa World*, June 10, 1921, p. 8. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", pp. 909-910. John A. Gustafson testimony; Laurel Buck testimony; and, handwritten notes to W. N. Ellis testimony; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interview with I.S. Pittman, Tulsa, July 28, 1978.

¹⁰⁶Oral history interview with Robert Fairchild, Tulsa, June 8, 1978. Handwritten notes to the testimony of W. E. Dudley, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. *Tulsa World*, July 7, 1921, p. 3. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 3, 1921, pp. 1, 3.

¹⁰⁷*Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 1. White, "Eruption of Tulsa," pp. 909-910. William Cleburn "Choc" Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," unpublished memoir of the 1921 Tulsa race riot, pp. 32-34, 47. Handwritten notes to the testimony of "Witnesses in Order", Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁰⁸*Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 3. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 8. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921.

¹⁰⁹Oral history interview with Dr. George H. Miller, M.D., Tulsa, August 1, 1971, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman. Tulsa City Directory, 1921*.

¹¹⁰*Okmulgee Daily Democrat*, June 1, 1921. *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 8. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 3. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921.

¹¹¹Phillips, "Murder in the Streets", p. 46.

¹¹²Laurel Buck testimony; handwritten notes to "Witnesses in Order" testimony; and miscellaneous handwritten notes; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. *Tulsa World*, June 10, 1921, p. 8. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot", p. 28.

Who actually performed the swear-in of the "Special Deputies" is unclear, as is what may have been the "official policy" — if any — of both the Police Department and the city government in response to the violence during the early hours of the riot. The latter was often prominently featured in a number of law suits filed after the riot. See, in particular: "Brief of Plaintiff in Error" and "Answer Brief of Defendant in Error", *William Redfern vs. American Central Insurance Company* (1925), Oklahoma State Supreme Court; and documents involving various cases filed by individuals who suffered property losses during the riot, including *C.L. Netherland vs. City of Tulsa*, Loula T. Williams vs. Fire Association of Philadelphia, *Osborne Monroe vs. Mechanics and Traders Insurance Company of New Orleans*, and *H.J. Caver vs. T.D. Evans*, et al..

¹¹³Letter from A. J. Perrine, Tulsa, July 2, 1921, to the Attorney General, Oklahoma City; Laurel Buck Testimony; Statement of [J.W.] McGee; Major Byron Kirkpatrick to Lieutenant Colonel L. J.F. Rooney, "Activities on Night of May 31, 1921 at Tulsa, Okla."; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. *Tulsa World*: June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 1; and June 2, 1921. *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. Oral history interview with L. C. Clark, Tulsa, June 25, 1975, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

¹¹⁴Oral history interview with W.R. Holway, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

¹¹⁵Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," p. 38. *Tulsa World*, May 31, 1921, p. 5.

¹¹⁶*Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 5. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 1. *New York Times*, June 1, 1921. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets", pp. 37-41. Oral history interviews with: Mrs. C.A. (Helen) Donohue Ingraham, Tulsa, May 4, 1980; and W.R. Holway; both by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

¹¹⁷Major C.W. Daley to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising, May 31, 1921", Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921.

¹¹⁸*Denver Post*, June 4, 1921. *Kansas City Post*, June 2, 1921. *New York Tribune*, June 2, 1921. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 2. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 5. Daley, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising". Handwritten notes to "Witnesses in Order" testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978.

¹¹⁹Ed Wheeler, "Profile of a Race Riot," *Impact Magazine*, IV (June-July 1971), p. 21. Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 2. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 3, 1921, p. 1.

¹²⁰White, "Eruption of Tulsa," p. 910.

¹²¹Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 19. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Second Extra Edition", p. 1; and June 2, 1921, p. 2. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 3, 1921, p. 1. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. *New York Post*, June 1, 1921. Captain Frank Van Voorhis to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising for Service Company, Third Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard", Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹²³Bell, "Report on Activities of the National Guard". See also: Kirkpatrick, "Activities on Night of May 31, 1921"; and, Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 207-210.

¹²⁴Bell, "Report on Activities of the National Guard." Brown, "Work of the Sanitary Detachment". Kirkpatrick, "Activities on Night of May 31, 1921." Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 207-212.

¹²⁵Captain John W. McCuen to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Duty Performed by [B] Company, Third Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, at Negro Uprising, May 31, 1921"; Lieutenant Roy R. Dunlap to Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney, "Report on Negro Uprising, May 31, 1921"; Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising"; Daley, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising and, Letter from Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney and Charles W. Daley to the Adjutant General, June 3, 1921; all in Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹²⁶Letter from Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney and Charles W. Daley to the Adjutant General, June 3, 1921. Kirkpatrick, "Activities on the Night of May 31, 1921." Bell, "Report on Activities of the National Guard." McCuen, "Duty Performed by [B] Company." Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising." Daley, "Information on

Activities During Negro Uprising." *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, June 4, 1921, P. 1. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot", pp. 30-31, 40-41.

¹²⁷Interview with Major Frank Van Voorhis, Tulsa, October 25, 1937, by Effie S. Jackson, Indian Pioneer History Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society. Letter from Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney and Charles W. Daley to the Adjutant General, June 3, 1921. Kirkpatrick, "Activities on Night of May 31, 1921." McCuen, "Duty Performed by ["B"] Company".

¹²⁸Oral history interview with Seymour Williams, Tulsa, June 2, 1978.

¹²⁹Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978. Smitherman, "The Tulsa Riot and Massacre."

¹³⁰Oral history interviews with: Elwood Lett, Tulsa, May 29, 1998; and Nell Hamilton Hampton, Tulsa, September 16, 1998. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921, p. 8. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Third Extra," p. 1.

¹³¹Smitherman, "The Tulsa Race Riot and Massacre".

¹³²Letter from Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney and Charles W. Daley to the Adjutant General, June 3, 1921.

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴*Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition," p. 1. Oral history interview with Harold Madison Parker, Tulsa, January 3, 1973, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot," p. 28. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 47-51. McCuen, "Duty Performed by ["B"] Company." Dunlap, "Report on Negro Uprising". Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising". Daley, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising".

¹³⁵Phillips, "Murder in the Streets." Jno. A. Gustafson, Chief of Police Wm. McCullough, Sheriff V. W. Biddison, District Judge.¹³⁹

J. B. A. Robertson, June 1, 1921, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹³⁹Copy of telegram from John A. Gustafson, Wm McCullough, and V. W. Biddison to Governor J. B. A. Robertson, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁴²Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 19-21. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁴³Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 68-73.

¹⁴⁴Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. Patrolmen Henry C. Pack and Robert Lewis were two of the approximately four African Americans who served on the Tulsa Police force at the time of the riot.

¹⁴⁵*Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921.

¹⁴⁶Testimonials of James T. West, Dr. R. T. Bridgewater, and J. C. Latimer in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 20-21, 38, 45-47, 60-61. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Extra," p. 1. *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921. *New York Mail*, June 1, 1921. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 70-73. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, November 29, 1970; and S.M. Jackson and Eunice Cloman Jackson, Tulsa, June 26, 1971; by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

¹⁴⁷Phillips, "Murder in the Streets", p. 70.

¹⁴⁸Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 65. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets", pp. 70-71. *New York World*, June 2, 1921.

¹⁴⁹Oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978.

¹⁵⁰Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 18-21. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁵¹Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921.

¹⁵²Testimonial of Dr. R. T. Bridgewater in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 45.

¹⁵³Barney Cleaver vs. The City of Tulsa, *et al.*, 1921. Testimonials of James T. West and "A.H." in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 37, 62. Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, November 29, 1970; and S. M. Jackson and Eunice Cloman Jackson, Tulsa, June 26, 1971; by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. *Chicago Defender*, October 25, 1921. Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, p. 197. Oral history interview with Allen Yowell, Tulsa, June 5, 1999.

Black Tulsa was not destroyed—as some have alleged—from the air, but by fires set by whites on the ground. And similar, latter-day claims that Mount Zion Baptist Church was specifically targeted and bombed must also be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism, given the rather primitive aerial bombing capabilities that existed, worldwide, in 1921. That said, however, the evidence does indicate that some form of aerial bombardment took place in Tulsa on the morning of June 1, 1921—thus making Tulsa, in all probability, the first U.S. city bombed from the air.

¹⁵⁴Letter from Lieutenant Colonel L. J. F. Rooney and Charles Daley to the Adjutant General, June 3, 1921. Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising." Testimonials of Dr. R.T. Bridgewater and Mrs. Carrie Kinlaw in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 45-57, 50-51. John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interview with Kinney Booker, Tulsa, May 30, 1998. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921.

¹⁵⁵Testimonials of James T. West, Mrs. Rosetta Moore, P.S. Thompson, Carrie Kinlaw, J.P. Hughes, and "A.H." in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 37, 42-44, 50-52, 62-63. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot," pp. 31, 55. Phillips "Murder in the Streets," pp. 70, 87-88. *New York Evening Post*, June 11, 1921. Franklin and Franklin, *My Life and An Era*, p. 197.

¹⁵⁶*Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921.

¹⁵⁷Oral history interviews with George Monroe, Tulsa, 1997-2000.

¹⁵⁸Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 49, 55-56. Laurel Buck testimony, and notes to the testimony of O. W. Gurley, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot," p. 31. *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Final Edition", p. 1. *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921. *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921.

The entire issue of fires being set in Greenwood by whites in military-style uniforms is further—and perhaps hopelessly—complicated by the use of the ambiguous term, "Home Guards." When used by whites, it usually refers to a loose organization of white veterans. When employed by African Americans, however, the term also appears to refer, at times, to the local, Tulsa-based units of the National Guard. See, also: Robert D. Norris, Jr., "The Home Guard", unpublished manuscript, ca 2000; and, Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, p. 131, n13.

¹⁵⁹Typescript note on the testimony of V.B. Bostic in letter of June 8, 1921, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. See also John A. Oliphant testimony, *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁰Type script notes on the testimony of Jack Krueger and Rich Rickard in letter of June 8, 1921, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, States Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁶¹Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 92-93. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 21. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 5. *Kansas City Post*, June 2, 1921. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot," pp. 32-33. John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. See also: oral history interview with W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; and oral history interview with Dr. Raymond Knight, Oklahoma City, February 10, 1971, by Ben Woods, Living Legends Library, Oklahoma Christian College.

¹⁶²McCuen, "Duty Performed by ["B"] Company." Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising." Testimonials of E.A. Loupe and "A.H." in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 49, 62-63. Miscellaneous handwritten notes, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interviews with: Seymour Williams, June 2, 1978; W. D. Williams, June 7, 1978; Robert Fairchild, June 8, 1978; V. H. Hodge, Tulsa, June 12, 1978; and I. S. Pittman, Tulsa, July 28, 1978.

¹⁶³From the *Wichita Daily Eagle*, reprinted in the *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921.

¹⁶⁴Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 50, 55. *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. Daley, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising." John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁶⁵Testimonial of I. T. West in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁶Oral history interview with Harold Madison Parker, Tulsa, January 3, 1972, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*.

¹⁶⁷Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 55.

¹⁶⁹John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. Oral history interview with Wilhelmina Guess Howell by Eddie Faye Gates, in *They Came Searching*, pp. 113-115.

¹⁶⁹Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising." McCuen, "Duty Performed by ["B"] Company." Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 73-74, 93-95. Interview with Binkley Wright, Los Angeles, February and August 25, 2000, by Eddie Faye Gates. Curlee Hackman, "Peg Leg Taylor and the Tulsa Race Riot," in J. M. Brewer, ed., *American Negro Folklore* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 34-36.

¹⁷⁰Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷¹Oral history interviews with: Kinney Booker, Tulsa, May 30, 1998; and Otis Clark, Tulsa, June 4, 1999. White, "Eruption of Tulsa", p. 910.

¹⁷² *Guthrie Daily Leader*, June 1, 1921. *Tulsa Tribune*: June 1, 1921, p. 6; and June 3, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 2. Affidavit of Albert Herring, December 2, 1921, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 55.

¹⁷³ McCuen, "Duty Performed by ["B"] Company."

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Undated letter by Mary Korte. Letter from Joan Morgan, Kansas City, Missouri, June 1998. "Mary Uhrig Korte Tells of Early Life in Tulsa," Giebar family genealogical newsletter, 1992. Notes on Mary Korte by Nora Stallbaumer, Tulsa, April 3, 1998. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁷⁷ Oral history interview with Merrill A. "Red" Phelps 11, Tulsa, August 12, 1999.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Jo Erhardt, "My Most Hideous Birthday," unpublished memoir.

¹⁷⁹ Oral history interview with Gloria Lough, Tulsa, June 4, 1999.

¹⁸⁰ Oral history interview with Guy Ashby, Tulsa, November 5, 1971, by Bruce Hartnitt.

¹⁸¹ Gill, "Tulsa Race Riot", pp. 36-37, n39.

¹⁸² Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, p. 212. Oral history interview with Mrs. Harry Frantz, Enid, May 9, 1985, by Joe L. Todd, Oklahoma Historical Society. Telephone interview with Mark Childers, Santa Fe, New Mexico, December 10, 1998. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁸³ *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Third Extra," p. 1. "Report from General Barrett," miscellaneous type script. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 211-212. Kirkpatrick, "Activities on Night of May 31, 1921" Daley, "Information on Activities During Negro Uprising".

¹⁸⁴ *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921: "Second Extra," p. 1; and "Third Extra," p. 1. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 1. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. *Denver Post*, June 4, 1921.

¹⁸⁵ *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Second Extra," p. 1. Oral history interviews with: L.C. Clark, Tulsa, June 25, 1975, by Hansel Johnson and Ruth Avery; and with E.W. "Gene" Maxey, Tulsa, 1971 and 1985; both in Avery, *Fear. The Fifth Horseman*.

¹⁸⁶ *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921. *Tulsa Tribune*: June 1, 1921, p. 8; and June 2, 1921, p. 3. Testimonials of Richard I. Hill and Dr. R. T. Bridgewater in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 41, 44-47. Oral history interviews with S.M. Jackson and Eunice Cloman Jackson, Tulsa, June 26, 1971, by Ruth Sigler Avery, in *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁸⁷ *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921, "Third Extra," p. 1. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 212-213.

¹⁸⁸ Frances W. Prentice, "Oklahoma Race Riot," *Scribner's Magazine*, XC (August 1931), pp. 151-157. Prentice was married to Clarence C. Prentice, salesman for the Sabine Oil and Marketing Company. At the time of the riot, the couple lived at 1446 S. Denver. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁸⁹ John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 55-56, 120. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁹⁰ John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Testimonial of Dr. R. T. Bridgewater in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 46, 120. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921.

¹⁹³ *Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, p. 1. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, p. 1. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 212-213. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets," pp. 103-105. John A. Oliphant testimony, Attorney Generals Civil Case Files, Case 1062, State Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Oral history interview with Nell Hamilton Hampton, Tulsa, September 16, 1998. Phillips, "Murder in the Streets", pp. 97-103.

¹⁹⁵ Some black Tulsans also found refuge in the First Presbyterian Church and other white churches. Testimonials of James T. West, Jack Thomas, Mrs. Rosetta Moore, Dr. R. T. Bridgewater, and C.L. Netherland, in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, pp. 23-24, 38, 39, 42, 44-47, 57. *Tulsa World*: June 1, 1921, "Third Extra", p. 1; and June 2, 1921, pp. 1, 2. *New York Times*, June 2, 1921. Robert N. Hower, "Angels of Mercy": *The American Red Cross and the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot* (N.p., n.p., 1993), p. A-2. Oral history interviews with Ernestine Gibbs and Robert Clark Frayser, by Eddie Faye Gates, in *They Came Searching*, pp. 86, 247. Oral history interviews with: W.D. Williams, Tulsa, June 7, 1978; and Nell Hamilton Hampton, Tulsa, September 16, 1998. Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising."

¹⁹⁶*Tulsa Tribune*, June 1, 1921, pp. 1, 2. *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, pp. 1, 2. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, p. 214. Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*.

¹⁹⁷*Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921, pp. 1, 7. *Tulsa Tribune*, June 2, 1921, p. 2. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, pp. 213-215.

¹⁹⁹White, "Eruption of Tulsa," p. 910.

¹⁹⁹Burial record ledgers for Stanley & McCune Funeral Directors, Tulsa, 1921.

²⁰⁰Preliminary scientific tests—primarily involving ground-penetrating radar—were performed at Oaklawn Cemetery, Newblock Park and Booker T. Washington Cemetery (now a part of Rolling Oaks Memorial Park) in 1998 and 1999. It is hoped that further and more definitive-tests will be performed in 2001.

The principal historical sources for each of the three sites include the following:

Oaklawn Cemetery. Oaklawn Cemetery burial records, Public Works Department, City of Tulsa. Historic and present-day Oaklawn Cemetery maps. Burial records ledgers, Stanley & McCune Funeral Directors, Tulsa, 1921. Tulsa County Commission, Minutes of Proceedings, 1921. Salvation Army records, Salvation Army Southern Historical Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Ruth Sigler Avery, *Fear: The Fifth Horseman*. Oral history interviews with Clyde Eddy, Tulsa, 1998-1999.

Booker T. Washington Cemetery. Historic and present-day maps for Booker T. Washington Cemetery. Oral history interviews with Larry Hutchings, Tulsa, April 10, 1998; John Irby, Tulsa, July 17, 1998; Chris Brockman, Tulsa, April 14, 1998; Elwood Lett, Tulsa, May 28, 1998; Gladys J. Cummins, Broken Arrow, April 20, 1998; Raymond Beard, Jr. and Sarah Beard, Tulsa, May 25, 1998; Mavelyn Blocker, Tulsa, May 24, 1998; Deborah Childers, Tulsa, May 24, 1998; Don Kennedy, Tulsa, May 24, 1998; Sarah (Butler) Thompson, Tulsa, May 25, 1998; and Sherry Thompson, Tulsa, May 23, 1998.

Newblock Park. Historic and present-day maps and aerial photographs of Newblock Park. Timothy A. Posey, "The Impact of the New Deal on the City of Tulsa" (M.A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1991). "Tulsa Parks," *Tulsa Journal*, 1, 3 (July 1984). *Tulsa Tribune*: February 15, 1921, p. 2; May 17, 1921, p. 1; and May 18, 1921, p. 3. Oral history interviews with: William M. O'Brien, Tulsa, March 2, 1998; Robert D. Norris, Jr., Tulsa, March 25, 1998; Ruth Avery, Tulsa, February 20, 1998; Bruce Hartnitt, Tulsa, May 30, 1998; Ed Wheeler, Tulsa, February 27, 1998; Frank Mason, Tulsa, March 26, 1998; Jeff Britton, Tulsa, March 26, 1998; Leslie Lawrence, Owasso, March 26, 1998; and Joe Welch and Harvey Schell, Sand Springs, March 18, 1998.

Additional information has been collected on other potential burial sites, including one other eyewitness account, and on the transportation of the bodies of the dead. "Historical Information About the Tulsa Race Riot," telephone log, January through March 1999. Oral history interviews with: Richard Gary, Tulsa, March 16, 1999; Ellen Prater Lasson, Tulsa, August 12, 1999; and Wade Foor and Charlie Anderson, Tulsa, June 5, 1999.

²⁰¹Old and young had to pile on trucks," wrote Mrs. Rosetta Moore after the riot, "and when we were being driven through town, men were seen clapping their hands, rejoicing over our condition." Testimonial of Mrs. Rosetta Moore, in Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 42.

²⁰²*Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921. Statement of J. W. Hughes, in Hower, "Angels of Mercy," p. A-3. *Tulsa City Directory*, 1921. Oral history interviews with Jewel Smitherman Rogers, Perris, California, 1999-2000. See also the forthcoming article by Paul Lee in *Essence Magazine* about the experiences of Julia Duff, a young teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, during the riot.

²⁰³On the aftermath of the riot, including relief efforts, local political maneuverings, and various legal actions, see: Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, pp. 71-97.

²⁰⁴The extensive post-riot relief efforts by the American Red Cross, and its intrepid local relief director, Maurice Willows, is well-documented in Robert A. Hower, "Angels of Mercy": *The American Red Cross and the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot*.

²⁰⁵*Tulsa World*, June 26, 1921, pp. 1, 8.



(Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

Airplanes and the Riot

By Richard S. Warner

There is no question that airplanes were in the air over Tulsa during and after the Tulsa race riot. The question is: what were they being used for?

We cannot entirely believe all the reports that have appeared over the years in newspapers, or as recounted by survivors, descendants of survivors, and others. The problem is to separate the probable from the improbable. For example, in one unidentified newspaper account from June 12, 1921, it was alleged that, "The planes used during the riot and which set fire to brick buildings are owned by the United States Government."¹ Subsequent research, however, casts considerable doubt upon this claim. While researching for his article, "Profile of a Race Riot," that appeared in the June-July, 1971 issue of *Impact Magazine*, Brigadier General Ed Wheeler (ret.) looked

into the possible involvement of U.S. military aircraft in the riot. Wheeler, who had access to military records which are no longer available, learned that there were only six U.S. military airplanes in Oklahoma at the time of the riot. Based at Fort Sill, some 212 miles from Tulsa, these six planes were World War I Jennys, with a range of about 190 miles. Of the six planes, the records showed that two were inoperable and undergoing maintenance while two had just been delivered and were not yet in flying condition. Only two were serviceable planes and neither was in the air on May 31 or June 1, 1921.² It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the airplanes reported over Tulsa during the riot were not U.S. military aircraft. Hence, they must have been privately or commercially owned airplanes, probably based in Tulsa.

The story of aircraft in Tulsa goes back to July 4, 1903, when the first recorded local flight, a balloon ascent, took place.³ Three years later, during the summer of 1906, Jimmy Jones constructed an airplane of his own design at his home in Tulsa. He and his partner, Bill Stigler, disassembled the plane and took it to a pasture near Red Fork. There they reassembled it, except for the installation of the control cables to make a test flight. It was a hot day and Jones and Stigler decided to go home and finish the job the next day. That afternoon, however, a strong wind came up and destroyed the plane.⁴

The next airplane in Tulsa was designed and constructed by Herman DeVry, who owned a machinery repair business. DeVry hired A. C. Beach, an English pilot then living in Tulsa, to test the airplane. After four tries, it finally took off from a field southwest of Sand Springs and rose to 800 feet, staying aloft for 20 minutes. After several other attempts to fly, the engine blew up and DeVry quit the aircraft business.⁵

The first airfield in Tulsa was established in 1917 by Harold Breene on the south side of Federal Drive (now East Admiral Place), at approximately South Hudson Avenue. A spur railway line served as the field's west border. There was one hangar. Mr. Breene purchased a number of surplus Curtis Jenny airplanes that he later sold to aviation enthusiasts.⁶

In 1920, Mr. Breene sold his Tulsa aviation interests to B.L. Brookins and Bill Campbell. The new company, called the Curtiss-Southwest Airplane Company, was the agency for Curtis and Waco airplanes.⁷

In early 1921, the airfield was moved to a new location on a farm owned by Mr. Brookins located just east of North Memorial Avenue and north of East Apache Street. It was situated in what is today a corner of Tulsa International Airport. According to the January 1, 1922 issue of the *Tulsa Spirit*, a Tulsa Chamber of Commerce publication, the airfield contained two large steel hangars, 90' x 60' in size and capable of holding eighteen airplanes, a motor repair shop, a wing and fuselage shop, and a gasoline and oil service station. Fourteen airplanes were based there.⁸

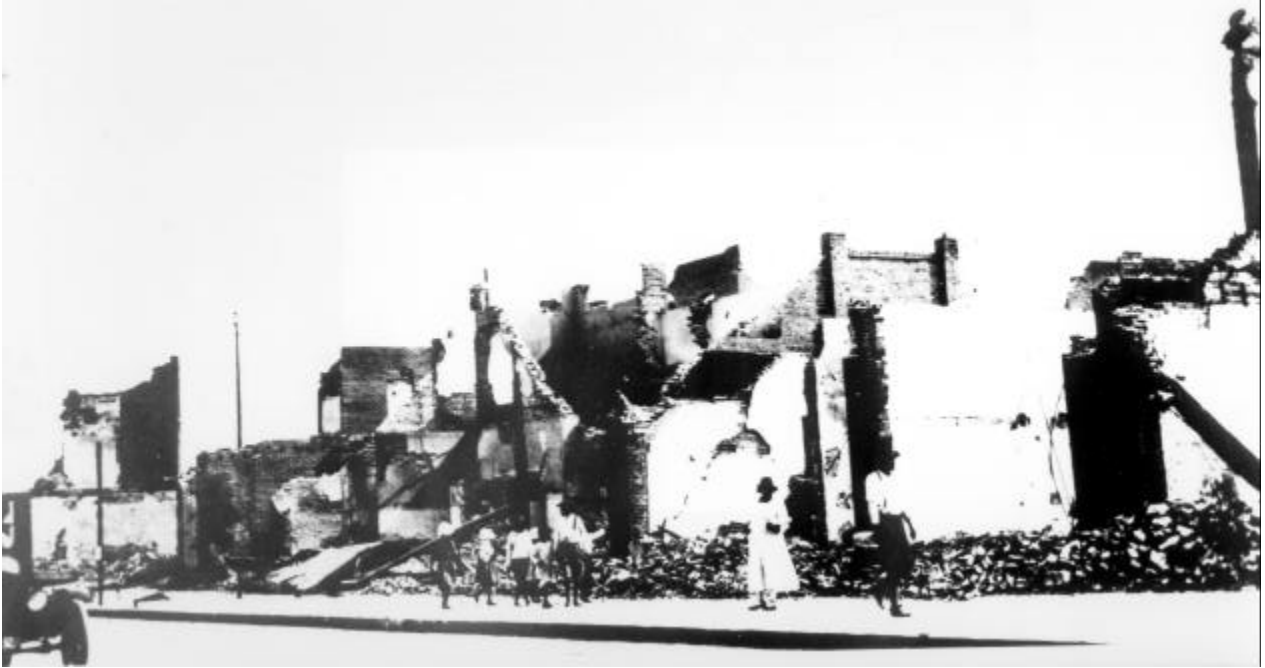
Sometime in 1921, a second air field was established in Tulsa by Paul Arbon, a World War I British pilot and dealer for the British-manufactured, Bristol aircraft. Arbon's airfield was located at the northwest corner of Federal Drive and Sheridan Road, and featured only one hangar.⁹

Registration of airplanes by the U.S. Government was not required in 1921. Thus, no records exist of actual airplane ownership during the time of the riot. Without government records, one can assume that if there were fourteen planes at the Curtiss-Southwest Air Field at the end of 1921, and probably no more than one (a demonstrator) at the Paul Arbon Air Field, the total number of airplanes based in Tulsa at the time of the riot would not have been more than fifteen.

Most of these were probably owned by the Curtiss-Southwest Airplane Company, but a few were probably owned by individuals or companies. There is really no way to determine the ownership of the planes, but it is very likely that at least one was owned by the Sinclair Oil Company. A "St. Clair Oil Company plane" is mentioned in some accounts of the riot and there is a photograph in the files of the Tulsa Historical Society of a Jenny refueling at the Curtiss-Southwest Air Field from barrels marked "Sinclair Oils." Tulsa was the headquarters of the Sinclair Oil Company at that time and the top executives lived here.¹⁰

Apparently, among the planes in Tulsa at the time of the riot, were a Stinson Detroiter, a single engine plane with an enclosed cabin capable of holding several people as well as another tri-motor, make unknown. Stinson did manufacture a tri-motor at that time according to personnel at the Tulsa Air and Space Center.¹¹

There are many references to airplanes during the riot, but few can be additionally documented through further research. Mary E. Jones Parrish included a number of references to airplanes in her book, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*. In her own account of her experiences during the riot, she mentions seeing "fast approaching aeroplanes." Moreover, in her escape from the riot area, Parrish tells of nearing the "aviation fields" —in all likelihood the Curtiss- South-



The losses in the Greenwood business district alone—including two theaters, three hotels, more than a dozen restaurants, and scores of shops, family-run businesses, and professional offices—were staggering. One contemporary observer called the deaths and destruction caused by the race riot “without parallel in America” (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

west Air Field—and seeing the “planes out of their sheds, all in readiness for flying, and these men with high-powered rifles getting into them.” Parrish adds that “The aeroplanes continued to watch over the fleeing people like great birds of prey watching for a victim, but I have not heard of them doing any harm to the people out in the direction where we were.” *Events of the Tulsa Disaster* also includes interviews including one with Mr. James T. West, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, who reported that airplanes “flew over very low, what they were doing I cannot say, for I was in my room.” Dr. R. T. Bridgewater, an assistant county physician, stated that he was “near my residence and aeroplanes began to fly over us, in some instances very low to the ground,” and that he heard a woman say, “look out for the aeroplanes, they are shooting upon us.” Mrs. Parrish also wrote that “more than a dozen aeroplanes went up and began to drop turpentine balls upon the Negro residences,” but she gives no source for this statement nor does it appear that she witnessed this herself. Lastly, Parrish also included the testimonial of an anonymous eyewitness, who stated, “Then

I saw aeroplanes, they flew very low. To my surprise, as they passed over the business district, they left the entire block a mass of flame.”¹²

Other contemporary sources also reported the presence of airplanes. Walter White wrote in the June 29, 1921 issue *The Nation* that “eight aeroplanes were employed to spy on the movements of the Negroes and according to some were used in bombing the colored section.”¹³

Mabel E. Little, in her unpublished biography, wrote that, “airplanes dropped incendiary bombs to enhance the burning of Mount Zion Baptist Church and business buildings.”¹⁴ A reporter for the Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch* wrote that “Airplanes were seemingly everywhere. They seemed to fly low and I could see the men in the planes as they passed us.” In an interview with Dr. Payne and Mr. Robinson that appeared in the same issue, it was stated that, “These two men with their wives succeeded in reaching the open country. They were finally spotted by the air murderers who showered load after load of leadened missiles upon them.” W. I. Brown, a porter on the Katy Railroad who reached Tulsa Wednesday morning, June 1, with the National Guard, recited this story:

"We reached Tulsa about 2 o'clock. Airplanes were circling all over Greenwood. We stopped our cars north of the Katy depot, going towards Sand Springs. The heavens were lightened up as plain as day from the many fires over the Negro section. I could see from my car window that two airplanes were doing most of the work. They would every few seconds drop something and every time they did there was a loud explosion and the sky would be filled with flying debris."¹⁵

Bruce Hartnitt, of Tulsa Junior College, interviewed Mabel Bonner Little in 1969 and 1971. He asked Mrs. Little, "Do you remember during the time of the riot itself, if there were any airplanes, people dropping stuff?" Mrs. Little replied, "Oh yes, they dropped those incendiary bombs, that's what burned those big buildings down, they couldn't have destroyed them with anything else . . ."¹⁶

In case No. 23, 331 filed in the District Court of Tulsa County between Barney Cleaver, plaintiff, and The City of Tulsa, one of the defendants was "The St. Clair Oil Company." The fourth paragraph of the plaintiffs petition alleges that:

"The St. Clair Oil Company, a corporation, did, at the request and insistence of the city's agents, and in furtherance of the conspiracy, aforementioned and set out, furnish airplanes on the night of May 31, 1921, and on the morning of June 1, 1921, to carry the defendant's city's agents, servants, and employees, and other persons, being part of said conspiracy and other conspirators. That the said J.R. Blaine, captain of the police department, with others, was carried in said airplane which dropped turpentine balls and bombs down and upon the houses of the plaintiff . . ."

The 1921 *Tulsa City Directory* does not list a J.R. Blaine, but it does list a G.H. Blaine, a police captain. Captain Blaine appears in a number of newspaper articles concerning airplanes and there is no question that he was a pilot or passenger on a number of flights. The same source does not list a "St. Clair Oil Company," but its phonetic similarity to the Sinclair Oil Company is too close to be ignored. It is interesting to note that Elisha Scott was the attorney for the plaintiff

in 1937 when this case was dismissed. This is the same Elisha Scott, a prominent African American attorney of Topeka, Kansas, who, according to an October 14, 1921 article in the *Chicago Defender*, claimed to have a thirty-one page affidavit signed by Van B. Hurley, supposedly a white former Tulsa policeman, that told of a meeting between local aviators and officials prior to the invasion of black Tulsa on the morning of June 1. These individuals allegedly planned an attack on the black area by airplanes. There is no record that a "Van B. Hurley" ever was a policeman or even existed. This affidavit was never made public or apparently used in any of the lawsuits. After his death, Mr. Scott's home burned and his personal papers evidently were destroyed. Beryl Ford, an authority on Tulsa's photographic history, after examining photographs of the Greenwood damage, has stated that the buildings were not destroyed by explosives. The debris shown in photographs, he believes, is located inside the shells of the buildings, where it had fallen after the rafters had burned, and not outside where it would have been scattered if explosives had been used. Outbuildings also are shown to be largely undamaged, something that was unlikely had explosives been used.¹⁷

An unidentified newspaper reported that Ed Lockett was shot from an airplane that had followed him for about eight miles from Tulsa. It was reported that "several hundred persons saw the aviator shoot Lockett and were later fired on by the same plane themselves." The body of a man was found on June 6, 1921 near the Curtiss-Southwest Air Field. Although there is no record of an "Ed Lockett," there is a funeral home record of an Ed Lockard who was found eight miles from Tulsa on June 6, 1921, and is buried in Oaklawn Cemetery in Tulsa.

The *Chicago Defender*, on June 11, 1921, reported that "at 4:30 a steam whistle sounded three times. With the coming of daylight airplanes from the local aviation field, in which the Cadillac company is interested, directed the movement of the oncoming army. At 6:15 a.m. men in the planes dropped fire bombs of turpentine or other inflammable material on the property." The article goes on to say, "One man, leaning far out from an airplane, was brought down by the bullet of a sharpshooter and his

body burst upon the ground.” Other newspapers published similar claims.

The *St. Louis Argus*, on June 10, 1921, reported that “The Negroes held their own until about 6 o’clock in the morning when a fierce attack was made upon them from the hill by cannons, and airplanes soared over the Negro section dropping fire on their houses.” J.W. Hughes, principal of Dunbar Grade School, wrote a statement that said that “at five o’clock a whistle was blown, seven aeroplanes were flying over the colored district . . .”¹⁸

As some newspaper accounts mention nitroglycerin bombs, it is interesting to note that the *Tulsa World* published an article on April 20, 1921 titled, “Tulsa Man First to Transport Nitro by Means of an Airplane.” The article discusses the great danger in transporting nitroglycerin and notes that a careless movement “may only leave a grease spot.”¹⁹

There is quite a bit of information that the police used airplanes to search the outskirts of the black area for fleeing people. When individuals were seen, a message was placed in a container and dropped to search parties on the ground. These containers may have been thought to be bombs by some. In reply to a request for information from people concerning the riot, one man called in and said that his uncle, Charles Foor, a Tulsa policeman, flew one of these search planes. He said that three planes were used and they flew in a “V” formation with his uncle in the lead. The planes, he believed, were used for reconnaissance only.²⁰

On June 7, 1921, the *Tulsa World* reported that Captain George Blaine of the Tulsa Police Department had flown over a number of black communities around Tulsa to see if any armed mobs were forming. This was in answer to persistent rumors that an attack upon Tulsa was being planned by African Americans in these communities. His flight took him over Boley, Red Bird, Taft, Wybark, and others. Blaine, it was reported, found no evidence of any such activity.²¹

Although it is within reason to believe that some individuals did drop inflammables or explosives on the riot area, there is very little to

support this. The newspapers targeted to black readers were full of stories of turpentine or nitroglycerin bombs being dropped and men shooting from planes. Mary E. Jones Parrish mentions bombing incidents, but one is from an anonymous source and the other may have not been witnessed by her. In Barney Cleaver’s lawsuit, his petition alleges that turpentine bombs were dropped on his house, thereby destroying it. However, he apparently did not witness this.

Allen Yowell stated that in 1950 or 1951 he was having his hair cut in a barber shop in Tulsa. There he heard a man, who looked to be 50 or 60 years old, who said that during the time of the riot, he and a friend obtained some dynamite, commandeered an airplane, flew over the riot area, and dropped the dynamite on a group of fleeing African American refugees not far from where some railroad tracks cross East Pine Street. Yowell said, “the man was bragging about this, and while he did not know if the story was correct or not, he felt that the man was telling the truth. He did not know the man’s name and never saw him again.”²²

Another oral informant, Lillian Lough, reported that her grandmother, a recent immigrant from Mexico, lived on the edge of the black area in 1921. At the time of the riot, she saw two young black boys running down the street being followed by a two-seater airplane. The man in the rear seat was shooting at the boys. She then ran out and grabbed the boys and took them into the house. The man in the airplane stopped shooting when she appeared.²³

It is within reason that there was some shooting from planes and even the dropping of incendiaries, but the evidence would seem to indicate that it was of a minor nature and had no real effect in the riot. While it is certain that airplanes were used by the police for reconnaissance, by photographers and sightseers, there probably were some whites who fired guns from planes or dropped bottles of gasoline or something of that sort. However, they were probably few in numbers. It is important to note, a number of prominent African Americans at the time of the riot including James T. West, Dr. R.T. Bridgewater, and Walter White of the NAACP, did not speak of any aggressive actions by airplanes during the conflict.

Endnotes

¹“Search Homes for Loot Taken During the Conflict”, unidentified article, Tuskegee Institute News Clipping Files, “1921–Riots, Tulsa.”

²Interview with Ed Wheeler, Tulsa, 1999.

³*Tulsa Division Skywriter*, April 26, 1968, a publication of the North American-Rockwell Corporation.

⁴David Moncrief, “Early Tulsa Takes Flight” an unidentified October 1981 article located in the files of The Tulsa Historical Society.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*The Tulsa Spirit*, January 1, 1922.

⁹*Tulsa Division Skywriter*, April 26, 1968.

¹⁰“Rushing in the Roaring 20s”, *Tulsa World*, June 15, 1969.

¹¹Interview with Beryl Ford and personnel of the Tulsa Air and Space Center, Tulsa, 1999.

¹²Mary E. Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, (rpt ed; Tulsa: Out On a Limb Publishing, 1998).

¹³Walter White. “Eruption of Tulsa”, *The Nation*, June 29, 1921.

¹⁴“*A History of the Blacks in North Tulsa and My Life (A True Story)*” by Mabel E. Little, unpublished manuscript.

¹⁵Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1921.

¹⁶Transcript of interview between Bruce Hartnitt and Mabel Bonner Little, circa 1969-1971.

¹⁷Telephone interview with Beryl Ford, Tulsa, 1999.

¹⁸*Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921. *St. Louis Argus*, June 10, 1921.

¹⁹*Tulsa World*, April 20, 1921.

²⁰Telephone interview with Wade Foor, Tulsa, 1999.

²¹*Tulsa World*, June 7, 1921

²²Telephone interview with Allen Yowell. Tulsa, 1999.

²³Telephone interview with Lillian Lough, 1999.

Confirmed Deaths in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: A Preliminary Report
by Clyde Collins Snow



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

Confirmed Deaths: A Preliminary Report

By Clyde Collins Snow

A Cautionary Foreword

It should be emphasized that this report is, as indicated in the title, preliminary. While collecting data for this study, it has become obvious that much critical information on how many people were killed and who they were is lacking. Much of this information still resides in the memories and family records and other personal documents of the survivors and participants of the riot - both black and white — and their descendants. For this reason, we are reaching out, both locally and nationally, for more information on possible persons killed in the riot whose deaths were never recorded. We also suspect much additional information of importance is contained in still unexamined documents such as life insurance claims, will probates, census records, etc. Hopefully, these documents still survive in obscure archives.

Until this data is collected and analyzed, no final report can be completed.

Acknowledgments

In my final report, I will include a full list of the many persons who have helped me. In this preliminary effort acknowledgments must be limited to the wise and indefatigable Mr. Dick Warner and Ms. Sue Bordeaux of the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Much of the basic information upon which this report is based was originally compiled by Dick; he is also a magnificent fact-checker. Sue Bordeaux's vast knowledge of the vital records system and her enthusiasm in putting it to work in this project was invaluable. Naturally, neither one of them are responsible for any factual errors or eccentric opinions which may appear in this preliminary report — they are all my own.



From the first shots that were fired at the courthouse on May 31, to the last fighting that took place on June 1, the Tulsa race riot proved to be a particularly lethal affair. And while a definitive death count is still elusive, it is clear that dozens of blacks and whites lost their lives in the catastrophe (Department of Special Collections McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

The Need for Accurate Casualty Counts

During the past half-century, it has become increasingly common for major disasters, natural and man-made, to become the subject of public investigation. Such investigations may be official — that is, conducted by any governmental branch, judicial, executive or legislative and at any level, federal, state or local. Unofficial, but no less searching and revealing, investigations may be conducted by the press or private entities. Examples of such inquiries in the recent past include the several investigations of the deaths of the followers of David Koresh in the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas in 1994. Such inquiries are designed to shed light on the causes of such disasters, establish culpability when possible and appropriate and provide guidelines to prevent or, if they do occur again, design procedures for effectively dealing with them in the

future. When conducted objectively, they generally attain these goals.

Unfortunately, no impartial investigation was conducted of the 1921 Tulsa race riot in its immediate aftermath, while memories of the participants and victims were still fresh, and the physical evidence, including the bodies of the dead, could be forensically examined. Today, eight decades after the event, only the documentary evidence — much of it lost or of doubtful authenticity — and the fading memories of the rapidly dwindling survivors remains.

A key piece of information in any investigation of incidents involving loss of human life is an accurate assessment of the number of victims. Such determinations are important for several reasons. For example, where preliminary estimates of the number of dead are part of an ongoing investigation, they can be used to make reasonable allotments of often scarce manpower, equipment, and financial resources to the task and to determine the overall investigative strategy.

Accurate estimates of the dead and injured can also help identify factors contributing to such disasters and, thus, provide guidelines for ameliorating the loss of life in similar future cases. For example, in Honduras, the immigration of the rural poor to urban areas resulted in large numbers of them building small houses on “waste” land along the steep banks of major river courses and other areas subject to flooding. As a consequence, many thousands of such settlers drowned or died in mud slides during the massive hurricane of 1998. This loss of life could be minimized by governmental or private aid to provide housing sites in safer areas or, at the least, assure the prompt evacuation of people from such vulnerable places when warnings of impending hurricanes are received in the future.

When the disasters are man-made, such as acts of terrorism, war crimes or other massive human rights violations, an accurate assessment of the number of victims is a necessary step in any forensic investigation conducted to exhumate the victims so that they may be identified and returned to the families, make suitable reparations to the persons affected and, hopefully and above all, provide evidence to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Before the ashes of Greenwood had cooled, disagreements over the number of dead began to surface. Estimates of the total number of dead have varied by an order of magnitude, ranging from about fifty to as many as five hundred. They also vary greatly in the reliability of the sources on which they are based. Here, I have chosen a more conservative approach by compiling a list of persons who have, at one time or another, been named as victims of the Tulsa race riot. At the outset, I should point out that this compilation is not likely to include all of the riot fatalities since it is probable that at least some and, perhaps many, deaths went unrecorded. At the same time, however, I feel that it may prove valuable to future scholars since it provides at least a firm minimum of the number of dead.

Classification of Deaths

Based on the information presently available, riot fatalities of both races can be divided into two groups. Within the first are those established by primary sources such as death certificates and mortuary records. The second group consists of deaths mentioned only in secondary sources (newspaper stories, magazine articles, books, etc.) dealing with the race riot. In this study, I have designated individuals in the first group as confirmed, and those of the second as reported deaths.

The distinction between the two groups is made clearer when put in a forensic context. For example, bearing in mind that there is no statute of limitations on murder and that the victims killed in the Tulsa race riot were homicide victims, it is at least theoretically possible that murder charges could be brought against an alleged perpetrator.¹ If the victim were to be Dr. Andrew C. Jackson, the prominent black physician who was gunned down after emerging from his burning Greenwood home with his hands held high, the death certificate signed eighty years ago would be unchallengeable evidence of his death in any court.

On the other hand, let us imagine that an elderly black man was charged with the death of a white woman identified only as "Mrs. Deary" by the now extremely aged ex-Sergeant Esley of the Tulsa National Guard. As suming that his

story had not changed since it was recounted in the *Muskogee* (OK) *Phoenix* in 1921, Sergeant Esley would testify that the victim died in her husband's arms after being struck by five bullets fired by a black who stole up behind her while she and her family were watching the fires in Greenwood from the front porch of their home on Sunset Hill. He might further state, as he did eight decades ago, that, after watching his mother die, Mrs. Deary's fifteen year old son joined the riot and helped set some of the fires. On cross-examination, of course, Sergeant Esley would be forced to admit that even in 1921, when he first told his story, he had not been able to remember the victim's name but only . . . "that it sounded like Deary." Furthermore, he was not sure whether she was shot late Tuesday night or on Wednesday morning. Now suppose, that the astute defense lawyer introduces (as they always do, at least on television), a "surprise" witness, and a fragile little old lady makes her way to the stand.² She would state that her name was Mrs. S. A. Gilmore and that, in 1921, she was living at 225 E. King in the Sun set Hill addition, which overlooked the Greenwood district. On Wednesday morning, while she and her husband were watching the battle below, she received five wounds in the arms and chest. While the shots came in the direction of Greenwood, it was never cer tain whether they were fired by a black or she was struck by stray shots being fired in the general di rection of Sun set Hill by mem bers of the white mob. Taken to Morningside Hospital, she lingered close to death for several days³ but eventually recovered. The defense attorney would then introduce as documentary evidence *Tulsa City Directories* which show that Mrs. Gilmore did indeed reside at 225 E. King at the time of the riot in 1921 and, in fact, was stilling living there two years later. He would also point out that Mrs. Gilmore was the only white female reported to have been shot during the riot in the abun dant lo cal and national press cover age. And fi nally, he would show that an exhaustive search of death records failed to produce any ev i dence of the death of Mrs. Deary in the form of funeral home, cemetery or, most importantly, a death certificate. While the jury would rush out to acquit, the red-faced prosecutor would sit contemplating how much he

would enjoy ripping out the pacemaker of his star witness, Sergeant Esley.

The hypothetical trials for the murders of Dr. Jackson and Mrs. Deary, by juxtaposing the tragic and the comic, serve to illustrate the crucial difference between confirmed and reported deaths as I have classified them here. Only the most dim-witted prosecutor would consider actually taking the Deary case to court based on Sergeant Esley's story. On the other hand, the Jackson murder would have been a strong case for the prosecution since the documentary evidence clearly establishes his death and the witnesses, both black and white, could have provided clear and convincing evidence of the circumstances of his death. Unfortunately, however, no investigation of this death was ever undertaken by the Tulsa police or other city, county, or state officials.

Readers should be aware the categorization of individual deaths as confirmed or reported in this preliminary study is not necessarily final. This is because the data presently available on many of the victims is still incomplete. As further information comes to light, at least some of the deaths classified as reported might be fully confirmed. This is well-illustrated by the case of Ed Lockard, which will be discussed in detail in the final report.

As noted above, much more data must be collected and analyzed to produce a final report. This is particularly true in regard to reported deaths. Therefore, in this preliminary report, only the data so far compiled on confirmed deaths will be presented.

METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Analytic Method

The initial effort of this study consisted of combing all known documentary sources for the names of individuals mentioned as victims or possible victims of the riot. The most important primary source was, of course, contemporary local and national press accounts in which the names of riot victims were given. These names include not only the reported fatalities but, also, those who were wounded severely enough to be admitted to local hospitals. In addition to press stories, the various books, reports, and articles published in

the years since the riot also were a source of names.

The next step in this analysis was to enter the names, along with other data pertaining to the victims, into a computerized database. Once entered, other information on a particular victim could be pursued. For example, an especially important procedure was to search for the person's death certificate in the files maintained by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, census data, *Tulsa City Directories*. Funeral home and cemetery records of the period also were helpful, and in a few cases, valuable information was supplied by the victim's family members.

Death Certificates

In 1921, Oklahoma death certificates consisted of two sections, one to be completed by the undertaker and the other by the physician who attended the deceased. Normally, the completion of a death certificate required four steps:

1. The undertaker would begin the process by filling in the personal data on the dead person. This would include the name, sex, race, age, oc-

1. PERSONAL AND GENERAL PARTICULARS
2. CAUSE OF DEATH
3. SIGNATURES
4. REGISTRAR'S CERTIFICATE

PERSONAL AND GENERAL PARTICULARS
1. NAME OF DECEASED: Tulsa
2. SEX: Male
3. RACE: Black
4. AGE: 33
5. DATE OF DEATH: July 23, 1999
6. PLACE OF DEATH: Tulsa, Oklahoma
7. CAUSE OF DEATH: Heart Disease
8. SIGNATURES: Rogers C. Perrow (Registrar), Ed Lockard (Physician)
9. REGISTRAR'S CERTIFICATE: July 23, 1999

Death certificate for an unknown African American

cupation, birthplace and occupation of the deceased as well as the names and birthplaces of his or her parents. The informant (usually the next-of-kin) providing this information also was asked to sign the certificate.

2. The certificate would then be sent to the attending physician who provided the date, time, and cause of death. Signed by the physician, it was returned to the undertaker.

3. Next, the undertaker would complete his part of the certificate by listing the cemetery and date of interment or, if the body was buried elsewhere, the date and place of shipment.

4. Finally, the undertaker would submit the completed certificate to the vital statistics registrar of the county in which the death occurred. After assigning it a unique register number, the registrar would forward it to the Bureau of Vital Statistics of the Oklahoma State Health Department in Oklahoma City.

In the case of the riot victims, the orderly process outlined above was not always followed. In particular, the personal information on the deceased was sometimes left vague or incomplete. Informants who were not immediate family members did not often know such details as the exact age, marital status, or birthplace of the deceased, much less the names of the dead person's father or mother. This was especially true for black victims since their next-of-kin were still in the detention camps and could not come to the mortuaries to claim their relatives if, indeed, they were informed of their deaths at all.

The information provided by physicians also was sketchy. For example, the exact time of death was not recorded and, in many cases, it is not clear whether the victim was dead on arrival at the hospital or survived for a few hours. Also, the causes of death on many certificates are laconic: "Gunshot wound (riot)" with no details on the number and location of wounds. Such lapses of overworked and harried physicians, overwhelmed by the influx of several hundred wounded in addition to the dead, is understandable. It is interesting that the doctors provided more detailed information on the certificates of

those who died under their care a few days after the riot than those who were dead on arrival or succumbed a few hours later.

To compound the problem, many death certificates were signed not by physicians but by Tulsa County Attorney W.D. Seavers. This was legal because at the time, state law allowed officers of the court to certify deaths that had not been attended by a physician. As nearly the entire Tulsa medical establishment was tied up in the care of the wounded, no doctors were available to examine bodies found at the scene. Apparently, this task fell to Seavers, who signed out eighteen victims whose bodies were found in the still smoldering ruins of Greenwood, or who died after being brought to temporary detention centers where blacks were held during the first hours of the riot. It is not clear whether Seavers actually visited the scene to examine the bodies or whether the death certificates were brought to him by undertakers.

Mortuary Records

At the time of the riot, the bodies of the known victims were taken from the hospitals where they were pronounced dead or, sometimes, directly from the scene to local mortuaries. There they were prepared for burial in Tulsa or shipped to other cities designated by their next-of-kin. The records of these establishments (Mobray's, Mitchell-Fleming, and Stanley-McCune), provide data on the deceased not found on the death certificates.

Press Accounts

The events of the riot received heavy coverage in local, state, and national newspapers as well as other journals, both white and black, of the time. As with all such news events, press attention was most intensive in the days immediately following the riot, then dwindled rapidly in the weeks that followed. Over the years, however, occasional newspaper feature stories and magazine articles dealing with the riot and its aftermath have appeared. The most valuable single source for these materials was the extremely thorough newspaper clippings collection from the Tuskegee Institute microfilm files.



While the white riot dead appear to have all been given proper burials, little effort was made by the white authorities to identify the bodies of black riot victims. Indeed, as both long-forgotten funeral home records and death certificates would confirm, some unidentified African-American riot victims were hurriedly buried in unmarked graves at Oaklawn Cemetery (Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

Books and Monographs

Over the years, several books have been published dealing with the Tulsa race riot. These include one by a riot survivor and several others by historians who have collected written and oral accounts from survivors and their descendants.

Miscellaneous Sources

In the course of this investigation, several researchers have generously provided unpublished reports and documents on the riot which they have collected in their own studies of the event.

DATA ANALYSIS

To date, death certificates on thirty-nine victims have been found. They are listed in Table 1 which summarizes the principal variables presently available on them. It should be noted that not all of the tabulated information was abstracted from the death certificates alone. For example, most of the information on the location of their wounds was found in other riot-related documents, particularly contemporary press accounts, which often provide more specific information on the nature of their injuries than was noted on the death certificates.

See Table 1 Tulsa Race Riot Deaths

Sex

All thirty-nine victims, including the stillborn infant, were diagnosed as males. However, it should be pointed out that the bodies of four blacks — all signed out by County Attorney Seavers — were so badly burned that identification was impossible. Since it is often impossible to determine the sex in such cases without an autopsy, the reliability of a layman's diagnosis in these four cases is questionable.

Race

Twenty-six (66%) of the thirty-nine victims, including the stillborn, were diagnosed as blacks. Again, the four bodies that were so badly burned that they could not be identified (see above) must be considered. This is especially true since thermal damage often results in the destruction of the delicate, paper-thin epidermis that is made up of cells which, in blacks, contain the melanin pigments determining skin color. When this layer is extensively destroyed, it exposes the underlying dermis that, in all races, is no darker than the skin of a light complexion white person, making it easy for an inexperienced observer to mistakenly diagnosis a burned black body as white. However, in the present case, since all the burn victims were found in fire-destroyed Greenwood, it is likely that they were indeed those of blacks.

Age

As noted above, among the black victims was an infant diagnosed as a stillborn. This case is interesting since it is apparently related to an account given to Eddie Faye Gates by a riot survivor, Rosa Davis Skinner. According to Mrs. Skinner, she and her husband Thomas, alarmed by the shooting, fled their home at 519 West Latimer a little after midnight on the night of the riot.

"When we got to Greenwood, we met up with a lot more black people who were running trying to find a safe place. We ran into a couple — the man was one of [her husband's] best friends. The wife had just had a baby that had died at birth. She had put it in a shoe box and was waiting until morning to bury it when the riot broke out. Well durin' all that runnin' and pushin' and shovin' when black people were trying to get safely away from the riot, that po' little baby got lost! Everybody was just runnin' and bumpin' into each other. They never did find that child."

According to information in the Stanley-McCune mortuary records, sometime on June 1, police brought in the body of a new born infant. It had been found in Greenwood earlier in the day by two white men who turned it over to the police. The body was described as that of a black male measuring "less than twelve inches long." It apparently bore no signs of trauma and was signed out as a stillborn. Like many of the other black victims, it was buried in Oaklawn Cemetery. The evidence seems compelling that the baby lost by its fleeing mother and that brought to the mortuary were one and the same. This case is important for two reasons. First, the story of this tiny victim provides a poignant glimpse of the madness that prevailed on that terrible day. Second, this infant is the only one of the thirty-nine known victims that did not die of gunshot wounds and/or burns.

Ages are given on the death certificates of all thirteen of the white victims (Table 2). One of these was apparently an estimate based on examination of the body. The others were provided by informants who knew the actual age of the victim. In contrast, ages are given for

only fifteen (58%) of the twenty-six blacks and, of these, at least seven are given as estimates (usually to the nearest fifth year, e.g., "35", "40", etc.). This distribution again clearly shows that black victims were signed out with less care and regard than whites; little or no effort was made to identify blacks by contacting their next-of-kin.

See Table 2 Distribution of Known, Estimated and Unknown Ages by Race

Despite the fact that no age estimates were given for nearly half of the black victims, statistical comparison of the available age data on the races is interesting. In the analysis below, I have excluded the stillborn which, as a non-violent death, is clearly a special case (see above). The mean age of white victims was around twenty-seven years compared to thirty-four years for blacks. This difference is statistically significant (Table 3).

See Table 3 Age of Confirmed Riot Deaths by Race

Birthplace / Residence

The distribution of the known victims by state of birth or residence is shown in Table 4. The state of residence was inferred from mortuary records which show the state where the body was shipped for burial. This information is available in the records of only two (8%) of the twenty-five black victims. Again, an indication of the lack of attention given them before their hasty burials. This is in contrast to the whites for which birthplaces/residence of all thirteen were given. It is of interest to note that eleven (85%) of the white victims were from outside Oklahoma. The significance of this finding will be discussed more fully below. In all, natives or residents of ten states are represented among the white victims.

See Table 4 Distribution of Confirmed Deaths by Race and State of Birth or Residence

Marital Status

Of the white victims, nine (69%) were single, separated or divorced. Only three were married and the wife of at least one of these does not appear to have been living in Tulsa at the time of his death. The marital status of one is unknown.

Among blacks, the marital status of seventeen is not given. Of the remaining eight, five were married and three were single.

See Table 5 Distribution of Confirmed Deaths by Race and Marital Status

Occupation

The occupations of ten (40%) of the black victims are known. Among them were two professionals, a physician, and a realtor (who also was a tailor). The remaining eight included five listed as “laborers,” a bank porter, an iceman, and an elevator operator.

Among the twelve (92%) of the white victims whose occupations are known, there was a high school student, two cooks, a salesman, a hotel clerk, and a day laborer. Five were skilled blue collar workers and, of these, three were oil field workers; the other two, a boiler maker and a machinist might also have been employed in petroleum-related jobs. The sole professional among the whites was the office manager of a large local oil company. Thus, at least one-third and possibly as many as one-half of the white victims were petroleum industry workers.

See Table 6 Distribution of Confirmed Deaths by Race and Occupation

Cause of and Manner of Death

All of the thirteen whites were killed by gunshot wounds. Among the twenty-five black adults, at least twenty-one (84%) died of gunshot wounds. The cause of death of the remaining four, all signed out by County Attorney Seavers, were given as burn but, as noted previously, any underlying fatal gunshot wounds may not have been apparent in the absence of autopsy.

Of the thirty-nine confirmed deaths, the manner of death of all but that of the stillborn black male were homicides. The latter is classified as “natural.” At least one, and possibly two, whites were killed by persons of their own race who apparently mistook them for blacks.

See Table 7 Cause and Manner of Death of Confirmed Death Victims

Wounds

Of the twenty-five blacks who died of gunshot injury, the wound locations of only four

are documented; all four of these men died in hospitals on June 2, or later. The wound locations of the remaining twenty-one blacks, all of whom died during the first twelve hours of the riot, were unspecified. The wounds of the twelve whites whose locations are known were nearly evenly distributed by anatomical region. The overall pattern of wound distribution is rather typical of those seen in hotly contested armed confrontations carried on at moderate to distant ranges. In this, it contrasts strongly with patterns observed in extra-judicial executions by firing squads.⁴

See Table 8 Anatomical Distribution of Gunshot Wounds of Confirmed Death Victims

Place of Death

At the time of the riot, Tulsa had four major white hospitals. Tulsa blacks were served only by Frissell Memorial Hospital, that was burned during the riot. Greenwood blacks who did not flee Tulsa altogether were first taken to temporary detention centers set up in the armory and Convention Center in downtown Tulsa. The lightly wounded who were forced to walk to the detention centers. Those more seriously injured were either carried to the centers by the unwounded or transported there by various means, including privately owned trucks and automobiles, some of which were driven by white volunteers.⁵

While it appears that small first aid stations were set up at the detention centers early on June 1, it must have become quickly apparent that they were not sufficient to provide the care that the dozens of wounded required. Accordingly, the basement of Morningside Hospital was hastily converted to accommodate blacks. Apparently, this makeshift facility included not only cots for the wounded but a small operating room where all surgery on the admitted blacks was performed. For the next few days, all injured blacks were treated in the Morningside basement, that may not have exceeded 5,000-square-feet of floor space.⁶ A brief glimpse of conditions there can be gained from a story in the *Tulsa World* on June 2, that noted sixty-three wounded blacks were being treated there. So far as is presently known, none of the

other white hospitals in Tulsa opened their door to African American patients.

All thirteen of the white fatalities were taken from the scene to one of four hospitals where they were either pronounced dead on arrival (DOA) or died later. Unfortunately, the death certificates are not always clear as to whether the victims who were admitted late on May 31, or in the early morning hours of June 1, were actually dead when brought to the hospital, or died shortly afterwards. So far as can be presently determined, at least two and possibly four whites were actually dead on arrival. All four were pronounced dead at Oklahoma Hospital by the same physician, Dr. Lyle Archerloss.

Only eight (31%) of the twenty-six black fatalities were brought to hospitals. Six died in Morningside, that as mentioned above, was the only one where blacks were treated in the first few days of the riot. A seventh died in Cinnabar Hospital on June 7, about a week after the riot. Presumably, he had been transferred from Morningside after Cinnabar had been reopened. The last died on August 20, in the Red Cross hospital that was set up in the Greenwood's black Dunbar School after the riot.

The other eighteen (69%) blacks were not taken to hospitals. The bodies of these sixteen individuals were found in the downtown area where the fighting began or in the ruins of Greenwood. Five days after the riot on June 6, the badly decomposed body of a black man was found about eight miles east of Tulsa. He had died of a gunshot wound of the neck. He was later identified as a man who had escaped from a temporary detention center.

All of these bodies were taken directly to mortuaries and their death certificates were signed out by County Attorney Seavers. Another of these "non-hospital" victims died in the armory detention center where he was taken after he was shot down by a teen-aged member of the mob while trying to surrender outside his home in Greenwood. Ironically, this man — a prominent physician — lay without medical attention for several hours before he finally succumbed to a bullet wound of the chest. His death certificate was also signed by the county attorney.⁷

See Table 9 Distribution of Confirmed Deaths by Place of Death

Date of Death

The records indicate that four of the white casualties died before midnight on May 31. If this is correct then these men were most likely killed in the downtown area where the fighting first began. Seven others died on June 1, and one on June 2. The last white fatality died in the early morning hours of June 6. He was wounded a few hours earlier when white militia men fired on the car in which he was riding. The perpetrators, at least one of whom was wearing his World War I army uniform, claimed that the driver of the car refused to obey their orders to stop.

None of the twenty-six black victims is listed as having died on the evening of May 31. Twenty-one were signed out as having died on June 1, two on June 2, and two others on June 7, and June 10, respectively. The last black to die of riot wounds was a twenty-one year old who lingered until August 20, eleven weeks after the riot.

The fact that no black fatalities were recorded for the evening of May 31, is curious. According to several sources, many shots were fired by both sides during the retreat of the blacks from the courthouse area back to Greenwood, and some early newspaper accounts describe blacks lying wounded or dead in the downtown area. If the latter are true, it suggests that no medical aid was extended to those wounded blacks unfortunate enough to have been left behind during the retreat to Greenwood.

See Table 10 Confirmed Deaths by Date of Death

Mortuaries

As in most of the United States at the time, Tulsa mortuaries were racially restricted. The three major establishments serving white Tulsans were Mitchell-Fleming, Mowbray, and Stanley-McCune. Black funerals were handled by a single Greenwood funeral home operated by S. M. Jackson, a graduate of the Cincinnati (Ohio) School of Embalming. In 1971, Jackson was interviewed by Tulsa historian Ruth Avery.⁸ His account of his riot experiences is

valuable since it provides some insight into the way the dead, both black and white, were handled. On the morning of June 1, when the white mob stormed into Greenwood, Jackson's funeral parlor was burned down. At the time, he was holding four embalmed bodies for burial; only two of these were retrieved (leaving one to wonder about the fate of the other two). At first interned, he was promptly paroled by the owners of Stanley-McCune who temporarily hired him to help process the bodies who were brought to their establishment. During the next few days he embalmed several blacks whose bodies were to be shipped to other cities for burial.

Stanley McCune also had a hastily arranged contract with Tulsa County to bury (unembalmed) the bodies of blacks whose relatives could either not afford to claim them for private burial or were not informed of the deaths. In all, Stanley-McCune handled the arrangements for two whites and eighteen blacks. The bodies of all of the blacks were prepared for burial by Mr. Jackson. He embalmed two of these that were claimed and were buried in other cities. The remaining sixteen were not embalmed and placed in plain wood coffins. Mr. Jackson was able to rebuild his Greenwood business and handled the funeral of the last black riot victim who died on August 20, and whose body was claimed by his family for burial in his native Mississippi.

See Table 11 Distribution of Confirmed Dead by Mortuary

Burial Places

Only three of the white victims were buried in Rose Hill, a privately operated cemetery. Another was buried in Watonga, a small town in western Oklahoma. The remaining nine were buried in other states. Five of the black fatalities were buried outside of Tulsa: two in other Oklahoma towns and three outside the state. The remaining twenty-one blacks (84%) were interred in Oaklawn, the Tulsa municipal cemetery.

See Table 12 Burial Places of Confirmed Dead

The Oaklawn Burials

In light of the controversy surrounding the total number of black victims of the race riot and the disposal of their bodies, the documented burials in Oaklawn take on a special significance. This is especially true in the light of the preliminary archaeological findings⁹

As noted above, twenty-one black victims, 84% of the total, were buried in Oaklawn. At that time, the cemetery was segregated by race and blacks were buried in the western-most section, so it is safe to assume that these black riot victims also were buried there. Five of these victims, all of whom died in Morningside Hospital, were buried by Mowbray mortuary. All these hospital cases died of gunshot wounds. Their death certificates were signed by a single physician, J. F. Capps, M.D. Dr. Capps signed out two of these as "John Does." Four died on June 1, and the fifth in the early morning of June 2.

The remaining sixteen were bodies found at the scene and taken to Stanley-McCune; their death certificates were signed by County Attorney Seavers. Six of these, four of whom were badly burned, were not identified. A seventh unidentified body was that of the previously described stillborn. The remaining nine were identified.

These Oaklawn burials were conducted at county expense. The Mowbray and Stanley-McCune records indicate that the victims were not embalmed but buried in plain wooden coffins; they also show that the mortuaries charged the county \$25 for each burial. An important feature of the Stanley-McCune records was a notation indicating the "grave number" of each burial. These numbers form a single sequence from 1 to 19, except for graves 15, 16 and 17. It is possible that these graves were filled by three of the Mowbray. Unfortunately, grave numbers were not given in the Mowbray records.

The data currently available on these Oaklawn burials is given in Table 13. They are significant for several reasons. First, should archaeological exploration of the area go forward, the excavators should encounter them. Assuming, as the records indicate, that they were buried in separate graves in the order indicated by the Stanley-McCune grave numbers, they should be encountered in an orderly row(s).

If so, the available information that we have on them should be valuable in obtaining tentative identifications. For example, the skeletons in graves 7, 9, 13, and 18 should show some signs of fire exposure. If so, they should provide tentative leads to the non-burned skeletons in adjacent graves.¹⁰ By narrowing the number of possible decedents, the effort (and the cost) of DNA identification could be substantially reduced.

**See Table 13 Burials of Confirmed Dead in
Oaklawn Cemetery**

DISCUSSION

Of course, this small group of documented fatalities cannot be considered a statistically-defined random sample of those who had some role in the riot, either as active members of the mob or as passive victims. However, it is probably typical enough to provide some glimpses of the kinds of people who were caught up in the riot.

The whites ranged in age from sixteen to thirty-nine years. As a group, they tended to be young, with a median age of twenty-seven years. The state of birth or residence of all thirteen are known and, of these, only two were born in Oklahoma. The bodies of all but four were shipped to other states for burial and, of the four Oklahoma burials, only three took place in Tulsa. Of the ten for whom we have marital information, seven were single, one was divorced and another had been separated from his wife for nearly twelve years. Among the three married men, the wife of one was not living in Tulsa at the time of the riot. At least four and possibly six were employed in petroleum-related jobs; three others held jobs suggesting transient status: two were cooks and the third listed as a "laborer." Judging from their occupations, all were of lower socioeconomic status except one, an oil company junior executive.

In short, the limited demographic information that can be drawn from such a small sample indicates that these men were probably fairly typical of white Tulsans of the oil boom days: young, single, non-professionals from outside Oklahoma who had been lured to Tulsa by the promise of good jobs and good

money. With no strong domestic ties to keep them home that night, drifting around in the bustling downtown area on a nice summer evening, perhaps looking for ladies, liquor or other excitement, they also were the kind who might be expected to show up around the courthouse when the talk about lynching a black accused of assaulting a white girl got started. Since boot-legging was a busy cottage industry in Tulsa, it is possible that at least some of them had high blood-alcohol levels by the time the trouble began.

Black victims, in contrast, tended to be older than whites. They ranged in age from nineteen to sixty-three. Blacks averaged close to 35 years in age — nearly seven years older than the whites. This difference is statistically significant. Of the eight for whom marital data is available, five were listed as married. While their occupational status tended to be lower than that of the whites (and none were employed in the petroleum industry), two, a realtor who also owned a tailor shop and a highly-regarded physician, were solidly middle class. Unlike the whites, most of whom were young, single, newcomers to Tulsa, this group of black victims appears to have been stable, older citizens of the Greenwood community.

These thirty-nine cases also demonstrate that, compared to white victims, those who were black victims were treated with what would today be considered cavalier, if not criminal, carelessness. This is indicated by the fact that at least one was allowed to bleed to death without medical attention in a detention center instead of being taken immediately and directly to a hospital after being gunned down in Greenwood while trying to surrender. Another indication of this is found in the death certificates. Those of at least four of the thirteen whites were pronounced dead before midnight on May 31, indicating that they were promptly taken to hospitals. In contrast, none of the death certificates of black victims are dated earlier than June 1, a finding that suggests that whether dead or still alive, they lay unattended for at least several hours. More evidence is provided by the fact that adequate treatment facilities were denied blacks until sometime in the late morning or afternoon of

June 1, when a makeshift ward and surgery was hastily set up in the basement of one of the several hospitals that normally admitted only whites. Only then were the many black wounded provided with care, and some allowed to die under the care of nurses and physicians.

If Tulsa medical care givers were callous and care less in their treatment of black riot victims, representatives of the Tulsa funeral industry were not far behind them. This is shown by the hasty, "county" burials in Oaklawn on June 1 and 2. Their death certificates in most cases signed by a layman, County Attorney Seavers. Much of the vital information on these certificates such as address, age, marital status, next-of-kin, etc. was left blank or filled in with a hastily scrawled "don't know". This indicates that authorities with the responsibility to contact families and identify victims did not bother to track them down in the admittedly crowded and confused detention centers. Thus, some families that might have been able and willing to claim their dead and bury them properly were not given this opportunity. Whether they could afford to or not, most probably did not know for sure that their relatives were already dead and buried in unmarked pauper graves until they were released from detention.

Another finger of blame points to law enforcement authorities at the local and county levels. As noted previously, all of these deaths — both black and white — were homicides which occurred within the jurisdiction of either the Tulsa Police Department (thirty-seven cases) or the Tulsa County Sheriffs Department (two cases). Yet, so far as is known, these murder cases were not investigated while at least some of the perpetrators could be identified and apprehended. Prosecutorial authorities, both county and state, also are accountable since they apparently did not aggressively press for such investigations.

These hard truths cannot be presented without pointing out that many white Tulsans and Tulsa institutions (particularly some churches and the local Red Cross) took a courageous role in the riot by offering protection and care

to their black neighbors. Their brave actions have been well documented elsewhere and will not be considered in detail here.

It should also be pointed out that what happened in Tulsa could have taken place in almost any other city in the United States in 1921. Nor were the conditions and circumstances leading to this tragic event a uniquely Oklahoman, or even "Southern" phenomenon. In the data considered here, this is probably best illustrated by the known birthplaces or residences of the white fatalities. Of the thirteen men who were killed, only two were native Oklahomans. None were from states of the deep South. Five — the two Oklahomans, a Texan, an Arkansan and a native of Kentucky — were from Confederate border states in which the populations were of deeply divided loyalties during the Civil War. The remaining seven were from midwestern or northeastern states.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, perhaps the least that can be said of the physicians, undertakers, police, and prosecutors of Tulsa of the time was that they were not hypocritical: they treated their black fellow-citizens no better when they were dead than they did when they were alive.

Although this preliminary report is limited to treatment of the confirmed dead, it cannot be closed without considering the as yet unconfirmed dead of the Tulsa race riot. First to be considered are the eighteen deaths that occurred in the Maurice Willows Hospital operated by the Red Cross until January 1, 1922. A systematic search of vital statistics records to find their names and the causes of their deaths has not yet been made. Some may have died of complications of wounds received during the riot; if so, of course, such deaths would add to the riot deaths. Others, particularly, if children or elderly whose homes were destroyed or their family life disrupted, may have succumbed easily to diseases they may have otherwise survived; while actually not killed in the riot the deaths of these victims would certainly have to be considered as riot-related.

As noted in the introduction of this preliminary report, we already have the names of many

possible descendants and, hopefully, may obtain still more. These reported dead will first be scanned against vital statistics records to see if their death certificates have been somehow overlooked. If they are not found, it will not necessarily mean that they did not die in the riot since there is at least some tenuous evidence that more people, especially blacks, died in the riot whose deaths were not recorded. Most of this evidence, it is true, is in the form of wildly varying estimates that appeared in both the Tulsa and national press in the days and weeks immediately following the riot. Many Tulsans, white and black, have recollections of bodies of victims being disposed of in irregular ways in the first few days following the riot. These estimates and stories cannot be dismissed lightly.

As one whose entire professional life has been devoted to the investigation of mass disasters such as fires and floods, aircraft accidents, human rights violations, war crimes and acts of terrorism throughout the world, this writer is fully aware of the often exaggerated estimates of the number of victims that surface in the wake of the chaos and confusion following such events. At the same time, experience has shown that in manner of these situations, official counts of the dead or often seriously underestimated.

In the present case, it should be pointed out that, like nearly all other states at the time of the riot, Oklahoma had no adequate system for the medicolegal examination of violent or unattended deaths. Today, the law mandates that all such deaths fall within the medicolegal responsibility of the State Medical Examiner. Bodies of such victims are examined and, when necessary, autopsied by forensic pathologists to determine the cause and manner of death. At the time of the riot, the law required that death certificates be signed by attending physicians or, as we have seen, certain public officials in exceptional cases. However, it appears that there was no controlling legal authority (to use a phrase currently in vogue) that required that medically unattended deaths not coming to the attention of officers of the court be documented with a state death certificate.

Therefore, it is possible that bodies found in the ruins of Greenwood during the days immediately after the riot were simply buried without documentation.

That this may have indeed happened is suggested by a statement apparently made by Major O. T. Johnson, a Salvation Army officer stationed in Tulsa at the time. According to stories in at least two newspapers, the *Chicago Defender*, June 11, 1921 and *St. Louis Argus*, June 10, 1921, Johnson is said to have stated that he hired a crew of over three dozen grave diggers who labored for several days to dig about 150 graves for Negro victims. Unfortunately, any official report that Major Johnson may have submitted to the Salvation Army has not yet been located. However, the possibility the statement attributed to him was indeed true is at least partly supported by two witnesses. One, Eunice Cloman Jackson, the wife of black mortician S. M. Jackson stated in 1971 that her step-father was part of a crew of fifty-five grave diggers; when she was asked where the bodies were buried, she replied that “. . .most of them were out at Oaklawn. That was the cemetery for burying them. . .”¹¹ Clyde Eddy, a young boy at the time, remembers seeing large wooden crates, each containing several burned bodies, awaiting burial in Oaklawn in the days following the riot. If bodies were collected from the burned out area of Greenwood they may well have been collected in crates rather than individual coffins and transported to Oaklawn for burial by Major Johnson and his large crew of grave diggers. They most likely would have been carried on trucks, railroad flatcars (the Frisco tracks ran adjacent to Oaklawn), or both, thus accounting for the several eyewitness reports that bodies were seen being carried from the Greenwood area on both trucks and flatcars.

The theory that perhaps as many as 150 bodies were buried in Oaklawn under Major Johnson's supervision can be framed as an hypothesis that can be tested by archaeological exploration of the area described elsewhere in this volume by Drs. Brooks and Witten.¹² Such an effort would, at the least, result in the recovery of the twenty-one black confirmed dead from their unmarked graves so that they can be

more suitably memorialized and, possibly, it would result in the recovery of the bones of the unidentified. If the hypothesis turns out to be true, undocumented dead and, thus, help provide a solution to a lingering mystery.

Endnotes

¹Theoretical indeed, since at this late date the perpetrator most likely would be as dead as his victim and the case, thereby, moved to a higher (or, possibly, lower) jurisdiction.

²The geriatric problems of conducting such a trial would be a nightmare. Imagine the complications resulting from the inter-tangling of iv and catheter tubes of the witnesses and defendant as they traded places on the witness stand!

³*Tulsa World*, June 3, 1921.

²The geriatric problems of conducting such a trial would be a nightmare. Imagine the complications resulting from the inter-tangling of IV and catheter tubes of the witnesses and defendant as they traded places on the witness stand!

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⁴Snow, Clyde. 1993 Forensic Anthropology Report. in Anderson, Snow *et al.* *The Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Destruction of Koreme*. (Middle East Watch/Physicians for Human Rights, New York and Boston: 1993).

⁵At this time, the three or four ambulances in Tulsa were operated by mortuaries and it appears that all of them were fully employed in taking wounded whites to the various hospitals.

⁶Warner, personal communication, November 11, 2000.

⁷What a excruciatingly cruel fate for a physician to have his death certificate signed by a lawyer!

⁸Avery, R. "African-American S.M. Jackson (Mortician) and his wife, Eunice Cloman Jackson on June 26, 1971 ", unpublished transcript of taped interview.

⁹See the report of Drs. Brooks and Witten elsewhere in this publication.

¹¹Eddy, *loc. cit.*

¹²Brooks and Witten, *loc. cit.*



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

The Investigation of Potential Mass Grave Locations for the Tulsa Race Riot

by Robert L. Brooks and Alan H. Witten

Introduction

On the night of May 31, and June 1, 1921 the City of Tulsa witnessed a racial conflict between whites and the minority black population living in the Greenwood section that was unprecedented in United States history during the twentieth century. This violence, somewhat erroneously labeled as a riot, was brought about by the inflammatory coverage by the *Tulsa Tribune* of an alleged rape attempt of a white girl by a young black male. Tensions had been mounting with a number of racial incidents occurring prior to the night of May 31. The economic success of the Greenwood community undoubtedly played a role in fueling resentment among the white population and further escalating the violence. Through the night of May 31, and into the morning of June 1, whites virtually destroyed the Greenwood section. There were an undetermined number of deaths, both black and white, with estimates ranging from the official count of 36 to approximately 300. Over 1,000 residences were

burned and another 400 looted. The business district of Greenwood was totally destroyed and probably accounts for much of the \$4 million in claims filed against the city in 1921.¹ Following this night of destruction and bloodshed, blacks were forcibly interned under armed guard. Eventually, over 4,000 blacks were held at the fairgrounds and other locations. Under provisions of the imposed martial law, blacks also were required to carry identity or "green cards."

This introduction only serves to broadly portray the conditions that existed in Tulsa during the "Race Riot." Detailed accounting regarding the causes of the riot, the progression of events, casualties, and property are discussed in other chapters of this report. This study focuses on those who died during the violence, what happened to their remains, and our efforts to relocate them almost 80 years later.

Casualties in the Tulsa Race Riot

As portrayed in the many studies concerning the Tulsa Race Riot, there is no well-documented

evidence for the number of people who died during the violence. Ellsworth notes that the Department of Health's Bureau of Vital Statistics estimate was ten whites and 26 blacks, whereas estimates in the Red Cross records were around 300 deaths.² There were other figures in the *Tulsa Tribune*, in two contradictory articles, of casualties of 68 and/or 175. While an accurate number of individuals who died during the violence may not be possible some 80 years later, some perspective can be gained by examining the black population of Tulsa and the Greenwood section and likely mortality profiles during a conflict of this nature.

It is estimated that approximately 11,000 blacks resided in Tulsa in 1921, most living in the area of the Greenwood section. The black population probably represented around ten percent of the total population of Tulsa. Using the Bureau of Vital Statistics counts, casualties among blacks using this statistic would be two percent of the black population.

Given the intensity of the conflict and the fact that many of the blacks resisting invasion of their community by whites were armed veterans of World War I, it would not be unreasonable to estimate 150 to 300 deaths. A death toll of 150 is only slightly greater than one percent of the black population. It is also suspected that the number of whites who died would exceed the ten individuals cited by the Department of Health. Unlike many riots, the racial conflict in Tulsa on the night of May 31, initially contained well-armed groups of blacks and whites. Later, as blacks were overrun by the increasing number of whites invading Greenwood, they lost the numerical capability for defending their property and sometimes, their lives.

The historicity of the Tulsa Race Riot must also be factored into the intensity of the violence. World War I ended three years prior to the violence. Thus, there were many blacks as well as white males who retained recent knowledge of warfare and armed conflict. Some of these veterans probably had retained their rifles from the war. Simply stated, this was not a riot of a few individuals with shot-

guns and pistols pitted against unarmed victims, at least not at the beginning.

Based on these considerations, the mortality profile would have comparable numbers of deaths among black and white males initially. As white numbers swelled and they successfully made their way into Greenwood, the number of black deaths would increase and also would reflect increasing numbers of women and children in residences. This profiling provides some credibility (although no hard evidence), for casualty counts between 175 and 300. If there were a greater number of victims than reported, then the City of Tulsa and the Army National Guard would have to deal with a significant health problem. Based on weather records for the City of Tulsa on May 31 and June 1, the temperatures hovered around 100 degrees. This would have made it a necessity that victims be handled expediently to prevent outbreaks of disease. One means of dealing with the deaths of large numbers of people is through mass graves. The following section discusses the plausibility of mass graves and possible locations.

Mass Graves and the Tulsa Race Riot

There are numerous accounts as to the disposition of the riot victims. There are reports of victims being placed on flat bed rail road cars and moved by rail from Tulsa. Other accounts have victims being thrown in the Arkansas River or being incinerated. However, the most frequently reported version is of victims being buried in mass graves. Some of these are oral histories of riot survivors. However, in many other cases they are secondary histories, stories that have been handed down through generations and across kinship lines as well. The difficulty here has been distinguishing oral histories that carry a higher level of credibility where there is some additional thread of evidence, information, or something that makes that particular individual's testimony more believable, from others of more speculative nature. In sorting through the hundreds of taped oral histories, telephone calls, and written accounts, three locations were identified that held greater credibility. This was based on the frequency of their reporting, the veracity of the individuals giving the account, and the plausibility of the location.



Bed frames rise out of the destruction in the Greenwood district (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

What is meant by plausibility is whether the location would have functioned as a mass grave or as a means of disposing of the victims. For example, the city incinerator was reportedly used to cremate riot victims. However, according to Clyde Snow, an internationally known forensic scientist, this would not have been a feasible strategy based on what we know of the size of the incinerator and the likely number of riot victims. It would have been too time consuming and requiring too much engineering coordination. The three locations frequently cited and thought to merit further study were Newblock Park, Oaklawn Cemetery, and Booker T. Washington Cemetery.

Newblock Park is located adjacent to the downtown area and the Greenwood section. It is bounded to the south by the Arkansas River, to the east by a residential area and 7th Street, to the north by Charles Page Boulevard, and on the west by more city property (Figure 1). At the time of the Tulsa Race Riot, Newblock Park was the location of the city landfill, the city incinerator, and a substantial amount of open land. Because of wooded tree lines, much of the area of Newblock may have been blocked from view. Today, Newblock Park is dramatically altered from the way it appeared in 1921; much of the park is greenspace. However, this greenspace hides the remains of old

water pumping system buildings, numerous utility lines, as well as the Parkview drainage channel leading to the Arkansas River. There is also a railroad line between the park and the Arkansas River as well as a levee constructed by the Corps of Engineers in the 1940s. Thus, the landscape is markedly different than that witnessed by Tulsans in the summer of 1921. There have been numerous unverified accounts of victims of the riot being buried in Newblock by whites and/or the National Guard. Accounts of their remains being subsequently unearthed during the many public works projects taking place there since the time of the riot have been reported. However, no evidence exists in the City of Tulsa's files documenting a mass grave or human remains being found in Newblock. The numerous reports of bodies being placed on the sand bar north of the 11th Street Bridge also figures in the Newblock Park account. If victims of the riot were to be placed in a mass grave in the Newblock Park area, this sand bar of the Arkansas River adjacent to the park could have served as a staging area for the event.

Oaklawn Cemetery is also located in the downtown area although not adjacent to the Greenwood section. It is bounded to the west by the Cherokee Expressway (I-444), to the south by 11th Street, and to the east by Peoria, and to the north by 8th Street (Figure 2). At the time of

the riot, Oaklawn functioned as a cemetery, one that contained plots for people from many different socio-economic lifestyles, including white and black paupers. Like much of the Tulsa landscape, Oaklawn changed significantly in the following 80 years. The Cherokee Expressway did not exist at the time of the Tulsa Race Riot and undoubtedly claimed the extreme western portion of the cemetery during its construction. Reports of victims of the riot being buried at Oaklawn include individual graves in addition to the mass interment. Currently, there are markers for two blacks who died during the riot in the black section of Oaklawn. It is not known whether the placement of the headstones for these graves is accurate or not. As with Newblock Park, burial of the riot victims is attributed to whites.

The final location that was frequently mentioned was Booker T. Washington Cemetery. Unlike the other sites, Booker T. Washington Cemetery is located in south Tulsa at what was in 1921 a rural outlier of the city. Booker T. Washington is bounded to the south by a creek drainage and sand borrow pit, to the north by South 91st Street, to the west by a Catholic Cemetery, and commercial and residential land to the east (Figure 3). At the time of the riot in 1921, there was probably little development with most of the area being agricultural land. The accounts of Booker T. Washington's use as burial place for riot victims also vary from the other two locations. According to oral histories of riot survivors, it was blacks that brought victims to Booker T. Washington for burial.

This occurred a few days after the riot suggesting that these may have been blacks that were wounded during the riot and died a few days after the conflict.

Archaeological Methods and the Search for Mass Graves

Research conducted by Scott Ellsworth and Dick Warner revealed the three locations described above as holding the greatest potential for mass graves within the Tulsa city limits. The problem then was how to examine the three sites to determine whether they might yield evidence of a large communal grave. In

the case of human rights violations in foreign countries this has been accomplished through the use of informants and mechanical equipment. However, in the case of the Tulsa Race Riot, some 80 years later, survivors of the riot's knowledge and memory of the 1920s landscape, compared to that of today, is questionable. Without precise knowledge of mass grave locations, the use of mechanical equipment to search for remains is not cost-effective. Thus, archaeological examination methods were used to seek mass grave locations in the three site areas.

Archaeologists frequently examine the landscape for evidence of prehistoric and early historic peoples settlements. While evidence of these settlements may be exposed on the surface, they are frequently buried by many feet of soil deposits. Thus, archaeologists have resorted to using a variety of methodological tools to cost-effectively examine the subsurface. Some of these methods use conventional mechanical equipment such as backhoes and hydraulic coring rigs. These offer the advantage of providing physical evidence of subsurface remains. Their disadvantages are that they disturb the ground subsurface and are heavy users of time and financial resources. Beginning in the 1940s, archaeologists began to explore non-invasive means of examining the soil subsurface through application of the principles of physics.³ By sending different types of physical impulses into the ground subsurface, archaeologists could measure differences between natural soil formations and culturally altered conditions. These contrasts are referred to as anomalies. When sampling over a large area, the pattern in these anomalies can often be articulated with recognizable shapes (e.g., houses, fireplaces, graves, etc.). Geophysical applications in archaeology were more frequently practiced in Europe from the 1940s through 1960s. However, following the transistor revolution of the 1970s, they became widely used around the world, particularly in the United States.⁴ There are three basic methods of geophysics applied in archaeology: magnetometer, resistivity, and radar.

The magnetometer measures changes in magnetic properties between cultural features and natural properties of the soil. These changes or

differences are usually due to the presence of ferrous metal objects although baked clays around burned houses or fireplaces also may present a strong magnetic response. Magnetometers today are extremely sensitive and can pick-up responses from small objects such as nails or gun parts. Resistivity involves measuring the resistance to an electrical current injected into the subsoil. Typically, the differences in values yielded by resistivity are a result of variation in ground moisture. These changes in ground moisture content are frequently due to collection of moisture around cultural features such as houses, walls, and privies. The third method applied is ground penetrating radar. Here, radar signals are projected into the ground and are reflected back upon encountering an object or natural feature (much like sonar on ships). The difference in the character of soil between a natural soil sequence and one where some type of cultural feature is present (e.g., house, trash pit, or grave) will variably reflect back to the radar unit and present an approximation as to the shape of the anomaly.

There are obvious benefits to use of geophysical methods in archaeological investigations. They permit cost-effective subsurface examination of large areas. In many, areas, the highly portable nature of today's equipment allows examination of confined or congested areas (e.g. wooded areas). Most importantly, these geophysical applications are non-invasive and do not physically disturb the subsurface areas under investigation.⁵ There are some disadvantages as well. They can respond to nearby surface features and they are sensitive to "noise" in the subsurface and may present distorted signals. In such cases, information on anomalies may be misleading or erroneous. The other drawback to these methods is that they lack a "ground truth" element. The actual character of the anomaly can only be confirmed by physical examination of the subsurface through excavation.

In the spring of 1998, it was recommended to the Tulsa Race Riot Commission that a search for mass graves sites be attempted through use of geophysical investigations.

Based on the cost-effectiveness of examining large areas and the non-invasive nature of the methods, geophysical examination of Newblock Park, Oaklawn Cemetery, and Booker T. Washington Cemetery appeared to be the most reasonable approach to study of this issue. The Commission at their February, 1999 meeting approved use of geophysics to examine for potential mass grave sites.

Archaeological Geophysics at the Three Suspected Mass Grave Locations

Phase I

On July 20 and 21, 1998, initial geophysical examination of the three-suspected mass grave locations was undertaken. David L. Maki and Geoffrey Jones of Archaeo-Physics conducted the geophysical investigations. Conditions at the time of the study were extremely hot and dry. Temperatures on the two days of fieldwork were 105 and 106 degrees. As discovered later, the extensive heat and drought of the summer of 1998 had some bearing on the results of the July work. The following details on Phase I investigations have been excerpted from Maki and Jones.⁶

Methods

The search for mass graves at the three locations was carried out with a pulse EKKO 1000 ground penetrating radar unit (GPR). Ground penetrating radar was selected for this initial examination because of its successful use in detecting both prehistoric and historic graves in a variety of settings. As noted in Maki and Jones report the GPR unit may locate anomalies through reflections from disturbed soil associated with the grave shaft such as bones, coffins, grave goods, and breakdown in normal soil conditions. Two different frequency antenna's were used, 450 MHz and 225 MHz. The higher frequency antenna was used to obtain better resolution although this frequency also experiences a loss in the depth of ground penetration. The antenna utilized was determined by local soil conditions at each locality. Each of the three potential mass grave locations was also sketched and a grid imposed over the area to be examined.

Newblock Park

Using information obtained from their oral history research, Scott Ellsworth and Dick

Warner assisted in the selection of the area for examination. This area is near the eastern extent of the park immediately adjacent to the Parkview drainage channel. Soils at Newblock Park consisted of silt, sand, and clay with relatively high moisture content. From a baseline established for the study area, data were systematically collected along transects spaced some .75 meters (ca. 30 inches) apart using the 225 MHz antenna. A total of 38 transects of GPR data were collected. Depth of subsurface penetration of the radar signal was limited to .5 meters to 1.5 meters due to high conductivity soils. Interpretation of the Newblock Park data was also complicated by reflection from the numerous building foundations and buried utility lines, especially the sewer lines. However, one anomalous area of interest was identified and is present on Transects 8-11 (Figure 4). Additionally, Transect 10 exhibits sloping reflections that might represent the walls of a shallow excavation (or pit). There also was an inverted reflection that potentially reflects a buried object of some nature. Investigations were inconclusive as to the specific nature of the reflective pattern.

While one anomaly was revealed during the work at Newblock Park, this does not discount the potential for other anomalies in areas not investigated.

Oaklawn Cemetery

As was the case at Newblock Park, Scott Ellsworth and Dick Warner assisted in identifying the areas at Oaklawn to be examined. Here, the study area was restricted to the black part of the cemetery. Three areas (A, B, and C) were targeted for GPR survey. Areas A and B were square and rectangular plots of land within the black section of the "The Old Potters Field" of the cemetery near 11th Street. Area C was a rectangular plot of land on the west side of Oaklawn nearest the Cherokee Expressway. One noteworthy feature of areas A and B was the presence of recognized single grave areas as marked by headstones. Soils in Oaklawn Cemetery are much like those at Newblock Park, exhibiting a mixture of silt, sand, and clay and a relatively high moisture content. Baseline grids were established for

the three areas. A 15 meter square (ca. 45 feet) grid was laid-out for Area A and data were systematically collected at .75 meter (ca. 30 inches) spacing using a 225 MHz antenna. Area B was a grid roughly 25 meters (75 feet) east-west by 7 meters (21 feet) north-south. Area C was a grid of some 13 meters (40 feet) north-south by 8 meters (25 feet) east-west.

These two areas were inspected using a transect interval of one meter and 225 MHz antenna. Forty-three transects of ground penetrating radar data were collected. As was the case at Newblock Park, depth of subsurface penetration by the radar signal was limited due to high conductivity soils. There was also a "ringing" response that made signal interpretation difficult. Despite these difficulties, 14 anomalies were identified at Oaklawn with 13 of these located within Area A (Figure 5). The remaining anomaly was found in Area B. Seven of these anomalies occur with burial markers. Thus, these distinctive reflections probably reflect marked and unmarked single interments. No evidence was found to suggest the presence of a mass grave in the three areas surveyed at Oaklawn Cemetery. However, this again does not discount the potential for a mass grave site within another, unexamined part of the cemetery.

Booker T. Washington Cemetery

With information provided by Scott Ellsworth and Dick Warner, three areas at Booker T. Washington Cemetery were selected for GPR study. Soils here differed from those at the other two locations, consisting of a homogeneous sand with relatively low moisture content. Area A was a roughly 40 meter (ca. 120 feet) by 7 meter (21 feet) rectangular segment south of the gravel road. Area B was a 22 meter (ca. 66 feet) by 22 meter (66 feet) square north of the gravel road and roughly 20 meters (60 feet) north of Area A. Area C contained two separate segments. The first was a 40 meter (120 feet) by 8 meter (ca. 25 feet) rectangular unit oriented north-south, whereas the second was a smaller 18 meter (55 feet) by 3 meter (9 feet) unit extending east-west approximately 5 meter (15 feet) east of the initial Area C unit. Ground penetrating radar data were systematically collected from the three units using 1 and 2 meter (3 and 6

feet) transect spacings. Because of the sandy nature of the soil, both 225 MHz and 450 MHz antennas were used. The 450 MHz antenna was used in Areas A and B and both antenna frequencies were used in the two Area C segments. A total of 40 transects were collected from the three areas. One anomaly was identified in Area A and was thought to potentially represent an individual grave. A much larger anomaly was recorded in the initial unit in Area C (Figure 6). The reflection suggested a zone of disturbed soil approximately 6.5 meters (ca. 20 feet) by 3 meters (9 feet) extending to a depth of at least a meter. This anomaly was thought to potentially represent a pit such as one might find with a mass grave.

Investigations at Newblock Park, Oaklawn Cemetery, and Booker T. Washington Cemetery did not conclusively demonstrate the presence of mass graves. However, anomalies were found at Newblock Park and Booker T. Washington Cemetery that merited further investigation. During the fall of 1998, it was recommended to the Tulsa Race Riot Commission that these anomalies be physically studied to ascertain whether they represented mass graves. This request was approved by the Commission in October, 1998.

Phase II

Following approval to study the anomalies at Booker T. Washington and Newblock Park, a methodology was developed to allow us to determine the nature of the anomalies without significantly disturbing these features. The plan was to take core samples from each of the anomalies using a three-inch truck-mounted bull probe. The three-inch cores would minimally disturb the anomalies while providing necessary information on the context and content of these features. This work was performed with the assistance of Dr. Lee Bement using the Archeological Survey's truck mounted coring rig on December 16, 1998.

Newblock Park

Because of the potential for buried utility lines at Newblock Park, an initial step in the investigation was to obtain from the City of Tulsa a map identifying the placement of lines in relation to the anomaly to be investigated.

With this information, avoidance of areas with a high density of utility cables, conduits, etc. was accomplished. Ten core samples were drawn from the anomaly. The cores were typically extended to a depth of 2 meters (6 feet). Material recovered from these samples included brick fragments, concrete, broken glass and whiteware, and cinders. The debris appears to be uniformly distributed throughout the area of the anomaly with little stratigraphic integrity. The artifactual data were suggestive of fill for what was apparently the basement or subfloor of a water pump station. The reflective shape of this feature as detected with the ground penetrating radar probably represents the slightly slumped subsurface walls of the razed building. Thus, the anomaly at Newblock Park can be discounted as a mass grave site. This does not, however, mean that Newblock Park can be discounted as holding potential for a mass grave.

Booker T. Washington Cemetery

During the study of Newblock Park, the truck-mounted coring rig was damaged and could not be used to investigate the anomaly in Area C at Booker T. Washington. The work here was accomplished using manually operated coring rods. These rods were capable of probing to depths of up to 1 meter (3 feet). Between 10 and 15 probes were randomly placed through the anomaly in Area C. No cultural material or evidence of graves was obtained during this work. Soils from the cores were uniform, corresponding to the natural soil stratigraphy, with no evidence of a disturbed context. At approximately 90 cm (35 inches), a sand lens with some clay content was encountered. This also marked slightly moister soils. Because of the drought conditions encountered in July, it appears that the radar was reflecting back from this moister clay lens, presenting a pit-like image. The potential single grave in Area A also was investigated with three core probes. These were negative as well. Although there are multiple reports of Race Riot victims being buried at Booker T. Washington, these locations were not discovered during this work.

Interpretations

The December, 1998 investigations conducted at Newblock Park and Booker T. Wash-

ington Cemetery failed to substantiate the anomalies as the sites of mass graves or even individual graves. The work did reveal why the ground penetrating radar presented these anomalies as pitlike features. This demonstrates the necessity of physically investigating such features before viewing them as valid mass grave locations. The first two phases of work also address but small portions of the three potential locations. That other areas within Newblock Park, Oaklawn Cemetery, and Booker T. Washington Cemetery hold mass grave sites cannot be discounted.

Phase III

In the spring of 1999, an eyewitness was found to the digging of a mass grave at Oaklawn Cemetery. Mr. Clyde Eddy, who was a child of ten at the time of the riot, witnessed white laborers at Oaklawn digging a "trench." There also were a number of black riot victims present in several wooden crates. While Mr. Eddy did not directly see the victims being placed in this trench-like area, it is reasonable to assume that its purpose was for a mass grave. Mr. Eddy recalls this area being within the white section of the "Old Potters Field" and was able to point out the area in a visit to Oaklawn during the spring, 1999. Based on this new information, further study of Oaklawn Cemetery was approved. Because a specific area was identified, thus limiting the search area, it permitted a more expansive examination using geophysical methods. Three different geophysical applications were used at Oaklawn: magnetometer, electromagnetic induction, and ground penetrating radar. Dr. Alan Witten of the Department of Geology and Geophysics, University of Oklahoma conducted these investigations at Oaklawn on June 4, 1999 and subsequently, on November 22, 1999.

A rectangular grid of 15 meters (45 feet) north-south by 50 meters (150 feet) east-west was established over the area that Mr. Eddy identified. Because the location was based on a visual history from some 80 years ago, the targeted area was enlarged by about a factor of four to ensure complete coverage. This rectangular area lies within 4 meters (12 feet) of the

iron fence facing 11th Street. Fourteen headstones or footstones are present within the unit.

The unit, referred to as the Clyde Eddy Area, was first examined using a Geometrics 858 cesium magnetometer. North-south transects were walked with the magnetometer at 1 meter (3 feet) intervals. Signals were acquired at a rate of 5 samples per second. Numerous magnetic anomalies were identified. Most of these represent headstones reinforced with iron rebar or ferrous objects associated with single marked interments. However, there was one large magnetic anomaly at 24.5 west and 3.5 south that could not be explained by the presence of the single graves (Figure 7). This anomaly extends over an area of some 2 meters (6 feet) north-south by 2.6 meters (ca. 8 feet) east-west to a depth of 1 to 1.6 meters (3-5 feet). This was a strong ferrous object signal. It could represent a coffin with considerable quantity of ferrous metal hardware or a ferrous metal object with no relation to the cemetery. Because it is doubtful that victims of the riot would have been buried with sizable amounts of metal or in metal coffins, this feature probably did not relate to burial of the race riot victims.

The Clyde Eddy Area was subsequently examined using electromagnetic induction (EMI) with a GEM-2. The GEM-2 is a broadband instrument that responds to variations in electrical conductivity somewhat like a resistivity device. Transects were covered in a manner identical to that for the magnetometer (1 meter spacing with 5 samples per second). The GEM-2 receives signal variation from both high conductivity objects (metal) as well as non-metallic conductors. Data acquired with the GEM-2 obtained results similar to that of the magnetometer. However, in addition to these responses, the GEM-2 also identified an area in the northwestern quadrant that exhibits a regular shape and could represent an area of altered soil electrical conductivity as a result of past excavation (Figure 8). This was roughly an area some 5 meters (15 feet) square.

Ground penetrating radar was initially performed on June 4, in conjunction with the 200 MHz antennas with a Mala Geosciences RAMAC system. Transects of systematically collected GPR data for the Clyde Eddy Area re-

vealed no reflections of possible cultural origin. This work, though, was conducted without the benefit of the results of the magnetometer and EMI data. A second GPR study was conducted on November 22, 1998.

GPR data acquisition in this second survey was focused on the two anomalies revealed by the magnetometer and ENR. Two grid areas were established and north-south transects at 1 meter (3 feet) intervals were run for the two potential features. Both 250 and 500 MHz antennas were used in data collection. The 250 MHz antenna provided no new data; the reflections were basically the same as those obtained on June 4, 1998. The 500 MHz antenna presented a much different picture. The radar identified an anomaly in the same location as that revealed by the GEM-2 unit. Ground penetrating radar data depict a feature measuring approximately 5 meters (15 feet) square, a unit essentially the same size as that defined by the GEM-2. The GPR data additionally suggest the presence of an isolated object in roughly the center of the anomaly and that the feature has walls that appear to be vertical with well-defined corners (Figure 9).

Interpretations and Conclusions

The third phase of geophysical work at Oaklawn Cemetery resulted in the identification of two subsurface anomalies or features. One anomaly represents a highly ferrous subsurface deposit. This is not believed to be associated with the Tulsa Race Riot. The other anomaly bears all the characteristics of a dug pit or trench with vertical walls and an undefined object within the approximate center of the feature. Because this anomaly showed up on both EMI and GPR surveys, it is not believed to be a false signal. The vertical walls also support an argument for this being some sort of dug feature. Without the presence of an eyewitness, this would just represent another "anomaly" to be examined. However, with Mr. Eddy's testimony, this trench-like feature takes on the properties of a mass grave. It can be argued that the geophysical study, combined with the account of Mr. Eddy, are compelling arguments for this feature being considered a mass grave.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

Between July, 1998, and November, 1999, geophysical investigations were conducted at three locations thought to potentially represent sites of mass graves for victims of the Tulsa Race Riot. Examination of select areas at Newblock Park and Booker T. Washington Cemetery through use of ground penetrating radar failed to reveal any features suggestive of a mass grave. As has been reiterated throughout this report, the failure to identify a mass grave at specified locations does not negate the potential for a mass grave within either Newblock Park or Booker T. Washington Cemetery. It only documents that such a feature was not present within the area examined.

Initial study of Oaklawn Cemetery with ground penetrating radar revealed a number of individual internments but no evidence of a mass grave. With an eyewitness account permitting a narrowing of the search window, a second examination was conducted at Oaklawn Cemetery. Through use of electromagnetic induction and ground penetrating radar, a 5 meter (15 feet) square anomaly with vertical walls was identified within the area pointed out by the eyewitness as where a trench was dug for burying riot victims. While this evidence is compelling, it cannot be viewed as factual until the feature has been physically examined by excavation to determine if this represents a grave site, and, more importantly, if a grave, whether it contains multiple individuals. The situation at Oaklawn Cemetery has been further complicated by cemetery records indicating that an adult white male had been buried there shortly before the riot and two white children were buried within the boundaries of this feature following the riot. This information seems contradictory to the presence of a mass grave at this location.

There are a number of recommendations that should be considered. They are enumerated as follows:

1. Oral history and archival work should continue the search for more specific data on areas within Newblock Park and Booker T. Washington Cemetery. Other locations that have some

credibility should also be reexamined (if merited).

2. Continued examination of records at Oaklawn Cemetery to resolve the somewhat paradoxical issue of a mass grave where other non Race Riot related people were reportedly buried.

3. Further examination of the potential mass grave feature at Oaklawn with geophysical applications. This would involve changing the angle of orientation used in the transects (e.g.,

a north west-southeast direction) to effect the reflection of the signal. Other options would be the use of different antenna and changing the signal rate.

4. At the discretion of commissions governing the Race Riot investigation, the City of Tulsa, and the Greenwood community limited physical investigation of the feature be undertaken to clarify whether it indeed represents a mass grave. This is not a recommendation to exhume any remains but to clarify the nature of this anomaly.

Endnotes

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(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

History Uncovered: Skeletal Remains as a Vehicle to the Past

By Phoebe Stubblefield and Lesley M. Rankin-Hill

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

—Ralph Ellison

Overview

During the last 20 to 30 years, several large and numerous small African American skeletal populations have been studied by physical anthropologists. Each population has contributed significantly to the reconstruction of African American lives, experiences, communities, and historical events. African Americans to a great extent are the “invisible people” in the historical record. This is a common problem whenever one studies non-elite people in the historical past, especially members of the underclass. These are the people who facilitated the lives of the wealthy and the powerful of society; they built cities, provided goods and services, and, to a great extent, were the essential elements of a growing society. How-

ever, they remain obscure in publications of their times and the history books. Elites leave significant documentation of their lives in a variety of forms and these materials have a high probability of being archived. The few sources of documentation for the poor and under classes of a society are likely to be lost.

Therefore, when African American skeletal populations are discovered or recovered they present a unique opportunity to add to the historical record and document the lives of the individuals and their community. Physical anthropological studies provide a direct method of assessment (providing evidence) when skeletal populations like the New York African Burial Ground or the Dallas Freedmen’s cemetery become available.

African American skeletal populations have become available under several conditions: 1) the intentional excavation due to land redevelopment or threat of environmental damage; 2)

the accidental discovery of an abandoned cemetery; 3) archaeological excavation projects for historical/anthropological research and documentation. These skeletal populations, represent a broad spectrum of African American lifestyles throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in the Western Hemisphere.

Biological and behavioral factors affect the human skeleton because the skeleton is a dynamic system, that undergoes growth and development throughout the individual's life span. In general, these biological and cultural factors can interfere in the normal processes of bone growth and loss, causing disease episodes and/or periods of delayed growth. These experiences can be usually indelibly recorded on the skeleton and dentition. Through observing these "historical remnants" of bones and teeth, the physical anthropologist has a means of measuring a population's health. In addition, the skeleton can record the actual cause(s) of death and/or contributory factors surrounding death.

Therefore, the potential contribution and importance of the Tulsa Race Riot victims' skeletal remains would be significant to both the documentation of the historical event and to African American history. It is imperative that these remains be located, recovered, "given a voice" through skeletal analysis, and then reinterred with dignity, as most of the African American skeletal populations have been and will be in the future.

A discussion of the basic types of analysis and information that physical anthropologists and forensic anthropologists can provide is presented below.

The Role of Forensic Anthropology in the Identification of Deceased Individuals

Forensic anthropology has had an active role in American science and medicolegal investigations since at least 1878, when Harvard anatomist Thomas Dwight published his essay on identifying human skeletal remains.¹ Existing as a poorly recognized subfield of the scientific discipline called physical anthropology, forensic anthropology received little scholarly or public notice until the task of identifying

and repatriating the deceased from World War II and the Korean War brought the field into prominent activity. Technical advances at this time and a steady increase in academic interest in the field led to its later organization as a section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in 1972. Since that time, forensic anthropology has been a recognized subfield of physical anthropology and the forensic sciences, requiring the usual academic rigors of obtaining the higher degrees in anthropology (at least a Master's degree), as well as the special training and certification of its section in the Academy.

A forensic anthropologist is a physical anthropologist who has been trained to recognize and examine human skeletal remains for indications of sex, age, height, unique characters of the individual, features which might indicate how the person died, and processes that affect the skeleton after death. Although a forensic pathologist or other medical doctor may seem a more appropriate conductor of such analyses, their education and training focuses on changes in soft tissue. The forensic anthropologist is expected to recognize bone outside of its natural context even if it is reduced to small fragments. He or she can identify all the bones of the human skeleton, determine if a bone is human or not, and understand that the shape of a bone is related to its function in the body and its owner's relationship to other animals.

Forensic anthropologists serve the public in several types of investigations. As a result they work with the other agents concerned with the disposition of human remains, such as medical examiners or coroners, local and federal law enforcement and family organizations. The most common circumstances are criminal investigations on a local or federal level, such as a local homicide or the results of terrorist activity. Other circumstances include mass disasters of natural or human cause, such as the recovery of tornado or aviation accident victims. The U.S. Army maintains a staff of forensic anthropologists at a facility based in Hawaii who are dedicated to the continued recovery and identification of Americans lost in the past armed conflicts. Frequently the public learns of the forensic anthropologists work when it in-



While stories have persisted for years that the bodies of riot victims were thrown into the Arkansas River, there is little evidence to support this oral tradition. Considerable oral and written evidence does exist, however, which points to African-American riot victims being buried in unmarked graves at Oaklawn Cemetery, Booker T. Washington Cemetery, and perhaps, Newblock Park (Courtesy department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

volves cases of historical interest, such as the exhumation of President Zachary Taylor for an investigation of the cause of his death, or the recovery and identification of the remains of the last Czar of Russia and his household.

The varieties of occasion that require the skills of a forensic anthropologist are sufficiently diverse that the anthropologist may enter the project at various points and utilize a wide assortment of skills. The list below is a summary of exercises that could be employed in a generic investigation. While it seems a short list, many activities take place under each section. While all of the items listed will be covered, most of the remainder of this chapter will focus on item three, laboratory analysis.

1. Scene or locality search for skeletal remains or burials
2. Recovery of remains by surface recovery or excavation
3. Laboratory analysis
4. Report production

As previously stated, forensic anthropologists are trained to discriminate between human and non-human bone. In many

investigations, the anthropologist's services begin and end (if no human bones are found) at this step when he or she is called to a locality or medical examiner's office and asked to make a determination. At an investigation scene the forensic anthropologist will search for and identify human bone, look for indications of burials, and conduct necessary excavations in a systematic manner using thorough documentation. In the search for burials, in addition to using visual clues, the anthropologist may employ specialized equipment and techniques, such as ground penetrating radar and infrared photography.

As part of recovery of remains, the anthropologist may map the locality in order to have a record of the position of the remains relative to a fixed landmark and any significant features of the site. This is a typical part of a criminal investigation and can be conducted in conjunction with scene investigators. Locating the site on an existing map and noting the physical address of the location may suffice, but in wooded areas or along roadsides the anthropologist may employ a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit to get the geographic coordinates of the site. If a burial is involved the site must be mapped with the lo-

cation of the burial indicated (sometimes the burial is the site), while the burial itself receives a mapping grid. The grid provides a means of mapping the location of each bone or artifact found within the burial. An organized and thorough excavation may provide the information that allows the reconstruction of the events surrounding the burial of the deceased. In one instance the late Dr. William Maples successfully documented differing times of death for multiple individuals in one grave, based on the information gained from his thorough excavation.² In addition to any physical mapping of the burial, good note taking, photography and/or videotaping during the excavation also will ensure a good record of what was found during the excavation.

Once human remains are found, they are collected in a manner that will protect the privacy of the family of the deceased, keep material remains in association, and prevent fragile material from further breakage or deterioration from exposure to air and sunlight. The remains are then maintained in a secure location while the anthropologist conducts the analysis. Good security ensures the remains and any items with them stay together and are not adulterated or altered by outside influences.

What Skeletal Remains Tell Us

In everyday living, our skeletons are frames from which we work our muscles, frames which we protect from breaking whenever possible and rely on as silent partners as we move through and manipulate the world around us. Yet human bones are not just a frame for the flesh, they also are frames for our identities. An anthropologist can get more information from a skeleton with all of its parts present, no bones broken, and little or no degradation from the environment. Even fragmentary remains will tell much about their former owner. Forensic anthropologists investigate six properties when examining skeletal remains: age, sex, ancestry, stature, unique characters of the skeleton, and indications of trauma.

Age Assessment

Unless the skeleton is sparsely represented, forensic anthropologists do not rely on only one technique to arrive at an age assessment.

The best assessments are a summary conclusion based on as many parts of the skeleton as possible. This technique becomes especially important when dealing with mature individuals, because they have fewer age-specific characters than infants, children, and young adults.

Age Determination in Infants, Children, and Young Adults

The techniques for determining skeletal age in children are based on standards of skeletal and dental maturation developed for living children. Infant remains are aged by comparing the length of the long bones of the legs or arms to guidelines for the maturation of living infants. One difficulty in aging infant remains is that their bones are very fragile, do not preserve well under ground, and are rarely recovered from burials. Older children, depending on how far into development they are, can be aged by various techniques, including long bone length, degree of completed growth of the teeth, and degree of completed growth of the long bones. Age assessments using dental remains are primarily based on the degree of development of each tooth crown and root, the simultaneous presence of adult and baby teeth, and whether a tooth has erupted and if so how far. This technique is useful from infants with teeth still developing inside the jaws, to teenagers with developing wisdom teeth. The dental eruption sequence may alone be enough to obtain an age assessment, but eruption of the wisdom teeth cannot be considered an indication of adulthood because their eruption times are highly variable.

The long bones of the arms and legs each have a main shaft that develops ends that fuse as the person matures. The age that the ends develop and fuse to the main shaft occurs so regularly that age can be assessed within a couple years if enough of the skeleton is present. Limb bones stop being useful for age assessment in early adulthood. The bones in the arm, being the last to fully develop, do so at about 18 years in women and 19 years in men. As a general rule when confronted with a skeleton that looks mature on first glance, the collarbone is examined first. The collarbone is the latest fusing long bone, becoming complete by about 25 years in males and females. If the collarbone is com-

pletely united, the anthropologist uses techniques for aging adult remains.

Age Estimation in Adults

Assessing age in the adult skeleton presents a special challenge because any parts that were going to fuse as a part of maturation have done so. Most standardized techniques for age assessment in adults focus on age related changes to mature bone in portions of the post-cranial skeleton. In 1920 and again in 1989, anthropologists published standards for age changes at the fibrous joint between the pubic bones, the pubic symphysis.³ Similarly, in 1986, anthropologists began publishing standards for the age changes to the sternal end of the fourth rib.⁴

Quite frequently a skeleton is too fragmentary or too poorly preserved to retain the pubic bones or the fourth rib. In such a case more marginal age estimation techniques may be used such as closure of the cranial sutures. Contrary to popular belief, cranial suture closure, as seen by the disappearance of the lines separating the bones of the cranium, is one of the most unreliable techniques for estimating age. Cranial sutures do not close in a systematic fashion in any human population. As a result, an age estimate of 30 to 50 years is not uncommon from this technique, which only signifies that the remains are adult, as was already known. Cranial sutures are used only as a last resort, such as when only a cranium is found.

In addition to using the suitable standardized techniques for the skeletal remains, the anthropologist also examines all the collected remains for general indicators of age. He or she examines the teeth, to see how worn or decayed they are in order to assess how long they were in use. Tooth wear is a population dependent character because some populations use their teeth as tools, get more dental care, or eat more grit than others. The joint surfaces and vertebrae also are examined for signs of arthritic development. In general, an older body will show more signs of lost cartilage and have more extensive bony growth on the margins of the joint. Vertebrae in particular begin developing bony growths called osteophytes as a person enters his or her 30s. The osteophytes

increase in size and number as a person grows older. Another indicator of greater maturity is the presence of ossified soft tissue, such as the thyroid and cricoid cartilage of the throat, the cartilage joining the ribs to the sternum, and sclerotic portions of the descending aorta. As stated earlier, every suitable method, beginning with the most reliable, should be used for an age assessment, but forensic anthropologists are especially careful while using qualitative clues. An overused and overworked body will have arthritic development and ossified soft tissue at a younger age than otherwise expected.

Sex Assessment

It is extremely difficult to estimate sex for pre-pubertal remains because the characters of the skeleton that indicate sex do not appear until after puberty. A few techniques have been proposed for estimating sex in infants, but the reliability of these techniques is questionable. Hunt and Gleiser (1955) developed a technique for children age two to eight, based on a combination of dental and skeletal development of the hand and wrist. This technique works better than 50 percent of the time, but does require a fairly intact skeleton.

For adult remains, estimating sex can be one of the simpler parts of a forensic analysis if certain parts of the skeleton are present. Given a choice, a forensic anthropologist would always prefer to have an intact pelvis, with the second choice being an intact skull. For either part two approaches are used to estimate sex, a morphological assessment and/or a metric assessment. The morphology or shape of the pelvis differs between males and females. This difference can be recorded by noting the presence of features associated with a particular sex, or by measuring the pelvis and using statistical analysis to estimate sex.

Forensic anthropologists understand that the sex differences in the human pelvis are related to differences in function and are trained to recognize the physical differences associated with function. The female pelvis differs from the male in being designed to pass a large brained infant through a narrow space. The pelvis is made of three bones, the two innominate plus the sacrum. The innominate, themselves are

composed of three bones that fuse at about age 13 in girls and 15 in boys, the pubis, ischium, and ilium. As a means of orientation, consider that when you sit down on a firm surface the bone that makes contact is the ischium, the bony hip you rest your hand on is the ilium, and the part that may unfortunately connect with the bar on a mens bike is the pubis. The female pelvis differs visibly from the male by having, among other features, a rectangular shape to the body of the pubis, a wide sciatic notch between ilium and ischium, and a pronounced angle beneath the body of the pubis.

In contrast to the pelvis, sex differences in the skull make males exceptional. Larger size plays a part here rather than a different shape, because while skulls serve the same function no matter the sex, men tend to be larger and more robust than are women. Greater robusticity means that in the male skull projections protrude farther, and ridges are rougher and sharper. In the skull, the male brow tends to project farther than in females, and the mass of bone behind the ear, the mastoid process, tends to be larger. Size and ruggedness also will distinguish male long bones and vertebrae.

Forensic anthropologists do not rely solely on morphology to estimate sex because there are several circumstances when this technique is insufficient. Skeletal remains are frequently fragmentary. Also, differences in size and shape occur as central tendencies surrounded by variation. Therefore, we can say that the female pelvis has certain features, but we do not expect every female pelvis to have all those features in the same degree. In addition, human populations differ in the degree to which males are more robust than females. Consider the contrast of the American quarterback with his cheerleader girlfriend juxtaposed to the Eastern European bride. The alternative to, or support for a morphological assessment is to compare measurements of the pelvis, skull, or other parts of the skeleton to statistical samples generated for particular populations. The equations of Giles and Elliot are frequently used to determine sex for skulls from Americans of European and African descent.⁵ Statistical procedures are very important in the next two

points of a forensic identification, ancestry and stature.

Determining Ancestry

The skull is the best source of information for estimating ancestry from the human skeleton. Just as with the pelvis in sex assessment, morphological and metric analysis of the skull can show the geographic population to which an individual belonged. A geographic population is the large collection of people such as Europeans, Africans, and Asians that is usually called a "race." Here the term race is avoided because the skull only indicates genetic ancestry, not the social connotations of race. Social issues of race such as "passing," or "one-drop rule," are rarely represented by the shape of the skull. In the same way that someone resembles his or her other relatives, that resemblance carries down to the bone and can be approximated with measurements and careful observation. When assessing ancestry we frequently state it in terms of descent. Typically in the United States we encounter individuals of European, African, Asian (which includes Native Americans), or mixed descent. This does not mean that the individual in question recently immigrated to the United States; rather, it means that the person's ancestry is derived from that population.

Forensic anthropologists determine ancestry by examining the morphology of the skull and by taking measurements at several points on the skull. In a morphological exam the anthropologist looks for particular sets of anatomical features that are found with greater frequency in certain populations. Closely related people will share more cranial features with each other than with their more distant relations on the next continent. On the other hand, since large populations are not made up of clones, the anthropologist cannot expect everyone in a particular population to have the same features in the same degree or combinations. Also, since all humans are related, the anthropologist cannot expect any cranial feature to necessarily be exclusive to a particular population. Therefore, an assessment of ancestry is based on a suite of characters that tend to appear or are found in similar degree in particular populations. For example, the anthropologist might look for a short,

high cranium combined with a narrow nasal aperture as part of an indication of European ancestry, but he or she would not require a short, high cranium because some Europeans have long craniums. Nor would we look only for the ratio of skull length to height because different populations can have the same ratio. See the table below for a list of some of the characters used for determining ancestry.

In addition to the morphological assessment, the forensic anthropologist can conduct a metric analysis of the skull. A metric analysis requires that a skull be measured across several points, and those measurements compared to a statistical sample of individuals of known ancestry. In the United States many forensic anthropologists rely on another set of equations designed by Giles and Elliot that distinguish between people of European, African, and Native American descent.⁶ Anthropologists at the University of Tennessee also have produced a statistical package called FORDISC that serves a combined function of ancestry and stature estimation. Metric analysis is often the preferred route to ancestry determination because it does not require that the eye be trained to recognize morphological traits, and because it is more effective on fragmentary skulls.

Stature Estimation

Estimation of the standing height of the living individual is an exclusively metric procedure. Anthropologists have developed predictive equations that estimate stature based on the length of various bones of the body. These equations exist for several populations, including Native Americans and Americans of African and European descent. Trotter and Gleser designed the most commonly used equations in response to the repatriation effort of WWII and Korean War dead.⁷ Normally, leg length is the greatest contributor to standing height, so most of the predictive equations are based on length of the long bones of the leg, the femur, tibia, and fibula. Other anthropologists have developed equations for the complete skeleton, vertebrae, long bones of the arm, and bones of the hands and feet. In cases where preservation is poor and bones are fragmentary

and incomplete, Steele developed equations for predicting the complete length of the long bone.⁸ One additional concern regarding stature estimation is that as people enter their 40s they begin losing height, so stature estimates for older individuals must be corrected. The rate of correction is minus 0.06 centimeters for every decade past 30.

Trauma Analysis

The assessment of trauma in skeletonized remains requires the ability to distinguish between perimortem trauma and postmortem damage. Perimortem trauma is damage caused to bone in the interval surrounding the time of death. The interval is defined by the time period during which the bone is “green” or behaves with the plasticity of its living state. Any trauma that occurs while the bone is fresh and green is perimortem trauma including damage that occurs shortly after death. Perimortem trauma that would have either contributed to or is directly associated with the cause of death is classified as trauma associated with the cause of death. For example, perimortem rib fractures can occur in a victim without those fractures being the cause of death, but the accompanying cranial gunshot wound would be trauma associated with the cause of death.

Forensic anthropologists are trained to recognize the types of trauma that can be found on bone including blunt force, sharp force, gunshot wounds, and burning. By visual inspection, touch, use of a light microscope, and radiography, the anthropologist can identify these forms on trauma from the characteristic marks they leave on bone. Blunt force trauma is associated with fractured or crushed bone, such as in a greenstick fracture or a depressed cranial fracture. Blunt force injuries to green bone may leave clear identifying marks of the instrument used to inflict the trauma, such as grooves or direct impressions of the weapon. Sharp force trauma includes incised cuts, stab wounds, and chopping injuries. This type of trauma leaves an assortment of marks, such as nicks, punctures or serrated grooves, which are observable by touch, plain vision, and under the microscope. The anthropologist may make a silicone cast of cutmarks for later comparison to the cutting

edge of a suspect weapon. Gunshot wounds, especially to thin or tabular bones, have characteristic beveled shapes. Bullets frequently leave traces of lead on the bone, which can be seen on an x-ray. Typical fracture patterns are found on bone burned during the perimortem interval. Fire damage may occur in conjunction with other forms of trauma, so the anthropologist is prepared to find evidence that might be obscured by the charring and breakage caused by burning.

Postmortem damage occurs after death, after the bone has become brittle from decomposition and drying. Some damage may occur during recovery such as marks acquired during excavation from shovels, trowels or probes, damage from careless handling such as breakage, and marks from scalpels or scissors. Other forms of damage are from natural agents such as dog or other carnivore chewing, rodent gnaw marks, root etching, and flaking and cracking caused by exposure to sunlight. Attempts to dispose of remains also will cause postmortem damage, such as cutmarks, chemical burns, and burning from fire. Forensic anthropologists are careful to minimize the occurrence of postmortem damage during and after recovery of remains. Postmortem damage is distinguishable from perimortem trauma by the lack of indicators of plastic behavior in the bone, a color difference between the outside bone and the newly exposed bone, and the pattern (e.g., only at joints) or type (e.g., carnivore chewing) of the damage.

Idiosyncratic Characters

Individual characters can be the clearest indicators of identity in skeletal remains. The forensic anthropologist carefully inspects the skeletal remains in order to document any features that might have been noted by family members or placed in a medical or dental record. The anthropologist documents healed fractures, atypical anatomy, signs of diseases that affect bones such as anemia, syphilis, cancer, or medical appliances such as prostheses, wires and sutures, and dental restorations and plates.

The anthropologist can make positive identifications by comparing antemortem radio-

graphs to postmortem radiographs of the same area, and matching the anatomy and/or medical appliances found in each. Another technique, called video superimposition, allows the anthropologist to match photographs taken in life to the features of the skull. In cases when the remains represent a complete unknown, the anthropologist may build or commission a facial reconstruction of the deceased based on the assessment of sex, ancestry, age, and published data on skin thickness. The reconstruction is either three-dimensional, using clay to represent the skin, or conceived of in two dimensions by a sketch artist.

The recent advances in genetic analysis has made it possible to describe the most unique characters of the individual, his or her DNA sequence. In non-living tissue, bone is the best preserver of DNA. Therefore, it is possible to take a small sample from the preserved bone of a deceased person and match the DNA to a sample collected while the individual was living, or to match the sample to the nearest relatives. Only a small bone sample is needed, because a technique called PCR (polymerase chain reaction) allows the volume of DNA to be amplified until there is an abundant amount to sequence.

The Report

After all the analyses and descriptions are complete, the forensic anthropologist generates a report of his or her findings. This report will document in a succinct and clear form all the findings and conclusions regarding sex, ancestry, stature, trauma analysis, and individualizing characteristics, made by the anthropologist. Any supporting documents such as radiographs, photographs, slides, or videotapes will accompany the report. Depending on the nature of the investigation this report will be submitted to a medical examiner, committee, or family organization, or, in the case of an interdisciplinary project, be combined with the reports of the other project members.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above description that "dead men do tell tales." Physical anthropologists and forensic anthropologists tell the stories of the individual skeletons and skeletal populations they study. This work identifies individu-

als, and provides evidence for reconstructing communities and historical events. The focus of locating the remains of Tulsa Race Riot victims is not to prove that it happened or to count the dead. When the individuals who lived and

died in Greenwood in 1921 are recovered they will be treated with respect and their stories will be documented. Their voices, therefore, will be added to the historical record, finally giving them and their families closure with dignity.

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Table 1. Short list of cranial characters and their expression in specific populations

	African	Asian	European
Skull length	Long	Long	Long or short
Skull breadth	Narrow	Broad	Narrow
Nasal aperture	Wide	Narrow	Narrow
Incisor shape	Spatular	Shoveled	Spatular



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

Riot Property Loss

By Larry O'Dell

An account of the property damage in North Tulsa during the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot can impart solid information. But researching the history of an African American controlled community seventy-nine years later, however, entails many problems associated with the racial climate of the era. Throughout the research process not just the destruction of property, but also the loss of life had to be considered. When tallying up the monetary value of a community the results are insignificant when compared to the loss of a father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter. Yet, the physical character of the community and the property lost are an important aspect to any undertaking to understand this awful occurrence in Oklahoma history.

Most of Tulsa's African American population resided in the northeast section of the city. The first step in the research involved building a database of North Tulsa for the years of

1920-1923. This would not only show the residence of many African Americans affected by the riot, but also would give a clue to the wealth and prosperity of black Tulsa by revealing the addresses of businesses, professionals, and civic locations. Also, listing the name and location of a resident in 1920, and then tracking that name through 1923, should shed insight on whether there was a huge population loss in North Tulsa and help to pinpoint citizens that may not have survived the riot.

The database utilized city directories, 1920 census information, and the appendix to Mary E. Jones Parrish's account, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, which has a partial list of losses and their addresses. With its document's completion, this database became a tool itself when compared to maps, interviews, Sanborn Insurance maps (created for insurance purposes and including descriptions of building and the mate-



(Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).

rials they are made of), plat maps, warranty deed records, building permits, Red Cross reports, and so on. The database highlights problems in the records for North Tulsa. Many of the African Americans in the census records do not show up in the *1920 city directory* and vice versa. Poor research or lack of interest by the *city directory* would probably account for the discrepancies. The census takers would likely mirror this attitude.

The United States census of 1920 reported 10,903 African Americans living in Tulsa County. The census also claimed that 8,878 blacks lived in the city of Tulsa, or that 10.8 percent of Tulsans were African Americans.¹ The influx of African Americans continued, totaling almost 11,000 by 1921 and, according to the database founded on *city directory* estimates, included 191 businesses. There were fifteen doctors, one chiropractor, and two dentists practicing in the district as well as three lawyers. This section of town contained a library, two schools, a hospital, and an office of the Tulsa public health services. Two newspapers, the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun*, were published in North Tulsa. African American fraternal lodges and churches dotted the neighborhoods and business districts in the northeastern quadrant of the city.

The database listed 159 businesses in 1920; after the riot in the *1922 city directories*, 120 businesses are listed. The Red Cross reported that 1,256 houses burned, that 215 houses were looted and not burned, and the total number of building not burned but looted and robbed was 314. According to 1920 census entries, a number of the residences in North Tulsa contained more than just one family, Greenwood Avenue held the heart of the district, with two theaters and many of the prominent businesses located there. Distinguished business owners and leaders of the community resided on Detroit Avenue, the western boundary to the African American section; across the street were white houses and businesses. Another economically prosperous section of the African American district was the Lacy sector in the eastern part of the community.²

Three sources corroborate an approximate value for the destroyed property: the Tulsa Real Estate Exchange Commission; the claims filed against the city in the City Commission meetings; and the actual damage claimed in court cases against insurance companies and the city of Tulsa. The Tulsa Real Estate Exchange Commission reported 1.5 million dollars worth of property damage, with one-third of it being in the business district. This research by the commission was done shortly after the riot and may



and Pipe Hill, East From Hartford and West to Boston.—Black Dispatch Publishing Co., Oklahoma City

be suspect because of their temporary involvement in the plan to relocate the black population and develop the Greenwood area for a train station.³ The Real Estate Commission estimated personal property loss at \$750,000. Between June 14, 1921, and June 6, 1922, Tulsa residents filed riot-related claims against the city for over \$1.8 million dollars. The city commission disallowed most of the claims. One exception occurred when a white resident obtained compensation for guns taken from his shop.⁴ The sum of the actual damage filed in the 193 retrieved court cases equaled \$1,470,711.56,

which is in close relation to the \$1.5 and the \$1.8 million of the other estimates.⁵

Of course, not all residents took insurance companies or the city to court, but most of the prominent businessmen and women, as well as the influential residents did have detailed petitions drawn out against both entities. In 1937, Judge Bradford J. Williams summarily dismissed most of the court cases. North Tulsans claimed a variety of possessions in these cases. For example, Dr. R. W. Motley claimed not only his surgical instruments and medicines, but Chippendale book cases, a set of the Harvard



Destruction in the black business district incurred most of the financial loss of the riot (Courtesy of Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries).



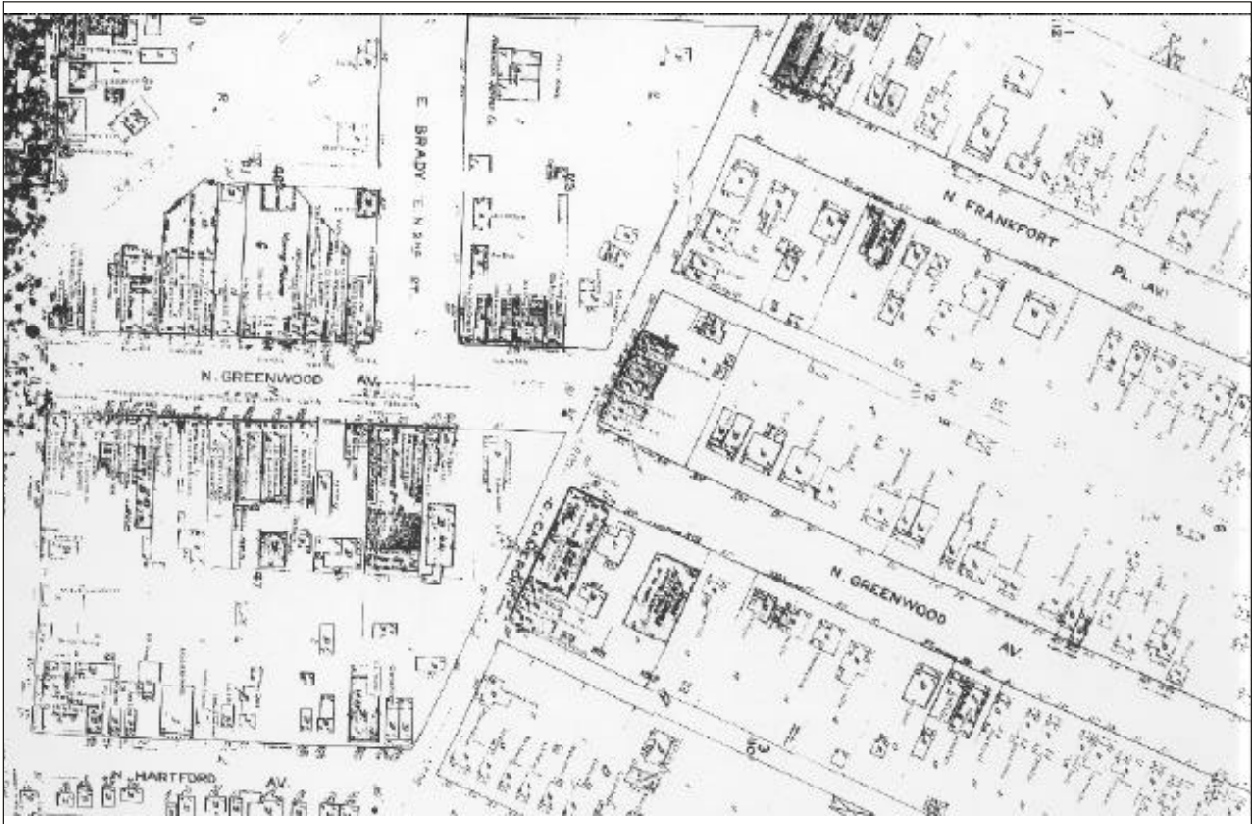
Ruins of a building completed months prior to the riot (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

Classics, a mahogany library table, a silk mohair library outfit, a Steinway piano, and Rodgers silverware, among other items. Other claims were for livestock, rental property, and other essential materials. A study of these claims reveals the diverse wealth and poverty in the community, one that could match or exceed that of many other many communities in 1921 Oklahoma.

According to Mary Parrish's book, court case claims, warranty deed records, and court clerk records, many African Americans in Tulsa owned rental property. Black Tulsans who suffered significant financial loss attributed to rental properties included R.T. Bridgewater, J.H. Goodwin, Sadie Partee, Loula Williams and G.W. Hutchins. Many other African Americans possessed rental property, including Carrie Kinlaw, Virgil Rowe, John Swinger, Emma Works, S.M. Jackson, J.B. Stradford, Osborne Monroe, C.W. Henry, Mrs. Warren and A.L. Stovall.

Also, many white Tulsans conducted real estate business in the African American district prior to the riot. One of the better known white businessmen, Cyrus S. Avery, sold multiple

lots in the Greenwood addition to black residents in the years before the riot. A powerful member of the chamber of commerce, Avery served as a member of the Tulsa Water Board for the Spavinaw water project, and he also directed the Executive Welfare Committee that collected \$26,000 for the Red Cross after the riot.⁸ E.W. Sinclair also conducted real business in North Tulsa. Sinclair was the president of Exchange National Bank and vice president of Sinclair Pipeline. Other significant white property owners in the district were: S.R. Lewis, vice-chairman of the taxpayer's committee; W.H. Botkin, real estate financier; Tate Brady, former Democratic national committeeman and Oklahoma commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans; T.E. Smiley, realtor; R.J. Dixon, realtor; George Stephens, realtor; H.E. Bagby, department manager of Exchange National Bank; Claude Sample, realtor; H.C. Stahl, information not found, but probably related to W.E. Stahl involved in insurance, loans and bonds; Earl Sneed, lawyer; Win Redfearn, proprietor of the Dixie Theater; The Brockman brothers, realtors; and J.A. Oliphant, lawyer.⁹



Portion of the Sanborn map dated 1920 with occupants drawn from the 1921 City Directory overlapped.

It is problematic to determine property ownership in 1921 North Tulsa for a variety of reasons. The city renamed some of the streets in the area after the riot, creating complications in the transference of an address from pre-riot to modern.¹⁰ Also, urban renewal and the accumulation of North Greenwood property for the highway and Rogers State University (Now OSU-Tulsa), create a gap in the records of property and cause old addresses, legal and otherwise, do not display on the county clerk computer system. City directories list residents by their city address, and even comparing these to city plats can cause confusion on the legal address; but, luckily, all warranty deeds and other tracking devices are made with the legal address, making this a time-consuming but not an insurmountable task. A great problem arises when the legal address is all that is known; matching it to a street address tends to be complex unless the owner and not the renter is listed in the city directory. Oftentimes two

buildings would be on one lot making the assignment of street addresses almost entirely guesswork. Another problem consists of property transfer that is conducted by means other than money convoluting the value of the property. In many instances a transfer of deed would be listed as costing the buyer only one dollar.

When looking for a certain individual or family, the best place to begin is the compiled database of city directories. After finding the address, if it can be located on the existing Sanborn maps, the size and make up of the structure and its location on the property can be determined. The Sanborn map will also pinpoint the legal address. If it is located outside the Sanborn map area it needs to be examined on the plat maps. Using the legal address, ownership can be determined by going to the Tulsa County Clerk's office. In theory, finding the last transaction in the tract indexes before 1921 should indicate the owner at the time of the riot. Besides problems listed in the paragraph above, how-



Black Tulsans salvaged what they could from their burned homes and businesses and began to rebuild on their own, using whatever materials they could find. It took some congregations years to rebuild their burned churches (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

ever, many times the lot will be split and sold to two parties, making it difficult to decide who owned what part of the lot.

Examining the properties of Percy and Mabel Little provides an example of how using the database, warranty deed records, plats, and county court house records can provide needed data. The Littles resided at 617 East Independence, which is not on a portion of the Sanborn Insurance maps. Percy had interest in the Bell and Little Restaurant on land owned by J. Hodnett or W. Appleby at 525 Cameron. The Littles had just bought some land off Greenwood Avenue at the legal address lots 13-14, block 8 Greenwood Addition, for \$600 from C.S. Avery on April 12, 1921. The bank released them from their mortgage on June 8, 1923. The 1923 directory lists P.L. Little at 1301 Greenwood. This residence should be on the land they purchased. This property before

the riot could have been used as a beauty parlor; after the riot Mrs. Little put an ad for her beauty parlor in Mary Parrish's book, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, that claimed the address as 1301 Greenwood.¹¹

Another example is Osborne Monroe. According to the *1921 Tulsa City Directory*, Monroe and his wife, Olive, lived at 410 Easton, lot 3, block 17 North Tulsa, and worked as a porter at 117 South Main Avenue. Mary Parrish listed the loss of their residence as \$1,000. According to the Sanborn Insurance maps their house before the riot was a one-story frame house with a porch. In August 1920, Monroe received a building permit to build a \$2,000 one-story frame structure on lot 1 block 15 North Tulsa Addition. In a petition filed against the Mechanics and Traders Insurance Company of New Orleans, Osborne Monroe claimed fire destroyed his property, consisting of two one-story

shingle-roof, frame building with stone piers foundation and brick chimneys and flues, on June 1, 1921. Six months after the riot, Mr. Monroe requested building permits on December 6, 1921, to build a frame building on lot 1, block 15 North Side Addition and on December 12, 1921 to build three frame buildings on lot 1, block 15 North Tulsa Addition at \$400 each. This would be on the 500 block of Exeter or North Elgin Place.¹²

By early July 1921, the city of Tulsa began granting building permits to African American residents of North Tulsa. O.W. Gurley received a permit on July 2 for a one-story brick building that was to cost him \$6,000. The earliest to rebuild were generally the “Deep Greenwood” business owners. For example, Gurley, Goodwin, Woods, Young, Bridgewater, and Williams were among the first to gain a building permit.¹³ This happened amidst the efforts of white Tulsa to industrialize this sector with various codes to prevent black rebuilding.¹⁴ The city manager or the fire marshal likely issued more permits to individual families as the winter of 1921 approached.¹⁵

Although much of the research on ownership of all property in North Tulsa may not be definitive, the character of the Greenwood area can be deciphered before and after the riot. A thriving area of the town of Tulsa where the majority of the business district was owned and managed by the African American residents, Greenwood also contained a diverse residential area. But, there were extensive

business dealings, especially in real estate, by whites and oftentimes, by major leaders of the white business or civic community conducted in North Tulsa. The majority of the wealth occurred in the “Deep Greenwood” business section and in the residential areas around Detroit Avenue and what was known as the Lacy Sector northeast of the business district. Using the three different sources explained above (Records of The Tulsa Real Estate Exchange Commission, claims addressed at the Tulsa City Commission meetings, and the various court cases) each with its own particular faults, an estimate of just under \$2 million of property damage in 1921 dollars can be made. When using a consumer price index inflation calculator, a tool provided by the website at NASA, a 1921 amount of \$1.8 million would equal an amount of \$16,752,600 in 1999.¹⁶

The tragedy and triumph of North Tulsa transcends numbers and amounts and who owned what portion of what lot. The African American community not only thrived in an era of harsh “Jim Crow” and oppression, but when the bigotry of the majority destroyed their healthy community, the residents worked together and rebuilt. Not only did they rebuild, they again successfully ran their businesses, schooled their children, and worshiped at their magnificent churches in the shadow of a growing Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma and continuing legal racial separatism for more than forty years. In fact, one of the largest Ku Klux Klan buildings, not only in the state, but the country stood within a short walking distance of their community.¹⁷

Tulsa Klan's New \$200,000 Klavern Will Accommodate 3,000 Klansmen



HERE is the new \$200,000 Klavern of Tulsa Klan Number 2, Realm of Oklahoma.

The building was financed by members of Tulsa Klan who purchased stock in the building association at \$25 a share. The new Klavern will seat

3,000 Klansmen and is located near the center of the Tulsa business district. The structure is of brick and steel finished in stucco.

Offices of the Tulsa Klan have been moved to the new building which was ready for occupancy in May.

(Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

Endnotes

¹Bureau of the Census, 1920.

² Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). *Tulsa City Directories* for 1920-1923 (Tulsa: Polk-Hoffhine Directory Company, 1920-1923).

³*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴Records of Commission Proceedings, City of Tulsa, September 2, 1921. J.W. Megee's pawnshop received \$3,994.57 for guns and ammunition taken from the store during the riot.

⁵Court cases vs. the City of Tulsa and various insurance companies. Although the punitive damages were claimed in many of these cases, for this purpose only actual damage was tallied.

⁶Dismissal records from court cases filed.

⁷*Motley vs. Mechanics and Traders Insurance Company*, Case No. 23404 Tulsa County District Court (1937)

⁸Avery, Ruth Sigler, "Cyrus Stevens Avery," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 45 (Spring 1967), pp 84-91.

⁹*Tulsa City Directory*, 1921 (Tulsa: Polk-Hoffhine Directory Company, 1921)

¹⁰Comparing the 1920 to the 1922 *Tulsa City Directories*.

¹¹*Tulsa City Directories*, Tulsa County Court cases, etc.

¹²*Tulsa City Directories*, Court Cases, Deed Records, etc.

¹³Building permits garnished from *The Tulsa Daily Legal News*, 1921-1922.

¹⁴Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, pp. 84-89.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁶<<http://www/jsc.nasa.gov/bu2/inflateCPI.htm>>. The CPI inflation calculator is for adjusting costs from one year to another using the Consumer Price Index inflation index. The calculator is based on the average inflation index during the calendar year. The CPI represents changes in prices of all goods and services purchased for consumption by urban household. User fees and sales and excise taxes paid by the consumer are also included. Income taxes and investment items (like stocks, bonds and life insurance) are not included.

¹⁷Carter Blue Clark, "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1976), p. 71.



The William's Dreamland Theater before the riot, destruction after the riot, rebuilding process, and opened after the riot (All Photos Courtesy Greenwood Cultural Center).





On June 7, 1921, the Tulsa City Commission passed a fire ordinance whose real purpose was to prevent black Tulsans from rebuilding the Greenwood commercial district where it had previously stood. African American attorney B. C. Franklin, shown at right, helped the legal effort that was successful in overturning the ordinance (Courtesy Tulsa Historical Society).

Assessing State and City Culpability: The Riot and the Law

By Alfred L. Brophy

The Tulsa riot represented the breakdown of the rule of law.¹ As Bishop Mouzon told the congregation of the city's Boston Avenue Methodist Church just after the riot, "Civilization broke down in Tulsa." I do not attempt to place the blame, the mob spirit broke and hell was let loose. Then things happened that were on a footing with what the Germans did in Belgium, what the Turks did in Armenia, what the Bolsheviks did in Russia.² That breakdown of law is central to understanding the riot, the response afterwards, and the decision over what, if anything, should be done now.

This essay assesses the culpability of the city and the state of Oklahoma during the riot, questions that are of continuing importance today. This essay begins by reviewing the chronology of the riot, paying particular attention to the actions of governmental officials. It

draws largely upon testimony in the Oklahoma Supreme Court's 1926 opinion in *Redfearn v. American Central Insurance Company* to portray the events of the riot. Then it explores the attempts of Greenwood residents and other Tulsans who owned property in Greenwood to obtain relief from insurance companies and the city after the riot.

Investigating Tulsa's Culpability in the Riot

This section summarizes the evidence of the city's culpability in the riot. It emphasizes that Tulsa failed to take action to protect against the riot. More important, city officials deputized men right after the riot broke out. Some of those deputies — probably in conjunction with some uniformed police — officers were responsible for some of the burning of Greenwood. After the riot, the city took further action to prevent rebuilding by passing a zoning ordinance that re-



Greenwood Business District devastated by the race riot (Western history Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

quired the use of fireproof material in rebuilding.

“The Riot”

Questions of Interpretation and Sources

In reconstructing the historical record of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, there are difficulties in interpretation. Questions ranging from general issues such as the motive of Tulsa rioters and was a riot inevitable given the context of violence and racial tension in 1920s Tulsa to specific issues such as whether Dick Rowland would have been lynched had some black Tulsans not appeared at the courthouse, the nature of instructions the police gave to their deputies, and how many people died can be answered with varying degrees of certainty.³ The record establishes with about as much certainty as on any issue related to the riot that “special” deputy police officers were deeply involved in the burning of Greenwood. Contemporaneous reports establish the shameful record of the hastily deputized police.

Looking for Evidence: The Official Investigations

Important details of the riot are recorded in several contemporary accounts. The 1926⁴ opinion of the Oklahoma Supreme Court in *Redfearn v. American Central Insurance Company*, the least biased of the contemporaneous “official” reports of the riot, demonstrates the close connection between Tulsa’s special police and the riot.⁵ It culminated a two year suit by William Redfearn, a white man who owned two buildings in Greenwood: the Dixie Theatre and the Red Wing Hotel. Redfearn lost both buildings, both were insured for a total of \$19,000. The American Central Insurance Company refused payment on either building, citing a riot exclusion clause in the policies. Redfearn sued on the policy and the case was tried in April, 1924. The insurance company claimed that the property was destroyed by riot and the judge directed a verdict for the defendant at the conclusion of the trial. During the trial and subsequent appeal, Redfearn and the insurance company advanced competing stories about the riot. Their briefs present one of the most complete stories of the riot now available.⁶ They also capture the uncertainty of facts and outcome that is central to a true understanding of history. For we have



Curiosity reigned as whites toured the destroyed Greenwood district after the riot (Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

the written, neatly stylized version of “ancient myth” and the other unwritten, chaotic, full of contradictions, changes of pace, and surprises as life itself.⁷ As we try to recover the unwritten history, Redfearn’s hundreds of pages of testimony are indispensable. It may no longer be possible to think of the events put in motion by the *Tulsa Tribune*’s story on Rowland having any other outcome. However, it is necessary to understand the contingencies, to put ourselves back in the events as they were occurring, and to understand how forces came together in the riot. We now know the broad contours of the riot, but the testimony fills in gaps in specific areas and recovers the chaotic, fearful environment in which black and white Tulsans struggled to prevent violence, even as strong forces, like the ideas of equality and enforcement of the law against mob violence clashed with white views of the place that blacks should occupy. The following account is drawn from those briefs and is supplemented with contemporary newspaper stories.

Evolution of the Riot

As best as we can now determine, a crowd of whites began gathering at the Tulsa County courthouse in the early evening on Tuesday, May 31. They were drawn there at least in part by a newspaper story implying that nine-

teen-year-old Dick Rowland had assaulted seventeen-year-old Sarah Page, a white elevator operator.⁸ Sometime around 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and certainly by 6:30 p.m., rumors that Dick Rowland would be lynched that evening circulated in the Greenwood community.⁹ Greenwood residents were becoming more anxious as the evening wore on. William Gurley, owner of the Gurley Hotel in Greenwood and one of the wealthiest blacks in Tulsa, went with Mr. Webb to the courthouse to investigate the rumored lynching. The sheriff told him “there would be no lynching; if the witness could keep his folks away from the courthouse there wouldn’t be any trouble.” Gurley then went back to report his conversation with the sheriff to the crowd gathered outside his hotel. The crowd was skeptical. “You are a damn liar,” said one person. “They had taken a white man out of jail a few weeks before that, and that they were going to take this Negro out.” At that point the speaker “pointed a Winchester at [Gurley], and was stopped by a Negro lawyer named Spears.”¹⁰

At approximately 9:00 p.m., the situation was becoming more heated. William Redfearn, owner of a theater testified:

that he closed his business about 9:00 p.m. or 9:30 p.m. on the evening of May 31. He closed it because a colored girl came

into the theatre and was going from one person to another, telling them something, and he looked out into the street and saw several men in the street talking and bunched up. Upon inquiry as to what was wrong, someone said there was going to be a lynching and that was the reason they had come over there.¹¹

Redfearn went to the courthouse, where someone asked him to go back to Greenwood, to try to dissuade the black residents from coming to town. Despite Redfearn's efforts, he was unsuccessful. When he returned, "there was a bunch of men standing in front of the police station and across the street when he arrived at that place; that there was probably fifty or sixty men in front of the police station."¹² The police chief attempted to persuade the blacks to disperse. Gurley told the court about the unstable scene at the courthouse:

That some white man was making a speech and advised the people to go home, stating that the Negroes were riding around with high powered revolvers and guns downtown; that the speech had some effect and the crowd started to disperse, but would soon come back; that while this man was speaking the witness noticed "some colored men coming from Main street; that when the machine was up in front of the courthouse, the people there closed in around that bunch of men, and that when they got mixed up a pistol went off, but the crowd soon dispersed, and he didn't know whether anyone was killed or not."¹³

Shooting started after the confrontation.¹⁴

After the shooting, "hell . . . broke loose," as O.W. Gurley told William Redfearn when they met that night.¹⁵ The record is not as clear on what happened immediately after the initial shooting. White witnesses were likely reluctant to testify and few blacks witnessed the next events around the courthouse.

The mob broke into Bardon's pawnshop, looking for guns. Henry Sowders, a white man who operated the movie projector in the Williams' Dreamland Theater in Greenwood,

closed up shop around 10:30 p.m. His car had been commandeered by blacks and he was taken back towards the courthouse by a black man. As he passed the courthouse, he was told he "had better get on home to his family, if he had one, or else get some arms, for the thing was coming on."¹⁶ The police department's reaction to the events "coming on" was to commission hundreds of white men.¹⁷

One of the best descriptions of the unfolding of events came from Columbus F. Gabe, a black man who lived in Greenwood for about 15 years. His testimony at the Redfearn trial preserves the unfolding of the entire riot and thus allows us to reconstruct a picture through a single character. He first heard about the lynching around 6:30 p.m. He went home to pick up a gun, and then he went to the courthouse. When Gabe arrived at the courthouse, there were perhaps about 800 people there and tensions were already running high. Some people were yelling to "Get these niggers away from here." Meanwhile, Gabe was told by a carload of blacks to arm himself. Whites were going to the armory to arm themselves and several carloads of armed blacks headed towards the courthouse. Gabe left the courthouse area, but was still within earshot when the gun that began the riot went off. The next morning, he was ousted from his house by two men. One said to the other, "Kill him," and the other said, "No, he hasn't a gun, don't hurt him," and said, "Get on up with the crowd." He was then taken to the Convention Center.¹⁸

Barney Cleaver, a black member of the Tulsa Sheriffs Department, presented similar testimony about the way the forces gathered momentum around the riot. He was policing Greenwood Avenue when he heard rumors of a lynching, so he drove up to the courthouse. According to Cleaver, as the blacks were dispersing, a gun fired and then people began to run away. He stayed at the courthouse until about four o'clock the next morning and then he headed back to Greenwood, where he met about 15 or 20 black men. He told the group that no one had been lynched and that they should go home. Someone then "made the remark that he was a white man lover."¹⁹



On the morning of June 1, most black Tulsans who were taken into custody were brought to Convention Hall, on Brady Street. Later, detention areas were established at the fair grounds and McNulty ball park (Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

The next morning, a whistle blew about 5:00 a.m., and the invasion of Greenwood began. Gurley left his hotel around 8:30 a.m., because he became worried that it might burn and as white rioters appeared. Gurley stated,

“Those were white men, they was wearing khaki suits, all of them, and they saw me standing there and they said, ‘You better get out of that hotel because we are going to burn all of this Goddamn stuff, better get all your guests out.’ And they rattled on the lower doors of the pool hall and the restaurant, and the people began on the lower floor to get out, and I told the people in the hotel, I said ‘I guess you better get out.’ There was a deal of shooting going on from the elevator or the mill, somebody was over there with a machine gun and shooting down Greenwood Avenue, and the people got on the stairway going down to the street and they stampeded.”²⁰

Gurley hid under a school building for a while. When he came out, he was detained and taken to the Convention Center.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court’s Version of the Riot

The Oklahoma Supreme Court’s opinion in *Redfearn*, written by Commissioner Ray, acknowledges the city’s involvement in the riot. The court wrote that “the evidence shows that a great number of men engaged in arresting the Negroes found in the Negro section wore police badges or badges indicating they were deputy sheriffs.” It questions, however, whether the “men wearing police badges” were officers or were “acting in an official capacity.”²¹ That statement indicates Commissioner Ray’s pro-police bias. The case was appealed from a directed verdict against *Redfearn*, that meant the trial judge concluded there was no evidence from which a jury could conclude that the men wearing badges were officers. Yet, cases involving resisting arrest routinely conclude that a police badge indicates one’s authority to arrest. Simply put, if one of the blacks involved in the riot resisted one of the men wearing a badge, he could have been prosecuted for resisting arrest. Commissioner Ray could have insulated the insurance company from liability with the statement that, even assuming the men wearing badges were police officers, they were acting beyond their authority and were thus acting as



African Americans were detained by many different white's, not only the police or National Guard (Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

rioters. Ray's inconsistency in applying precedent suggests that his motive was not a solely impartial decision of the case before him, but the insulation of the police department and Tulsa from liability.

There is substantial testimony in Redfearn's brief, moreover, demonstrating a close connection between the "police deputies" and the Police Chief Fire Marshal, Wesley Bush, stated that when he arrived at the police station sometime after 10:00 p.m.,

the station was practically full of people, and that the people were armed; that there would be bunches of men go out of the police station, but he didn't know where they would go; that they would leave the police station and go out, and come back - they were out and in, all of them, that they were in squads, several of them together.²²

The instructions those special deputies received are unclear. According to pleadings in a suit filed by a black riot victim, one deputy officer gave instructions to "Go out and kill you a d__m nigger."²³ Another allegation was that the mayor gave instructions to "burn every Negro house up to Haskell Street."²⁴ Other contemporary reports contain similar allegations.²⁵

Whether they received instructions to "ru[n] the Negro out of Tulsa," as one of the photos of the riot was captioned or not, many of the rioters

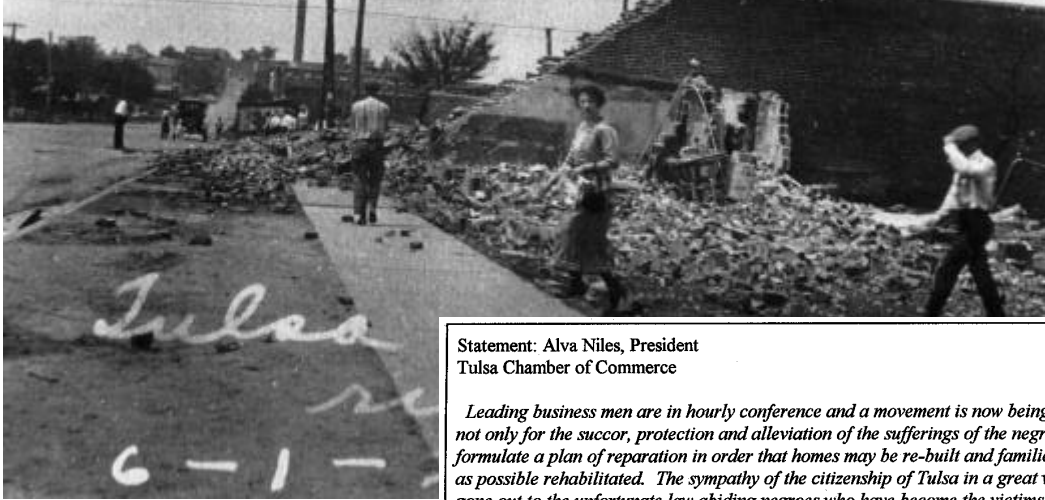
wore badges and started fires.²⁶ Green Smith, a black carpenter who lived in Muskogee and was in Tulsa for a few days working on the Dreamland Theater installing a cooling system, testified to the role of the special police during the riot. He awoke before 5:00 a.m. and went to work at the theater, but soon heard shooting. The shooting was heavy from 5:00 a.m. until around 8:00 a.m., and then it let up. But by 9:30, "there was a gang came down the street knocking on the doors and setting the buildings afire." Smith thought they were police. In response to a cross-examination question, how he could know they were police, Smith testified, "They came and taken fifty dollars of money, and I was looking right at them."²⁷ He saw a gang of about ten to twelve wearing "Special Police" and "Deputy Sheriff" badges. "Some had ribbons and some of them had regular stars."²⁸ Smith was arrested and taken to the Convention Center.

The insurance company's brief presents a different story, one that blames Tulsa blacks. But perhaps most telling is the insurance company's argument at the end of the brief, in which the insurance company was arguing that there was a riot and, therefore, they did not have to pay for the losses. There were from a few hundred to several thousand people engaged in the Tulsa race riot. They met at different places including the courthouse, Greenwood Avenue, the hardware store, and the pawn shop. They fully armed themselves with guns and am-

Statement: L. J. Martin, Chairman
City of Tulsa's Executive Welfare Committee

"Tulsa can only redeem herself from the country-wide shame and humiliation in which she is today plunged by complete restitution of the destroyed black belt. The rest of the United States must know that the real citizenship of Tulsa weeps at this unspeakable crime and will make good the damage, so far as can be done, to the last penny."

Ellsworth, Scott - *Death In A Promised Land*, p. 83



(Photo Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

Statement: Alva Niles, President
Tulsa Chamber of Commerce

Leading business men are in hourly conference and a movement is now being organized, not only for the succor, protection and alleviation of the sufferings of the negroes, but to formulate a plan of reparation in order that homes may be re-built and families as nearly as possible rehabilitated. The sympathy of the citizenship of Tulsa in a great way has gone out to the unfortunate law abiding negroes who have become the victims of the action, and bad advice of some of the lawless leaders, and as quickly as possible rehabilitation will take place and reparation made. . .

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.

Minutes, Tulsa Chamber of Commerce Board Meeting June 15, 1921

munition, with a common intent to execute a common plan, to-wit: the extermination of the colored people of Tulsa and the destruction of the colored settlement, homes, and buildings, by fire.²⁹

Apportioning Blame to the City

Whatever interpretation one places on the origin of the riot, there seems to be a consensus emerging from historians that the riot was much worse because of the actions of Tulsa officials. Major General Charles F. Barrett, who was in charge of the Oklahoma National Guard during the riot and thus was a participant in the closing moments of the riot, wrote in his book *Oklahoma After Fifty Years* about the role of the deputies in fueling the riot. The police chief had deputized perhaps 500 men to help put down the riot.

He did not realize that in a race war a large part if not a majority, of those special deputies were imbued with the same spirit of destruction that animated the mob.

They became as deputies the most dangerous part of the mob and after the arrival of the adjutant general and the declaration of martial law the first arrests ordered were those of special officers who had hindered the fire men in their abortive efforts to put out the incendiary fires that many of these special officers were accused of setting.³⁰

Several other white men testified about the role of the police. According to testimony found in the Oklahoma Attorney General's papers, a bricklayer, Laurel Buck, testified that after the riot broke out he went to the police station and asked for a commission. He did not receive it, but he was instructed to "get a gun, and get busy and try to get a nigger."³¹ Buck went to the Tulsa Hardware Store, where he received a gun. Like many other men, Buck was issued a weapon by Tulsa officials. Buck then stood guard at Boston and Third. In the words of the lawyer who questioned Buck, he "went to get a Negro." By that he meant that, if he had seen a

black man shooting at white people he would have “tried to kill him.” He was “out to protect the lives of white people . . . under specific orders from a policeman at the police department.” And the only reason Buck did not kill any blacks was that he did not see any. The next morning he went near Greenwood, where he saw two uniformed police officers breaking into buildings and setting them afire.³²

Another witness, Judge Oliphant, linked the police and their special deputies to burning, even murder. The seventy-three-year old Oliphant went to Greenwood to check on his rental property there. He called the police department around eight o’clock and asked for help protecting his homes.³³ No assistance came, but shortly after his call, a gang of men — four uniformed officers and some deputies — came along. Instead of protecting property, “they were the chief fellows setting fires.”³⁴ They shot Dr. A.C. Jackson and then began burning houses.³⁵

Oliphant tried to dissuade them from burning. “This last crowd made an agreement that they would not burn that property [across the street from my property] because I thought it would burn mine too and I promised that if they wouldn’t, . . . I would see that no Negroes ever lived in that row of houses any more.”³⁶

The record from the testimony of credible whites before the attorney general and in the *Redfearn* case, in conjunction with General Barrett’s book, demonstrate the involvement of the city in the destruction.

State Culpability: The Divided (and Ambiguous) Roles of the National Guard

During the opening moments of the crisis, the local units of the National Guard behaved admirably. They defended the armory against a crowd of gun-hungry whites, then offered their assistance to the police in putting down the riot. However, it is precisely that offer of assistance and their subsequent cooperation with the Tulsa police that calls their behavior into question.

There also is substantial evidence that the out-of-town units of the National Guard — those who had traveled throughout the night from Oklahoma City — helped restore order when they arrived around 9:00 am on the morning of June 1. They deserve some of the credit for limiting the loss of life caused by the white mobs that invaded Greenwood. Nevertheless, the local units of the National Guard may have acted unconstitutionally in restoring order. The guardsmen arrested every black resident of Tulsa they could find and then took them into “protective custody.” That left Greenwood property unpro-



(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University Of Tulsa).

tected -and vulnerable to the “special deputies” who came along and burned it.

The key questions then become, what was the role of the local units of the National Guard that were present in Tulsa even before the riot broke out and were there throughout the riot? What was the role of the out-of-town units of the National Guard that arrived from Oklahoma City around 9:00 a.m. the morning of June 1?

The local units knew that there was trouble brewing in the early evening of May 31. They closely guarded their supply of ammunition and guns and waited orders from the governor about what to do next. Sometime after 10:00 p.m., following the violent confrontation at the courthouse, the local units, under the direction of Colonel Rooney, went into action and traveled the few blocks from the armory to the police station, where they established headquarters. The soldiers helped to stop looting near the courthouse.³⁷ They then began working in conjunction with local authorities to try to quell the riot. There was consideration given to protecting Greenwood by keeping white mobs out. But such a plan was abandoned in favor of another, which had disastrous consequences for Greenwood. The local units of the Guard systematically disarmed and arrested Greenwood residents, leaving their property defenseless. When the “special deputies” came along in the wake of the Guard, it was a simple task to burn Greenwood property.

After-Action Reports: The Testimony of the Local Units of the National Guard

The National Guard’s after-action reports describe their role in the riot using their own words. Two reports in particular suggest that the local units of the Guard — while ostensibly operating to protect the lives and property of Greenwood residents — disarmed and arrested Greenwood residents (and not white rioters), leaving their property defenseless, allowing deputies, uniformed police officers, and mobs to burn it.

According to the report filed by Captain Frank Van Voorhis, the police called around 8:30 p.m. to ask for help in controlling the crowds at the courthouse. No guardsmen went

to the courthouse until they received orders from Lieutenant Colonel Rooney, the officer in charge of the Tulsa units of the National Guard. Van Voorhis arrived after the riot had broken out at 10:30 p.m., with two officers and sixteen men. They went to the police station, where they apparently began working in conjunction with the police. At 1:15 a.m. they “produced” a machine gun and placed it on a truck, along with three experienced machine gunners and six other enlisted men. They then traveled around the city to spots where “there was firing” until 3:00 a.m., when Colonel Rooney ordered them to Stand Pipe Hill. At that point, Rooney deployed the men along Detroit Avenue, from Stand Pipe Hill to Archer, where they worked “disarming and arresting Negroes and sending them to the Convention Hall by police cars and trucks.”³⁸ Van Voorhis’s report details the capture of more than 200 “prisoners.” Van Voorhis’s men were able to disarm and capture those Greenwood residents without much gunfire. It appears that his men killed no one.

Captain McCuen’s men, however, did fire upon a number of Greenwood residents in the process of responding to what the local units of the Guard called a “Negro uprising.” Sometime after 11:00 p.m., McCuen brought 20 men to the police station, where Colonel Rooney had set up headquarters. They guarded the border between white Tulsa and Greenwood for several hours. Then they began moving towards Greenwood and established a line along Detroit, on the west side of Greenwood. They began pushing into Greenwood, using a truck with an old (and likely inoperable machine gun on it), probably around 3:00 a.m. McCuen’s men, like Van Voorhis’s, were working in close conjunction with the Tulsa police. They arrested a “large number” of Greenwood residents and turned them over to the “police department automobiles,” that were close by “at all times.” Those cars “were manned by ex-service men, and in many cases plain-clothes men of the police department.”³⁹ The close connection between the local units of the National Guard and the police department is not surprising. Major Daley, for instance, was also a police officer.⁴⁰ The Guard established its headquarters at the police station

.⁴¹ The local units were instructed to follow the directions of the civilian authorities.⁴² Once they went into operation, the local units took charge of a large number of volunteers, many of whom were American Legion members and veterans of the war.⁴³

Some may argue that the Guard was taking Greenwood residents into protective custody. Indeed, the local units of the National Guard told the men they were disarming, and they were there to protect them.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the after-action reports suggest that the Guard's work in conjunction with local authorities was designed to put down the supposed "Negro uprising," not to protect the Greenwood residents.⁴⁵

McCuen's men did not seem to be working to protect blacks. In fact, after daylight he received an urgent request from the police department to stop blacks from firing into white homes along Sunset Hill, located on the northwest side of Greenwood. "We advanced to the crest of Sunset Hill in a skirmish line and then a little further north to the military crest of the hill where our men were ordered to lie down because of the intense fire of the blacks who had formed a good skirmish line at the foot of the hill to the northeast among the outbuildings of the Negro settlement which stops at the foot of the hill." The guardsmen fired at will for nearly half an hour and then the Greenwood residents began falling back, "getting good cover among the frame buildings of the negro settlement." As the guardsmen advanced, they continued to meet stiff opposition from some "negroes who had barricaded themselves in houses." According to McCuen, the men who were barricaded "refused to stop firing and had to be killed." It is unclear how many they killed. Later, at the northeast corner of the settlement, "Ten or more negroes barricaded themselves in a concrete store and a dwelling." The guardsmen fought along side civilians, and at this point, some blacks and whites were killed.⁴⁶

As the guardsmen were advancing, fires appeared all over Greenwood. Apparently, the white mobs followed closely after the guardsmen as they swept through Greenwood disarming and arresting the residents. They fires

followed shortly afterwards. In essence, the guardsmen facilitated the destruction of Greenwood because they removed residents who had no desire to leave and appeared more than capable of defending themselves. While the after-action reports are sparse, they create a picture of the local units of the Guard working in close conjunction with the local civilian authorities to disarm and arrest Greenwood residents. It was those same civilian authorities who were later criticized for burning, looting, and killing in Greenwood.

Colonel Rooney, who was in charge of the local units of the Guard, admitted that the Guard fired upon Greenwood residents. However, he claimed that his men only fired when fired upon.⁴⁷ Rooney's men were lined up facing into Greenwood and they positioned to protect white property and lives. When the Guard heard that blacks were firing upon whites, they moved into position to stop the firing. When the Tulsa police thought that five hundred black men were coming from Muskogee, they put a machine gun crew on the road from Muskogee with orders to stop at the invasion "at all hazards."⁴⁸ When Colonel Rooney heard a rumor that the five hundred black men had commandeered a train in Muskogee, he went off to organize a patrol to meet it at the station.⁴⁹ Yet, in contrast, when whites were firing upon blacks who were in the Guard's custody, they responded by hurrying the prisoners along at a faster pace. The Guard seems to have been too busy working in conjunction with civilian authorities arresting Greenwood residents, or too preoccupied putting down the "Negro uprising" to protect Greenwood property.

McCuen concluded that "all firing" had ceased by 11:00 a.m. The reason for the end of the fighting was not that the Guard had succeeded in bringing the white rioters under control. Rather, it was that the Greenwood residents had been arrested or driven out. "Practically all of the Negro men had retreated to the northeast or elsewhere or had been disarmed and sent to concentration points."⁵⁰

Interpreting the Local Units' Actions

There remains the question of how one should interpret the actions of the National Guard's local units. Individuals appear to have

H. A. Guess, Black Wall Street
Attorney & Riot Survivor

"Tulsa Will". . . The question is will Tulsa raise to the emergency and make good the losses which she has visited upon her colored citizens in the upheaval of June 1st, better known as Tulsa Race Riot? Will her broadminded, big-hearted leaders and town and empire builders surrender to the whim of a few political buccaneers and land schemers whose ulterior motive is self-aggrandisement at the expense of the public will, or, will they rush aside some of the cob-webs of legal technicalities and face the issues of facts in a courageous, generous and altruistic spirit that has so signally characterized the triumphal march at the head of modern civilization of the proud Anglo-Saxon race, and proceed to get on foot plans for the rehabilitation of the burned district? . . . What are some of the things that should be foremost in such a program?

Reparation. . . will restore confidence of those whose faith has been seriously shaken; will give notice to the outside world that if Tulsa is big enough, strong enough, cosmopolitan enough to match the greatest race riot in American history, she is also generous enough, proud enough, rich enough and possessing enough respect for law and order and disdaining anything that savors of greed, graft and legal oppressions, to fail to do entire justice to a sorely tried people whose accumulations, in many instances, of a life-time, were swept away in a few hours and too, without any fault on their part. It may very well be said by Tulsa's legal advisers that there is no precedent for re-embursement in such cases; that a bond issue and election to make good the losses would be illegal. We answer the race riot was also illegal and, since the damage wrought was also great, some way should be found to make good the loss. There is and should be an adequate remedy to adjust every great wrong.

Column, Oklahoma Sun, August 3, 1921

been arrested based on race. Some have argued that the Guard took Greenwood residents into protective custody and that they protected lives by doing so. There were simply too few guardsmen to protect all of Greenwood from invasion by white mobs.⁵¹ So the question becomes, is it permissible to draw such distinctions based on race in time of crisis? Was it constitutionally permissible to arrest (or take into protective custody) Greenwood residents? Did the local units of the National Guard behave properly? Mary Jones Parrish captured the frustration of Greenwood residents after the riot:

It is the general belief that if [the state troops from Oklahoma City] had reached the scene sooner many lives and valuable property would have been saved. Just as praise for the State troops was on every tongue, so was denunciation of the Home Guards on every lip. Many stated that they [the local guard] fooled [the residents] out of their homes on a promise that if they would give up peacefully they would give

them protection, as well as see that their property was saved . . . When they returned to what were once their places of business or homes, with hopes built upon the promises of the Home Guards, how keen was their disappointment to find all of their earthly possessions in ashes or stolen.⁵²

Parrish's account testifies to the belief among Greenwood residents that the local troops were culpable and the out-of-town units were responsible for ending the riot, or at least for restoring order afterwards.

While in extremely rare instances it is permissible for the government to draw invidious distinctions based solely on race,⁵³ such action must be narrowly tailored. In 1921, the Supreme Court recognized that it was inappropriate for the government (as opposed to private individuals) to segregate on the basis of race.⁵⁴ The reports of the Guard units based in Tulsa acknowledge that they arrested many blacks, beginning as early as 6:30 a.m. on June 1.⁵⁵ At that point, much of Greenwood was still intact. It is likely that had the local units not arrested those

residents, their homes would not have been vacant and they might not have been burned. In essence the Guard created the danger when they took Greenwood residents into custody.

Much of the United States Supreme Court's law on racial arrests arises out of World War II. Three cases in particular address the constitutionality of drawing distinctions based on race: *Hirabayashi v. United States*,⁵⁶ decided in June 1943, and *Korematsu v. United States*,⁵⁷ and *Ex Parte Endo*,⁵⁸ decided on the same day in December 1944. They all addressed the legality of the United States laws regarding Japanese Americans. *Hirabayashi*, the first of the race cases to reach the United States Supreme Court, addressed the constitutionality of a curfew imposed on Americans of Japanese ancestry living in Hawaii. A majority of the court upheld the racially discriminatory curfew. One concurring justice observed that "where the peril is great and the time is short, temporary treatment on a group basis may be the only practicable expedient whatever the ultimate percentage of those who are detained for cause."⁵⁹ The concurring opinions were careful to note that distinctions based on race were extraordinarily difficult to justify. They went "to the brink of constitutional power."⁶⁰ While arrests might be justified upon a showing of immediate harm, they had to be justified. "Detention for reasonable cause is one thing. Detention on account of ancestry is another," Justice William O. Douglas wrote.⁶¹ Justice Murphy's concurrence further limited the government's power to detain American citizens without any showing that they posed a threat.⁶²

While the Supreme Court unanimously upheld a curfew imposed upon American citizens on the basis of race, in two cases decided the next year, some justices voted against continued distinctions based on race. In *Ex Parte Endo*, Mitsuye Endo, an American citizen whose loyalty to the United States was unquestioned, challenged her continued detention in a relocation camp. The United States sought to justify the detention on the ground that there were community sentiments against her and that, in essence, she was detained for her own

safety. In rejecting the argument, the United States Supreme Court observed that community hostility might be a serious problem, but it refused to permit continued detention on that basis once loyalty was demonstrated.⁶³

The most important-and most heavily criticized case of the trilogy was *Korematsu*, which upheld the forced relocation of Japanese Americans. The court upheld the relocation, with the bold contention that "when under conditions of modern warfare our shores are threatened by hostile forces, the power to protect must be commensurate with the threatened danger."⁶⁴ The majority opinion acknowledged that the majority of those interned were loyal.⁶⁵ We now recognize the decision as improper. Indeed, the Civil Rights Act of 1988, that provided \$20,000 compensation to each Japanese American person interned during World War II was premised on the belief that *Korematsu* and the relocation that it upheld was wrong. The act apologized for the relocation and internment and provided some compensation for those affected.

Justice Roberts' dissenting opinion in *Korematsu*, argued that the relocation was unconstitutional, and recognized that citizens might occasionally be taken into protective custody. At other times, the government can, Roberts acknowledged, "exclude citizens temporarily from a locality." For example, it may exclude citizens from a fire zone.⁶⁶ But the internments went beyond limited exclusion for the protection of the people excluded and so Roberts thought them improper. *Korematsu* involved internment "based on his ancestry, and solely because of his ancestry, without evidence or inquiry concerning his loyalty. . . ."⁶⁷

The evidence seems to establish that the local units of the National Guard, in conjunction with police deputies, arrested based on race, not on danger to the Greenwood residents themselves. The fear of Tulsa's police force was that the Greenwood residents were engaged in an uprising. Their response was to disarm and arrest, in some cases taking life to do so. That behavior is suspect even under the majority's opinion in *Korematsu*. Under Justice Roberts's dissent, the actions of the local units of the National Guard are even more suspect. There is one other

precedent that is important in interpreting the National Guard's actions: the United States Supreme Court's 1909 decision in *Moyer v. Peabody*.⁶⁸ That case arose from a conflict between miners and mining companies in Colorado. The president of the Western Federation of Miners was arrested by the National Guard and detained for several weeks, even though there 'was no probable cause to arrest him. Simply put, he had committed no crime. Colorado's governor explained that there was an insurrection and that he had to arrest Moyer and detain him to put down the insurrection.⁶⁹ Justice Holmes gave the National Guard, acting under the governor's orders, broad power to arrest in order to put down an insurrection. Holmes refused to allow a suit against the governor for deprivation of constitutional rights, as long as the governor had a good faith belief that the arrest was necessary. It is easier, though, to classify the arrest of one person in Moyer, as justified, than the wholesale arrest of Greenwood residents. Moyer supported limited arrests to stop insurrections. The local units of the National Guard, in conjunction with deputized Tulsa police officers, arrested thousands. In the process — according to their own reports—they killed an unspecified number of blacks. Such actions are difficult to defend even applying the legal standards of the times.

Newspaper Accounts of the Official Involvement in the Riot

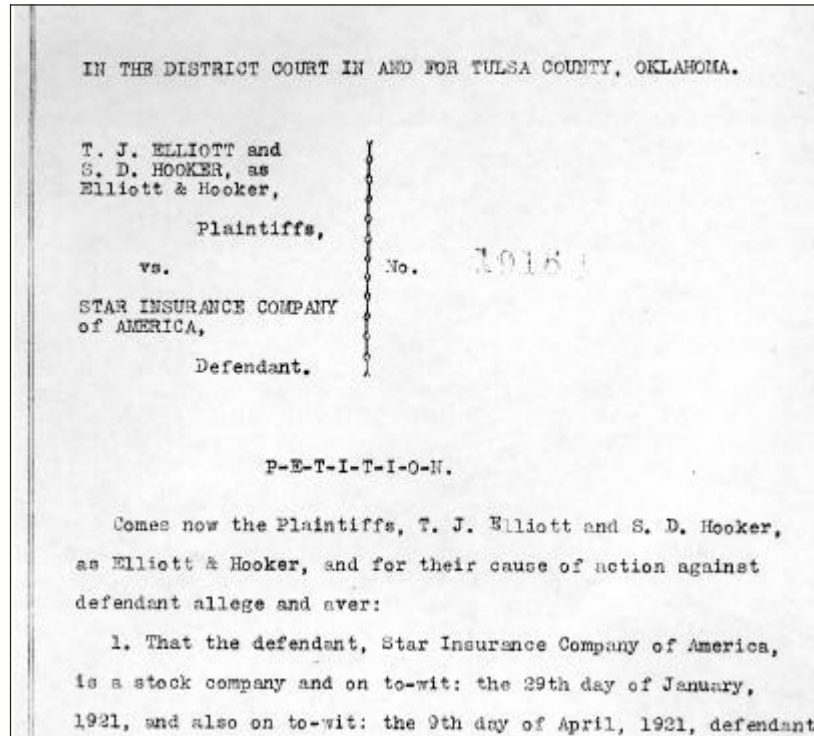
The accounts of the riot as it was unfolding in the *Tulsa World* show the coordination of the police, National Guard, and white citizens. Some white men were working to arrest "every Negro seen on the streets." Many of those people had at a minimum volunteered their services to the police.⁷⁰ "Armed guards were placed in cars and sent out on patrol duty. Companies of about 50 men each were organized and marched through the business streets."⁷¹ As the *Tulsa World* stated in an editorial on June 2, "Semi-organized bands of white men systematically applied the torch while others shot on sight men of color."⁷²

The black press presented starker pictures of official involvement in the destruction. An

account of Van B. Hurley, who was identified as a former Tulsa police officer, was printed in the *Chicago Defender* in October 1921. The account was circulated by Elisha Scot, an attorney from Topeka, Kansas, who represented a number of riot victims. The *Defender* reported that Hurley, "who was honorably discharged from the force and given splendid recommendations by his captains and lieutenants," named city officials who planned the attack on Greenwood using airplanes. Hurley described "the conference between local aviators and the officials. After this meeting Hurley asserted the airplanes darted out from hangars and hovered over the district dropping nitroglycerin on buildings, setting them afire." Hurley said the officials told their deputies to deal aggressively with Greenwood residents. "They gave instructions for every man to be ready and on the alert and if the niggers wanted to start anything to be ready for them. They never put forth any efforts at all to prevent it whatever, and said if they started anything to kill every b_ son of a b_ they could find."⁷³ Hurley's account is somewhat suspect, but it fits with Laurel Buck's testimony that the police told white Tulsans to "get out and get a nigger."

At a minimum, there was substantial planning by the police for the systematic arrest and detention of Greenwood residents. Fire Marshal Wesley Bush reported that he saw armed men coming and going from the police station all evening.⁷⁴ The *Tulsa Tribune* reported that there had

been plans to take Greenwood residents to the Convention Center. It is very difficult at this point to reconstruct the instructions from the mayor and police chief to the deputies. That difficulty arises in large part because the city refused to allow a serious investigation of the riot. There are, however, a substantial number of reports of those instructions and the pattern of destruction certainly fits with those reports. Quite simply, it is difficult to explain the systematic arrest of blacks, the destruction of their property, and the timing of the invasion of Greenwood without relying upon some coordination by the Tulsa city government, with the assistance of the local units of the National Guard.⁷⁵



Many owners of destroyed property took action against insurance companies.

Statutory Liability for City's Failure to Protect

Asking for reparations for the riot does not require us to read our own morality back onto Tulsa at the early part of the century. Many states provided a remedy for the city's failure to protect riot victims in the 1920s. At the time of the riot, for instance, Illinois had a statute providing a cause of action for damage done by riot when the local government failed to protect against the rioters. The Illinois law provided that the municipality where violence occurred was liable to the families of "lynching" victims. It allowed claims for wrongful death up to \$5,000.⁷⁶ The Illinois courts construed "lynching" to include deaths during race riots.⁷⁷ If the riot had occurred in Illinois, there would have been a right to recover if the police failed to protect the victims. Tulsans knew about the statutes in Illinois and Kansas. They even consulted an attorney from East Saint Louis for help in understanding their legal liability.⁷⁸

The Aftermath of the Riot: Of Prosecutions, Lawsuits, and Ordinances

As Tulsans began to shift the rubble after the riot, they asked themselves how had such a tragedy occurred, who was to blame, and how might they rebuild. A grand jury investigated the riot's causes and returned indictments against about seventy men, mostly blacks. The city re-zoned the burned district, to discourage rebuilding, as Greenwood residents and whites who owned property in Greenwood filed lawsuits against the city and their insurance companies. The lawsuits, filed by more than one-hundred people who lost property, testify to the attempts made by riot victims to use the law for relief, and its failure to assist them, even after the government had destroyed their property.

The Failure of Reparations Through Lawsuits

Greenwood residents and property owners (both black and white), filed more than one-hundred suits against their insurance companies, the city of Tulsa, and even Sinclair Oil Company, that allegedly provided airplanes that were used in attacking Greenwood. Not one of

those suits was successful. One, filed by William Redfearn, a white man who owned a hotel and a movie theater in Greenwood, went to trial and then on appeal to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Redfearn's insurance company denied liability, citing a riot exclusion clause. The clause exempted the insurance company from liability for loss due to riot.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court interpreted the damage as due to riot—an understandable conclusion, and thereby immunized insurance companies from liability.⁷⁹ Following the failure of Mr. Redfearn's suit, none other went to trial. That is not surprising. It is difficult to see how anyone could have prevailed in the wake of the *Redfearn* opinion. They lay fallow for years and then were dismissed in 1937.

The Grand Jury and the Failure of Prosecutions

Just as the legal system had failed to provide a vehicle for recovery by Greenwood residents and property owners, the legal system failed to hold Tulsans criminally responsible for the reign of terror during the riot. The grand jury, convened a few days after the riot, returned about seventy indictments. A few people, mostly blacks, were held in jail. Others were released on bond, pending their trials for rioting. However, most of the cases were dismissed in September, 1921, when Dick Rowland's case was dismissed. When Sarah Page failed to appear as the complaining witness, the district attorney dismissed his case.⁸⁰ Other dismissals soon followed.⁸¹ Apparently, no one, black or white, served time in prison for murder, larceny, or arson, although some people may have been held in custody pending dismissal of suits in the fall of 1921.

The grand jury's most notable action is not the indictments that it returned but the whitewash it engaged in. Their report, which was published in its entirety in the *Tulsa World* under the heading "Grand Jury Blames Negroes for Inciting Race Rioting: Whites Clearly Exonerated,"⁸² told a laughable story of black culpability for the riot. The report is an amazing document, that demonstrates how evidence can be selectively interpreted. It is, quite sim-

ply, a classic case of interpreter's extreme biases coloring their vision of events.

The grand jury, which began work on June 7, took testimony from dozens of white and black Tulsans. It operated within the framework established by Tulsa District Judge Biddson. He instructed the jurors to investigate the causes of the riot. Biddson feared that the spirit of lawlessness was growing. The jurors' conclusions would be "marked indelibly upon the public mind" and would be important in deterring future riots.⁸³ It cast its net widely, looking at the riot as it unfolded as well as social conditions in Tulsa more generally.

The grand jury fixed the immediate cause of the riot as the appearance "of a certain group of colored men who appeared at the courthouse . . . for the purpose of protecting . . . Dick Rowland." From there it laid blame entirely on those people who sought to defend Rowland's life. It discounted rumors of lynching. "There was no mob spirit among the whites, no talk of lynching and no arms."⁸⁴

Echoing the discussions of the riot in the white Tulsa newspapers, the grand jury identified two remote causes of the riot which were "vital to the public interest." Those causes were the "agitation among the Negroes of social equality" and the break down of law enforcement. The agitation for social equality was the first of the remote causes the jury discussed:

Certain propaganda and more or less agitation had been going on among the colored population for some time. This agitation resulted in the accumulation of firearms among the people and the storage of quantities of ammunition, all of which was accumulative in the minds of the Negro which led them as a people to believe in equal rights, social equality, and their ability to demand the same.⁸⁵

The Nation broke the grand jury's code. Charges that blacks were radicals meant that blacks were insufficiently obsequious. They asked for legal rights.

Negroes were uncompromisingly denouncing of "Jim-Crow" cars, lynching, peonage; in short, were asking that the Federal constitutional guarantees of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" be given regardless of color. The

Negroes of Tulsa and other Oklahoma cities are pioneers; men and women who have dared, men and women who have had the initiative and the courage to pull up stakes in other less-favored states and face hardship in a newer one for the sake of greater eventual progress. That type is ever less ready to submit to insult. Those of the whites who seek to maintain the old white group control naturally do not relish seeing Negroes emancipating themselves from the old system.⁸⁶

Such was the mind set of the grand jury that they thought ideas about racial equality were to blame for the riot, instead of explaining why Greenwood residents felt it necessary to visit the courthouse. Thus, the grand jury recast its evidence to fit its established prejudices. And as it did that, as it confirmed white Tulsa's myth that the blacks were to blame for the riot, it helped to remove the moral impetus to reparations.

Preventing Rebuilding?

Given the context of racial violence and segregation legislation of Progressive-era Oklahoma, it makes sense that one of the city government's first responses was to expand the

fire ordinance to incorporate parts of Greenwood. That expansion made rebuilding in the burned district prohibitively expensive. The city presented two rationales: to expand the industrial area around the railroad yard and to further separate the races.⁸⁷

The story of the zoning ordinance is one of the few triumphs of the rule of law to emerge from the riot. Greenwood residents who wanted to rebuild challenged the ordinance as a violation of property rights as well as on technical grounds. They first won a temporary restraining order on technical grounds (that there had been insufficient notice before the ordinance was passed). Then, following re-promulgation of the ordinance, they won a permanent injunction, apparently on the grounds that it would deprive the Greenwood property owners of their property rights if they were not permitted to rebuild.⁸⁸

And so, having won one court victory, Greenwood residents were left to their own devices: free to rebuild their property, but without the direct assistance from the city that was crucial to doing so. Now the question is whether the city and state wish to acknowledge that as a debt and to pay it?



(Courtesy Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Libraries).

Endnotes

¹This brief report on “the riot and the law” is necessarily summary. For a fuller exploration of many of the issues discussed here, see Alfred L. Brophy, “Reconstructing the Dreamland” (2000), available at

²Black Agitators Blamed for Riot, *Tulsa World*, June 6, 1921.

³There are seven key questions, which need answers in developing a clear picture of the riot: (1) How did Tulsa go from minor event in elevator to attempted lynching?

(2) How did Tulsa go from confrontation at the courthouse to riot?

(3) What was the role of the police? That question has several sub-parts:

(a) How many were commissioned as deputies?

(b) What instructions did police give the deputies?

(c) How much planning was there for the attack on Greenwood?

(4) What was the role of the mayor?

(5) What was the role of the National Guard?

(6) What motivated the changing of the fire ordinance and the rezoning of Greenwood to require building using fireproof material? How was that resolved?

(7) Was a riot inevitable? That question has several sub-parts:

(a) Was there planning before the evening of May 31, to “run the Negro out of Tulsa,” as some alleged. See, e.g., “The Tulsa Riots”, 22 *The Crisis*. pp. 114-16 July 1921. “Compare Public Welfare Board Vacated by Commission: Mayor in Statement on Race Trouble”, *Tulsa Tribune*, June 14, 1921 (reprinting Mayor T.D. Evans speech to City Commission. June 14, 1921) “It is the judgment of many wise heads in Tulsa, based upon observation of a number of years that this uprising was inevitable. If that be true and this judgment had to come upon us, then I say it was good general ship to let the destruction come to that section where the trouble was hatched up, put in motion and where it had its inception.”

(b) Were racial tensions so great that there would have been a riot even without the attempted lynching of Dick Rowland? See Walter F. White, “The Eruption of Tulsa”, *The Nation*, pp. 909-910 (detailing elements of racial tension and lawlessness in Tulsa). See also: R. L. Jones, “Blood and Oil”, *Survey* 46, June 1921.

On questions of historical interpretation, where the record is only imperfectly preserved, there are inevitable uncertainties.

⁴221 *Pacific Reporter* p. 929 (1926).

⁵The other “official” reports, the grand jury report and the fire marshal’s report, are less helpful in reconstructing the riot. The hastily prepared grand jury report blamed Tulsa’s blacks for the riot. The grand jury report focused blame on “exaggerated ideas of equality.” See “Grand Jury Blames Negroes for Inciting Race Rioting: Whites Clearly Exonerated”, *Tulsa World*, June 26, 1921, pp. 1,8 (reprinting grand jury report). The grand jury report, for instance, declared that the riot was the direct result of “an effort on the part of a certain group of colored men who appeared at the courthouse . . . for the purpose of protecting . . . Dick Rowland....” *Id.* at 1. An indirect cause of the riot was the “agitation among the Negroes” for ideas “of social equality.” *Id.* It is an extraordinary document, which illustrates in vivid detail how an investigation can select evidence, refuse to seek out alternative testimony, and then formulate an interpretation that is remarkably biased in the story it creates.

The fire marshal’s report cannot be located. There was another investigation, perhaps by a special city court of inquiry. See “Hundred to be Called in Probe”, *Tulsa World*, June 10, 1921. “With the formal empaneling and swearing in of the grand jury Thursday morning the third investigation into the causes and placing of responsibility for the race rioting in Tulsa law week was begun.”; “Police Order Negro Porters Out of Hotels”, *Tulsa Tribune*, June 14, 1921. “This action follows scathing criticism of the system that allowed the Negro porters to carry on their nefarious practices of selling booze and soliciting for women of the underworld made . . . at the city’s court of inquiry held several weeks ago.”

⁶Brief of Plaintiff in Error, *William Redfearn, Plaintiff in Error v. American Central Insurance Company*, 243 P 929 (Okla. 1926), No. 15,851 [hereinafter Plaintiff’s Brief].

Of the previous historians of the riot, only Ellsworth has even mentioned Redfearn’s suit. See Ellsworth, *supra* note 2, at 135, n. 57. No one has utilized the Oklahoma Supreme Court’s opinion or the briefs.

⁷Ellison, “Going to the Territory”, in Ellison, *Going to the Territory*, p. 124 (1986). See also Brent Staples, *Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White*, 1994, (exploring ways that life unfolds and the ways that individuals and families perceive, react to, and rewrite that history). Ellison’s essay spoke in terms similar to those employed by Bernard Bailyn, whose widely read monograph on Thomas Hutchinson, the governor of Massachusetts on the eve of

the American Revolution, presented a sympathetic portrait of the Loyalist, in an effort to present a comprehensive portrait of the coming of Revolution. See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson IX*, 1974. One hopes that the Redfearn testimony, when combined with a careful reading of the other texts, will enable us to “embrace the whole event, see it from all sides.” *Id.* We might even see “the inescapable boundaries of action; the blindness of the actors—in a word, the tragedy of the event.” *Id.*

The competing narratives of the insurance company and Redfearn showed the ways that Tulsans interpreted what happened during the riot and the conclusions they drew from those events. Cf. Judith L. Maute, *Peevyhouse v. Garland Coal and Mining Co. Revisited: The Ballad of Willie and Lucille*, 89 NW. U. L. REV. 1341, 1995, (exploring in detail the background to an infamous Oklahoma case). Redfearn shows the competing interpretations of the riot’s origins even within the Greenwood community itself and the constraints imposed upon the Oklahoma Supreme Court by desire to limit the city’s liability. The testimony shows the diversity of opinions in Tulsa and the ways that legal doctrine shapes those opinions.

Those competing interpretations can tell us a great deal about larger Tulsa and American society, much as studies of medicine and law serve as mirrors for society more generally. See, e.g., Edward H. Beardsley, *A History of Neglect: Health Care for Blacks and Mill Workers in the Twentieth-Century South* VIII, 1987; Eben Moglen, *The Transformation of Morton Horwitz*, 93 Column. L. Rev. 1042, 1993, (discussing modes of legal history and the reflections on culture they provide).

⁸See R. Halliburton, “The Tulsa Race War of 1921”, 2 *J. Black Studies*, pp. 333-57, 1972. (citing story, “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in an Elevator”, *Tulsa Tribune*, May 31, 1921.

⁹Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 44; 47 (testimony of Barney Cleaver); Brief of Defendant in Error, *William Redfearn, Plaintiff in Error v. American Central Insurance Company*, 243 P 929 (Okla. 1926), No. 15,851 [hereinafter Defendant’s Brief] at 74 (Testimony of Columbus F. Gabe).

¹⁰Defendant’s Brief, *supra* note 9, at 101 (Testimony of O.W. Gurley).

¹¹Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 30 (Testimony of O.W. Gurley).

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*, at 48-49.

¹⁴A somewhat different, more detailed version of the confrontation appears in Ronald L. Trekell, *History of the Tulsa Police Department, 1882-1990*, 1989.

¹⁵Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 48.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, at 44.

¹⁷Charles F. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years: A History of the Sooner State and Its People, 1889- 1939*, 1941.

¹⁸Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 40.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, at 44.

²⁰Defendant’s Brief, *supra* note 9, at 106.

²¹221 *Pacific Reporter*, at 931.

²²Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 67.

²³Petition in *Robinson v. Evans, et al*, Tulsa County District Court, No. 23,399, May 31, 1923.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵See, e.g., Walter F. White, “The Eruption of Tulsa”, 112 *Nation*, June 29, 1921.

²⁶See, e.g., Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 61. It is important to note that one early criticism was that the sheriff failed to deputize officers to quell fears of a lynching. See “Tulsa in Remorse,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1921. General Barrett “declared the Sheriff could have [pacified the armed men] if he had used power to deputize assistants. The General said the presence of six uniformed policemen or a half dozen Deputy Sheriffs at the county building Tuesday night, when whites bent on taking from jail Dick Rowland . . . clashed with Negroes intent on protecting Rowland, would have prevented the riot.” See also “Tulsa Officials ‘Simply Laid Down’,” *Sapulpa Herald*, June 2, 1921. Reporting General Barren’s belief that officials could have prevented riot by dispersing both blacks and whites.

²⁷Plaintiff’s Brief, *supra* note 6, at 62.

²⁸*Ibid.*, (emphasis in original). While the Oklahoma Supreme Court referred to the some of the special deputies as sheriff’s deputies and some evidence mentions sheriffs deputies, it appears that the police were the only officials who commissioned special deputies. I would like to thank Robert Norris and Rik Espinosa for clarifying this point with me.

²⁹Defendant’s Brief, *supra* note 2, at 207 (emphasis added).

³⁰Charles F. Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, 1941.

³¹Testimony of Laurel Buck 30, Attorney General's Civil Case Files, RG 1-2, A-G Case No. 1062, Box 25 (Oklahoma State Archives).

³²Testimony of Laurel Buck, *supra* note L1, at 32. See also "Witness Says Cop Urged Him to Kill Black", *Tulsa Tribune*, July 15, 1921; "Instruction is Denied by Court", *Tulsa World*, July 16, 1921, (summarizing Buck's testimony).

³³Testimony of John A. Oliphant, at 2, Attorney General's Civil Case Files, RG 1-2, A-G Case No. 1062, Box 25 (Oklahoma State Archives).

³⁴*Ibid.*, at 6.

³⁵*Ibid.*, at 7.

³⁶*Ibid.*, at 8.

³⁷See "Weapons Must be Returned," *Tulsa World*, June 4, 1921, (asking for return of weapons and threatening prosecution if weapons are not returned).

³⁸Frank Van Voorhis, "Detailed Report of Negro Uprising for Service Company, 3rd Infantry Oklahoma National Guard," July 30, 1921.

³⁹John W. McCuen, "Duty Performed by Company 3rd Infantry Oklahoma National Guard at Negro Uprising May 31, 1921" (undated) Oklahoma State Archives.

⁴⁰See "Rooney Explains Guard Operation," *Tulsa World*, June 4, 1921; L. J. F. Rooney and Charles W. Daley to Adj. Gen. Bartlett, June 3, 1921 (Oklahoma State Archives) "I asked Major Daley where [the machine gun] had come from and he said 'we dug it up' and I inferred that he meant it was the property of the Police Department of which Major Daley is an officer."

⁴¹Brian Kirkpatrick, "Activities on night of May 31, 1921, at Tulsa, Oklahoma." July 1, 1921, Oklahoma State Archives "After patrols had been established... I established your headquarters in the office of the Chief of Police."

⁴²Around 10:00 p.m. on the evening of May 31, Oklahoma's Adjutant General, Charles Barrett, who later criticized the local Tulsa authorities, told Major Byron Kirkpatrick of Tulsa to "render such assistance to the civil authorities as might be required." Kirkpatrick, *supra* note 41.

⁴³Kirkpatrick, *supra* note 41 "I assumed charge of a body of armed volunteers, whom I understand were Legion men, and marched them around into Main Street. There the outfit was divided into two groups, placed under the charge of officers of their number who all had military experience, and ordered to patrol the business section and court-house, and to report back to the Police Station at intervals of fifteen minutes."; C. W. Daley, "Information on Activities during Negro Uprising May 31, 1921," July 6, 1921, Oklahoma State Archives "There was a mob of 150 walking up the street in a column of squads. That crowd was assembled on the corner of Second and Main and given instructions by myself that if they wished to assist in maintaining order they must abide by instructions and follow them to the letter rather than running wild. This they agreed to do. They were split up at this time and placed in groups of 12 to 20 in charge of an ex-service man, with instructions to preserve order and to watch for snipers from the tops of buildings and to assist in gathering up all Negroes bringing same to station and that no one was to fire a shot unless it was to protect life after all other methods had failed."

⁴⁵Van Voorhis, *supra* note 38, at 3.

⁴⁶McCuen, *supra* note 39, at 2.

⁴⁷See "Rooney Explains Guard Operation", *Tulsa World*, June 4, 1921. "None of my men used their rifles except when fired upon from the east. The most visible point from which enemy shots came was the tower of the new brick church. This was sometime just prior to daybreak."

⁴⁸There were fears, for example, that blacks were coming from Muskogee to reinforce the Greenwood residents: "In response to a call from Muskogee, indicating several hundred Negroes were on their way to the city to assist Tulsa Negroes should fighting continue, a machine gun squad loaded on a truck, went east of the city with orders to stop at all hazards these armed men." "Race War Rages for Hours After Outbreak at Courthouse; Troops and Armed Men Patrolling Streets", *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* See also Daley, *supra* note 43. "Upon receiving information that large bodies of Negroes were coming from Sand Springs, Muskogee and Mohawk, both by train and automobile. [sic] This information was imparted to the auto patrols with instructions to cover the roads which the Negroes might in on. At this point we received information that a train load was coming from Muskogee, so Col. Rooney and myself jumped into a car, assembled a company of Legion men of about 100 from among the patrols who were operating over the city, and placed them in charge of Mr. Kinney a member of the American Legion and directed him to bring men to the depot which was done in a very soldierly and orderly manner. Instructions were given that the men form a line on both sides of the track with instructions to allow no Negroes to unload but to hold them in the train by keeping them covered. The train proved to be a freight train and no one was on it but regular train crew."

⁵⁰McCuen, *supra* note 39, at 2.

⁵¹See, e.g., "Guards men at Cen ter of Riot Dis cus sion", *Daily Oklahoman*, May 23, 2000, (re port ing de bate over role of National Guard's role in riot).

⁵²Mary Jones Parrish, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, p. 31, (circa 1921) (reprinted 1998).

⁵³See *Lee v. Washington*, 390 U.S. 333, 1968. Affirming desegregation order in Alabama prison but observing that there might be instances where segregation was necessary to maintain order. The last time the United States Supreme Court upheld overt (non-remedial) racial distinction was *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214, 1944. That decisions—and the United States government's willful withholding of evidence showing that such discrimination was unnecessary—became the basis for the Civil Rights Act of 1988. See Eric K. Yamamoto, "Racial Reparations: Japanese Americans and African American Claims", 40 *Boston College Law Review* 477-523, 1998. ⁵⁴See, e.g., *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60, 1917 (invalidating as unconstitutional a zoning ordinance that segregated on the basis of race). While Professor Aoki has recently analyzed the early twentieth century alien laws as important precursors to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, Keith Aoki, "No Right to Own?: The Early Twentieth-Century "Alien Land Laws" as a Prelude to Internment", 40 *Boston College Law Review* 37-72, 1998, no one has yet interpreted the internment of blacks during the Tulsa riot, which drew no legal protest, as a testing ground for the idea of internment. See "85 Whites and Negroes Die in Tulsa Riots", *supra* note at 2. "Guards surrounded the armory, while others assisted in rounding up Negroes and segregating them in the detention camps. A commission, composed of seven city officials and business men, was formed by Mayor Evans and Chief of Police Gustafson, with the approval of

General Banett, to pass upon the status of the Negroes detained."

⁵⁵See Van Voorhis, *supra* note 38.

⁵⁶320 U.S. 81, 1943.

⁵⁷323 U.S. 214, 1944.

⁵⁸323 U.S. 283, 1944.

⁵⁹320 U.S. at 107.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, at 111.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, at 108.

⁶²*Ibid.* at 113.

⁶³323 U.S. at 302-03.

⁶⁴323 U.S. at 220.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, at 218-19.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, at 231.

⁶⁷323 U.S. at 226.

⁶⁸212 U.S. 78 (1909).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, at 85 "So long as arrests are made in good faith and in the honest belief that they are needed in order to head the insurrection off, the Governor is the final judge and cannot be subjected to an action after he is out of office. . ."

⁷⁰"Race War Rages for Hours After Outbreak at Courthouse: Troops and Armed Men Patrolling Streets, *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921. "Thousands of persons, both the inquisitive including several hundred women, and men, armed with every available weapon in the city taken from every hardware and sporting goods store, swarmed on Second street from Boulder to Boston avenue watching the gathering volunteer army offering their services to the peace officers."

⁷¹"Race War Rages for Hours After Outbreak at Courthouse: Troops and Armed Men Patrolling Streets," *Tulsa World*, June 1, 1921.

⁷²"The Disgrace of Tulsa," *Tulsa World*, June 2, 1921.

⁷³"Ex-Police Bears Plots of Tulsans: Officer of Law Tells Who Ordered Airplanes to Destroy Homes," *Chicago Defender*, Oct. 25, 1921. See also: "Attorney Scott Digs Up Inside Information on Tulsa Riot," *Black Dispatch*, October 20, 1921.

⁷⁴Plaintiffs Brief, *supra* note 6, at 67.

⁷⁵See also Walter F. White, "The Eruption of Tulsa," *The Nation*, June 29, 1921. Later White published another account of the riot: "I Investigate Lynchings," *American Mercury*, January, 1929. ⁷⁶See, e.g., "Act to Suppress Mob Violence," Illinois, *Hurd's Revised Statutes*, 1915-16 chap. 38, section 256a.

⁷⁷See, e.g., *City of Chicago v. Sturigs*, 222 U.S. 323, 1908, (upholding constitutionality of Illinois statute imposing liability on cities for three-quarters value of mob damage, regardless of fault); *Arnold v. City of Centralia*, 197 Ill. App.

73, 1915, (imposing liability without negligence under Illinois statute, *Hurd's Revised Statutes*, 1915-16 chap. 38, section 256a, on city that failed to protect citizens against mob); *Barnes v. City of Chicago*, 323 M. 203 (1926) (interpreting same statute and concluding that police officer was not "lynched").

⁷⁸"City Not Liable for Riot Damage", *Tulsa World*, August 7, 1921.

⁷⁹221 *Pacific Reporter*, 929, 1926.

⁸⁰*State v. Rowland*, Case No. 2239, Tulsa County District Court, 1921.

⁸¹See *State v. Will Robinson et al*, Case No. 2227, Tulsa County District Court, 1921.

⁸²*Tulsa World*, June 26, 1921.

⁸³"Judge Biddson's Instructions to Grand Jury," *Tulsa Tribune* June 9, 1921.

⁸⁴"Grand Jury Blames Negroes for Inciting Race Rioting; Whites Clearly Exonerated," *Tulsa World*, June 26, 1921.

⁸⁵*Ibid*.

⁸⁶Walter F. White, "The Eruption of Tulsa", *The Nation*, 909 June 29, 1921. One justice on the Georgia Supreme Court explained the origins of an Atlanta riot in this way: "This one thing of the street car employees being required by their position to endure in patience the insults of Negro passengers was, more largely than any other one thing, responsible for the engendering of the spirit which manifested itself in the riot." *Georgia Railway & Elec. Co. v. Rich*, 71 S.E. 759, 760 (Ga, 1911).

⁸⁷See "Burned District in Fire Limits," *Tulsa World*, June 8, 1921, (reporting the "real estate exchange" organization supported expansion of fire limits, because it would help convert burned area into industrial area near the railroad tracks and would "be found desirable, in causing a wider separation between Negroes and whites").

⁸⁸"Negro Sues to Rebuild Waste Area," *Tulsa World*, August 13, 1921; "Three Judges Hear Evidence in Negro Suit," *Tulsa World*, August 25, 1921. The three-judge panel upheld the ordinance to the extent that it prohibited the building of permanent structures. But it allowed the building of temporary structures. *Ibid*. The property owners argued that the city was depriving them of their property by such restrictive building regulations and that the restrictions endangered their health. See Petition in *Lockard v. Evans, et al.*, Tulsa County District Court, Case 15,780 para graphs 6-7,

August 12, 1921. Their argument was based, at least in part, on the emerging police power doctrine that the state could regulate to promote health and morality. The petitioners applied a corollary to that doctrine, arguing that the city was prohibited from interfering with that protection. The judges granted first a temporary restraining order against the ordinance in August because there was insufficient notice when it was passed. See "Can Reconstruct Restricted Area, District Judges Grant Restraining Order to Negroes", *Tulsa World*, August 26, 1921. Then, following re-promulgation of the ordinance, the judges granted a permanent injunction against it, citing the ordinance's effect on property rights. See "Cannot Enforce Fire Ordinance, Court Holds Unconstitutional Act Against The Burned District," *Tulsa World*, September 2, 1921. The judges' opinion has been lost.

Notes on Contributors

Dr. John Hope Franklin, a native of Rentiesville, is the James B. Duke Professor of History Emeritus at Duke University. A member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, he is the author of numerous books, including *From Slavery to Freedom*, now in its eighth edition. His father, the well-known Tulsa attorney B. C. Franklin, survived the riot.

Dr. Scott Ellsworth was born and raised in Tulsa. The author of *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, he formerly served as a historian at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Robert L. Brooks is the Director and State Archaeologist of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey. He is responsible for the management and protection of Oklahoma's heritage resources, including unmarked graves and burial sites.

Alfred L. Brophy is a professor of law at Oklahoma City University. A specialist in property law, he is president of the board of directors of Oklahoma Indian Legal Services.

Dr. Danney Goble, a native Oklahoman, attained his Ph.D. at the University of Missouri. He has authored numerous books of regional history and the American South. He now is on the faculty at the University of Oklahoma.

Larry O'Dell is a historian with the Oklahoma Historical Society. Raised in Newcastle, he currently serves as a research associate for the Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture project.

Dr. Lesley Rankin-Hill is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. A specialist in the study of burial remains and historic cemeteries, she is the author of *A Biohistory of 19th Century Afro-Americans*.

Dr. Clyde Snow, of Norman, is an internationally recognized forensic anthropologist. An expert in the identification of human skeletal remains, he currently serves as a consultant to the Oklahoma State Medical Examiner.

Phoebe Stubblefield is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Florida. A specialist in forensic anthropology, she is also the grandniece of survivors of the Tulsa race riot.

Richard S. Warner, a lifelong Tulsan, is a member of the board of directors of the Tulsa Historical Society. A well-known authority on the history of Tulsa, he has contributed to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma* and other professional publications.

Dr. Alan H. Witten is the Schultz Professor of Geophysics at the University of Oklahoma. An expert in near-surface remote sensing, he has coordinated scientific research for archaeological investigations both in the United States and overseas.

Epilogue

By State Senator Maxine Horner

There is an intergenerational effect from the 1921 Tulsa race riot that is the unconscious transmittal of an experience that is most mysterious and intriguing. In response to an incident like the riot which in effect, was potentially an act of ethnic cleansing, the message was clear: "We abhor you people and wish you were not here and in fact, are willing to make that happen."

There are characteristics of people who have been through a shared experience such as the Great Depression or in this case, the "riot" that emerged haunted as a result of that experience. The way they relate to their children and grandchildren and the world around them is not how they may have related had it not been for that experience.

If a people have been terrorized to the degree that North Tulsa survivors and descendents were, it could be expected that they would not make themselves noticed or be noticed by the group that terrorized them in the first place. Alternative ways of relating and responding may have to be developed or adaptations made by both groups for good or ill will. It is that perspective that allowed the horror of the riot in the first place. Since statehood and beyond, Oklahoma has taken its black citizens through intimidation, stereotypical conditioning, segregation, and legal and social engineering. Some of those conventions were even transmitted by representatives of the African American community suggesting that they cast down their buckets where they were — to conform as second-class citizens.

Speaking in Boley, Oklahoma during a convention of the National Negro Business League, famed educator Booker T. Washington, told the gathering not to worry about being segregated. He recommended that instead, they build up the section, which had been assigned to them, and they would make friends and be respected by the whites. Washington searched for an accommodation with whites, and a comfort zone for blacks being held back

and terrorized through segregation and racism. He urged blacks "to pull themselves up by the bootstraps." In Tulsa they did. Staying in their place did not appease whites or inspire the friendship forecasted by Washington.

After the epitaph for the black boulevard was written in flames, the aftermath led more toward a conspiracy to further dehumanize the suffering population than to demonstrate a justice toward its fellow citizens. That city government officials and real estate interests attempted to force blacks off their land and develop the properties as an industrial area is a matter of record. Churches, schools, homes and business enterprises were destroyed. Men, women and babies were carried away dead, to unknown places, as funerals were banned for not too mysterious reasons. The National Guard issued Field Order 4 on June 2, that all able bodied Negro men were "required to render such service and perform such labor as required by the military commission." In my view that is involuntary servitude, slavery by Marshal Law. Why did the National Guard not clear the area of all persons, black and white? Why were 6,000 African American citizens placed in concentration camps and walked through the streets as a defeated enemy - when it was in fact, a riot by whites? It was the black community under attack by terrorists. With estimates of from 150 to 300 dead, it was at best shameful, at worse, a massacre.

This report does not answer all my questions, nor did I anticipate it would. It does draw a clear picture of the racial climate at the time, and offers reasonable men and women, if they choose, adequate information to draw some conclusion. On June 1, 1921, Lady Justice was blind. Indeed, her eyes were gouged out. As significant, accumulation of wealth was halted and the community was left to begin again only with its own meager resources. What is owed this community 80 years later is a repairing — education and economic incentives and something more than symbolic gestures or an official report as an apology extended to the survivors. The climate

was real and official. The words of Mayor T.D. Evans spoken during the June 14, 1921 meeting of the Tulsa City Commission are brought to our attention once again:

[T]his uprising was inevitable. If that be true and this judgment had come upon us, then I say it was good generalship to let the destruction come to that section where the trouble was hatched up, put in motion and where it had its inception. All regret the wrongs that fell upon the innocent Negroes and they should receive such help as we can give them. *It...is true of any warfare that the fortunes of war fall upon the innocent along with the guilty. This is true on any conflict, invasion, or uprising...*

Let us immediately get to the outside the fact that everything is quiet in our city, that this

menace has been fully conquered, and that we are going on in a normal condition.

The mayor had his way. The conspiracy of silence was launched. We can be proud of our state for reexamining this blot on our state and our conscience, and for daring to place the light from this report on those dark days. This has been an epic journey. It can be an epic beginning. There are chapters left to write. To face, not hide again, the shame from this evil. Some remedial action is suggested in this report and others are prepared for statute in Senate Bills 751 and 788 and House Bills 1178 and 1901 and House Joint Resolutions 1028 and 1029. The Oklahoma legislature is now the caretaker of this past and may disperse to the future forgiving, fair, kind, deserved and decent justice.

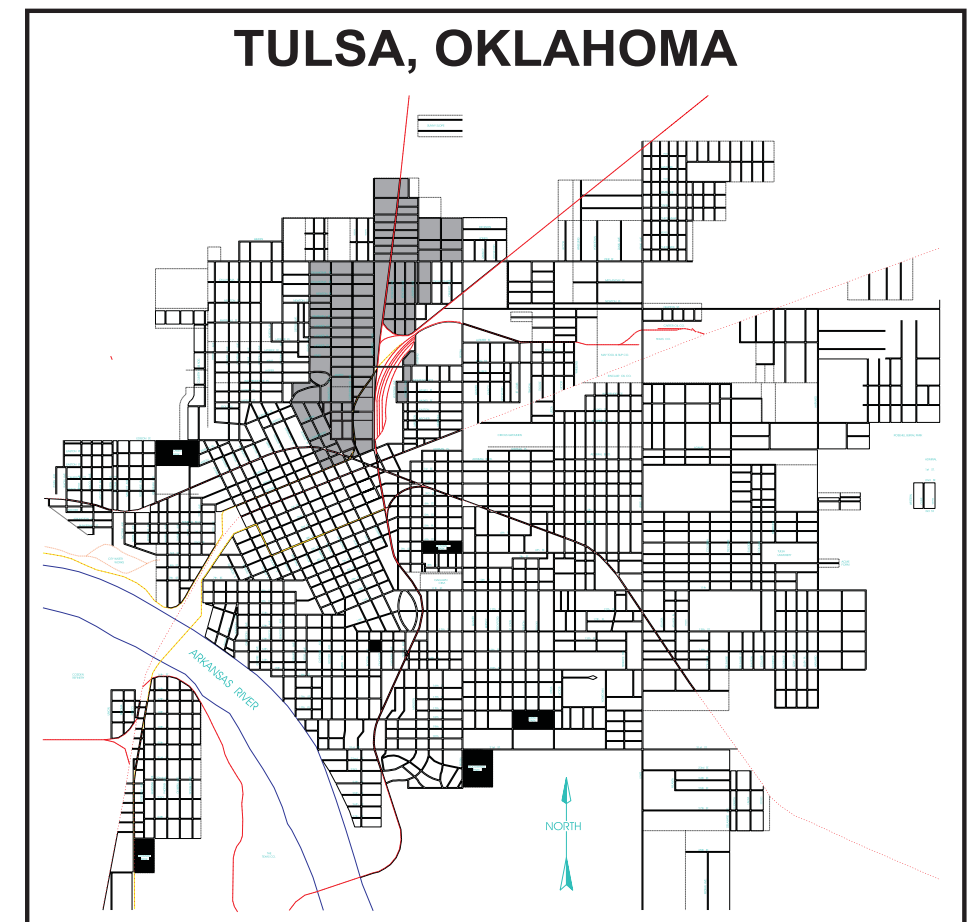
The African American Section, 1921



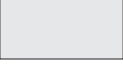
Tulsa Oklahoma

The African American section of Tulsa contained 191 businesses prior to the Race Riot of 1921, which included 15 doctors, a chiropractor, 2 dentists, and 3 lawyers. The residents also had access to a library, 2 schools, a hospital, and a Tulsa Public Health Service. The *Polk City Directory* listed 159 businesses in 1920 and after the riot, in 1922, there were 120 businesses in the directory. In the *City Directory* in 1921 there were 1,149 residences and most of them were occupied by more than one person--or even one family; the 1920 *directory* reported 1,126 residences. After the riot, the 1922 *directory* listed 1,134 residences.

The Red Cross reported that 1,256 houses were burned, 215 houses were looted but not burned, and the total number of buildings not burned but looted and robbed were 314. The Tulsa Real Estate Exchange estimated \$1.5 million worth of damages and one-third of that in the Black business district. The Exchange claimed personal property loss at \$750,000. Between June 14, 1921, and June 6, 1922, \$1.8 million of claims were filed against the city of Tulsa and disallowed.



The Tulsa Race Riot--Map Legend

	Whites; white mob or crowd		Machine gun -- in hands of Tulsa National Guard
	Advancing or attacking whites		Machine gun -- in hands of white rioters
	White defensive or offensive lines		State troops: out of town National Guard units
	Blacks; black crowd		Tulsa Police department officers
	Retreating or advancing blacks		Tulsa County Sheriff's Department
	Black defensive line		Buildings or homes on fire
	Black neighborhoods		City blocks which have been burned
	Tulsa units of the National Guard		Airplanes (all flown by whites)
	Tulsa National Guard -- skirmish line		"Battle" or gunfight

The Seeds of Catastrophe

Tulsa, Oklahoma

MAY 31, 1921

3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Partly cloudy ~ High 87° Low 67°

Sunset 7:34 p.m. ~ South winds

◆ We may never really know what actually happened in the elevator of the Drexel Building on Monday morning, May 30, 1921. A clerk in a nearby store thought there had been a sexual assault. Others believed that there had been a lover's quarrel between Sarah Page, the white seventeen-year-old elevator operator, and Dick Rowland, a black nineteen-year-old who worked in a shoe shine parlor one block away. But the most likely explanation is that when Rowland entered the elevator that day, he tripped and accidentally stepped on Page's foot. And when she screamed, he fled.

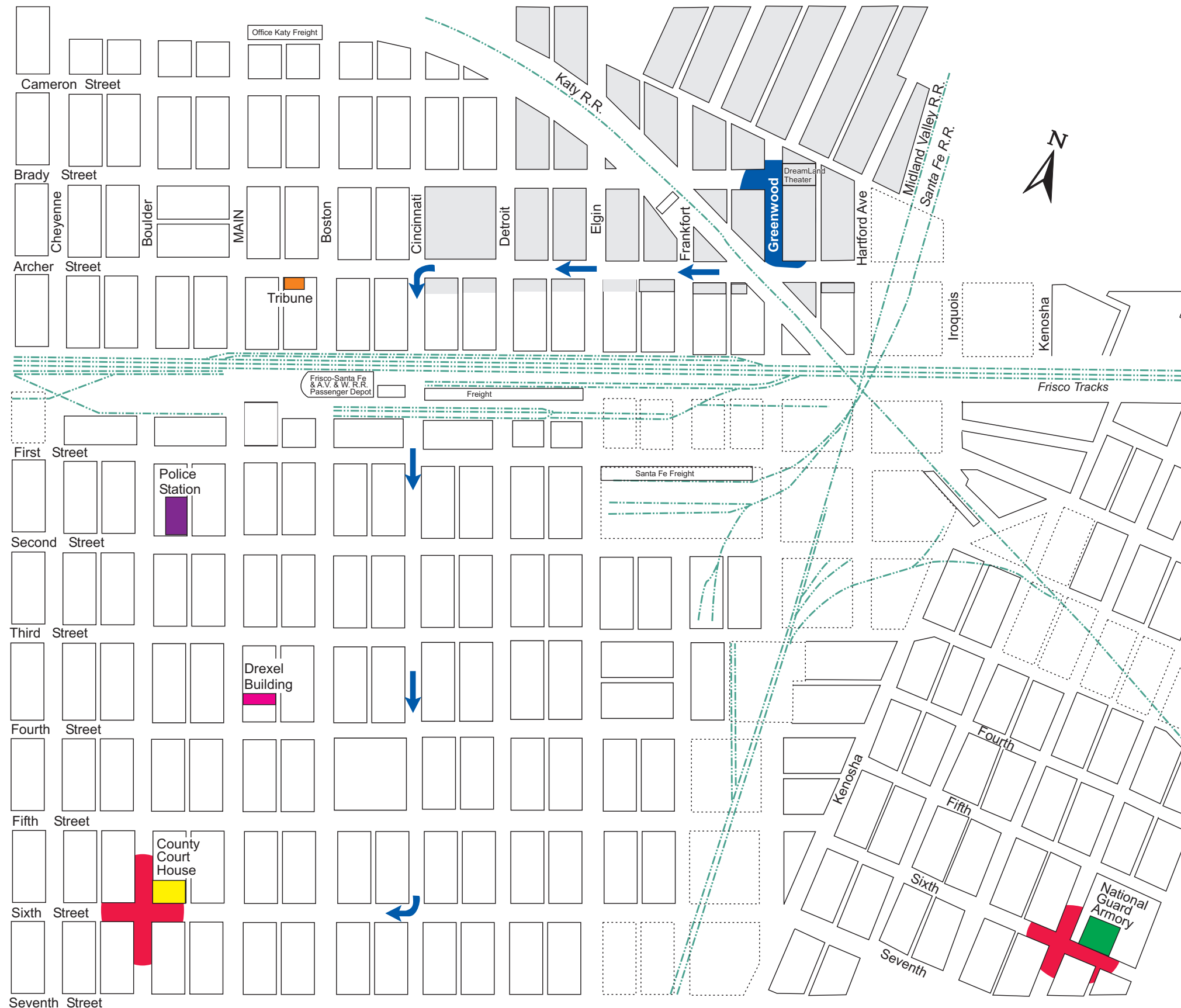
◆ The *Tulsa Tribune* decided otherwise. The next day, the afternoon newspaper ran an inflammatory front-page article claiming that Rowland had attempted to rape Page. More ominously, in a now lost editorial, the paper may have claimed that Rowland, who was now in police custody, would be lynched by whites that evening. The May 31, 1921 edition of the *Tulsa Tribune* rolled off the presses by three o'clock. Within an hour, there was -- once again -- lynch talk on the streets of Tulsa.

♦ As predicted, whites began to gather outside of the Tulsa County Courthouse, where Dick Rowland was being held, before sunset. The crowd soon grew into the hundreds. At 8:20 p.m., three white men entered the courthouse and demanded that the authorities hand over Rowland, but they were turned away.

◆ Meanwhile, along Greenwood Avenue, in the heart of the African American commercial district, word of the impending lynching spread like wildfire. Cries of "We can't let this happen here" were heard as black men and women anxiously discussed how to respond to the oncoming calamity. At nine o'clock, a group of twenty-five armed black men traveled by automobile to the courthouse. There, they offered their assistance to the authorities should the white mob attack the Courthouse. Assured that Dick Rowland was safe, they returned to Greenwood.

◆ The arrival of the black men at the courthouse electrified the white mob, now more than a thousand strong. Whites without guns went home to retrieve them. One group of whites tried to break into the National Guard Armory, in order to gain access to the weapons stored inside. But a small contingent of armed National Guardsmen, threatening to open fire, turned the angry whites away.

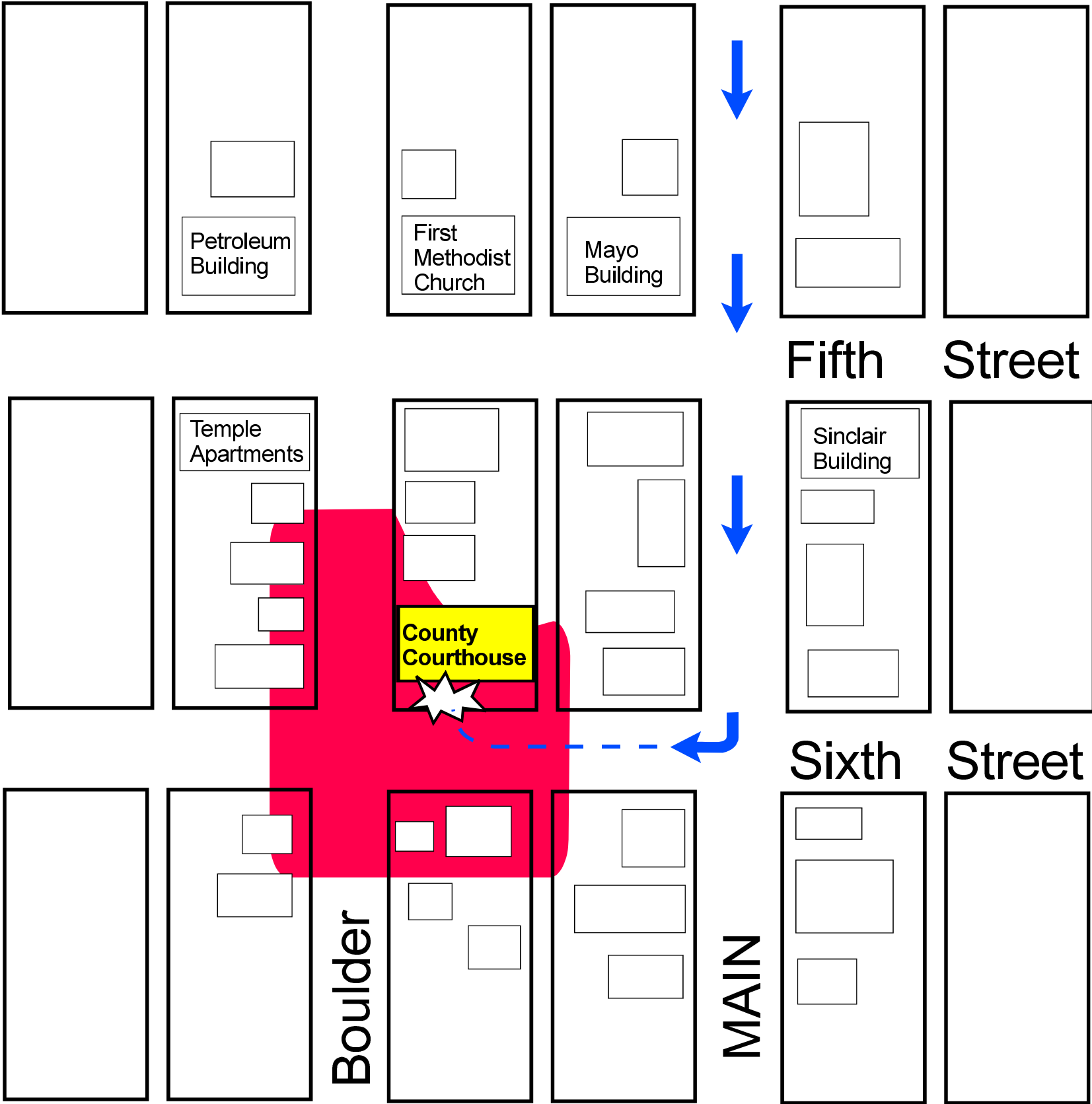
By 9:30 p.m. Tulsa was a city that was quickly spinning out of control.



The Riot Erupts

Tulsa, Oklahoma

May 31, 1921
10:30 p.m.



◆ By half past nine o'clock on Tuesday evening, the white mob outside the County Courthouse had swollen to nearly two-thousand persons. They blocked the sidewalks and the streets, and spilled over onto the front yards of nearby residences. There were women as well as men, children as well as adults. And with each passing minute, there were more and more guns.

◆ Willard M. McCullough, Tulsa County's new sheriff, tried to talk the would-be lynchers into going home, but the mob hooted him down. McCullough had, however, organized his handful of deputies into a defensive ring around Dick Rowland, who was being held in the jail on the top floor of the Courthouse. The Sheriff positioned six men, armed with rifles and shotguns, on the roof of the building. He also disabled the elevator, and ordered his men at the top of the stairs to shoot any intruders on sight.

◆ Tulsa police Chief John A. Gustafson later claimed that he too, tried to talk the lynch mob into going home. But, at no time on the afternoon or evening of May 31st did he order a substantial number of his sixty-four man police force to appear, fully armed, in front of the Courthouse. Indeed, by 10 p.m., when the drama at the Courthouse was nearing its climax, Gustafson was no longer at the scene, but had returned to his office at Police Headquarters.

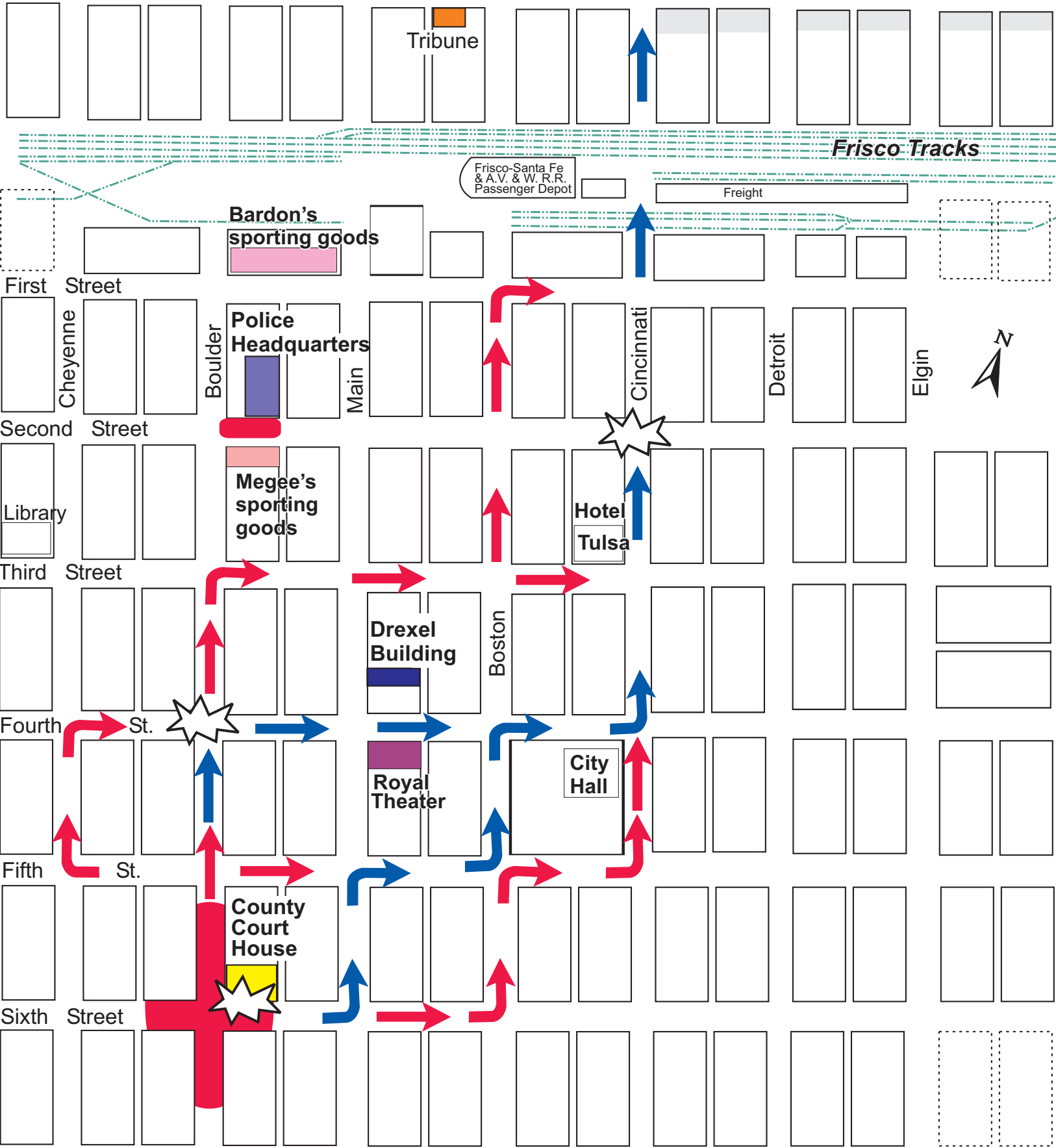
◆ In the city's African American neighborhoods, meanwhile, tensions continued to mount over the deteriorating situation at the Courthouse. Outside of the offices of the *Tulsa Star*, the city's leading black newspaper, a large group of men and women had gathered, debating what to do, and waiting on word of the latest developments downtown. Smaller groups of armed black men also began making brief forays downtown by car, both to try and determine what was happening at the Courthouse, as well as to demonstrate their determination to whites that Dick Rowland would not be lynched.

◆ A little after 10 p.m., when a rumor began to circulate that the white mob was storming the Courthouse, a second contingent of armed African American men, perhaps seventy-five in number, set out for downtown by automobile. Near Sixth and Main, the men got out of their cars and marched, single file to the Courthouse. As before, they offered their services to the authorities to help protect Dick Rowland. Once again, their offer was refused.

◆ And then it happened. As the black men were leaving, a white man attempted to forcibly disarm a tall, African American World War I veteran. A struggle ensued, and a shot rang out.

America's worst race riot had begun.

First Blood



Tulsa, Oklahoma

May 31 to June 1, 1921
10:30 p.m. to Midnight

- ◆ Although the first shot fired at the courthouse was perhaps unintentional, those that followed were not. Almost immediately, members of the white mob--and possibly some law enforcement officers--opened fire on this second contingent of African American men, who returned volleys of their own. The initial gunplay lasted only a few seconds, but when it was over, more than twenty people, both blacks and whites, lay dead or wounded.
- ◆ Outnumbered more than twenty-to-one, the black men quickly began retreating toward the African American district. With armed whites in close pursuit, heavy gunfire erupted along Fourth Street. A second--and deadlier--skirmish broke out at Second and Cincinnati, before the black men, their numbers seriously reduced, were able to head north across the Frisco tracks. No longer directly involved with the fate of Dick Rowland, the men were now fighting for their own lives.
- ◆ Meanwhile at the courthouse, the sudden and unexpected turn of events had an electrifying effect, as groups of angry, vengeance-seeking whites took to the streets and sidewalks of downtown. At police headquarters on Second Street, nearly five-hundred white men and boys--many of whom, only minutes earlier, had been members of the lynch mob--were sworn-in as "Special Deputies." According to Laurel G. Buck, a white bricklayer who was sworn-in, the police instructed the new recruits to "Get a gun, and get a nigger."
- ◆ Shortly thereafter, whites began breaking into downtown pawnshops and hardware stores, stealing guns and ammunition. Dick Bardon's sporting goods store, at First and Main, was especially hard hit, as was J. W. Megee's shop, located across the street from police headquarters. Eyewitnesses later testified that uniformed Tulsa policemen took part in some of the break-ins, handing out guns to whites.
- ◆ More bloodshed soon followed, as whites began gunning down any blacks who happened to be downtown. An unarmed African American man was chased down the alley which ran between Boulder and Main. Near Fourth Street, he ducked into the rear entrance of the Royal Theater, but whites caught up with him inside, where they murdered him on stage. Not far away, a white man in an automobile was killed by a group of whites, who had mistook him to be black.
- ◆ Around midnight, a small crowd of whites gathered--once again--in front of the courthouse, yelling "Bring the rope!" And "get the nigger!" But they did not rush the building. By then, most of Tulsa's rioting whites no longer particularly cared about Dick Rowland anymore. They now had much bigger things in mind.

May 31 to June 1, 1921
11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.

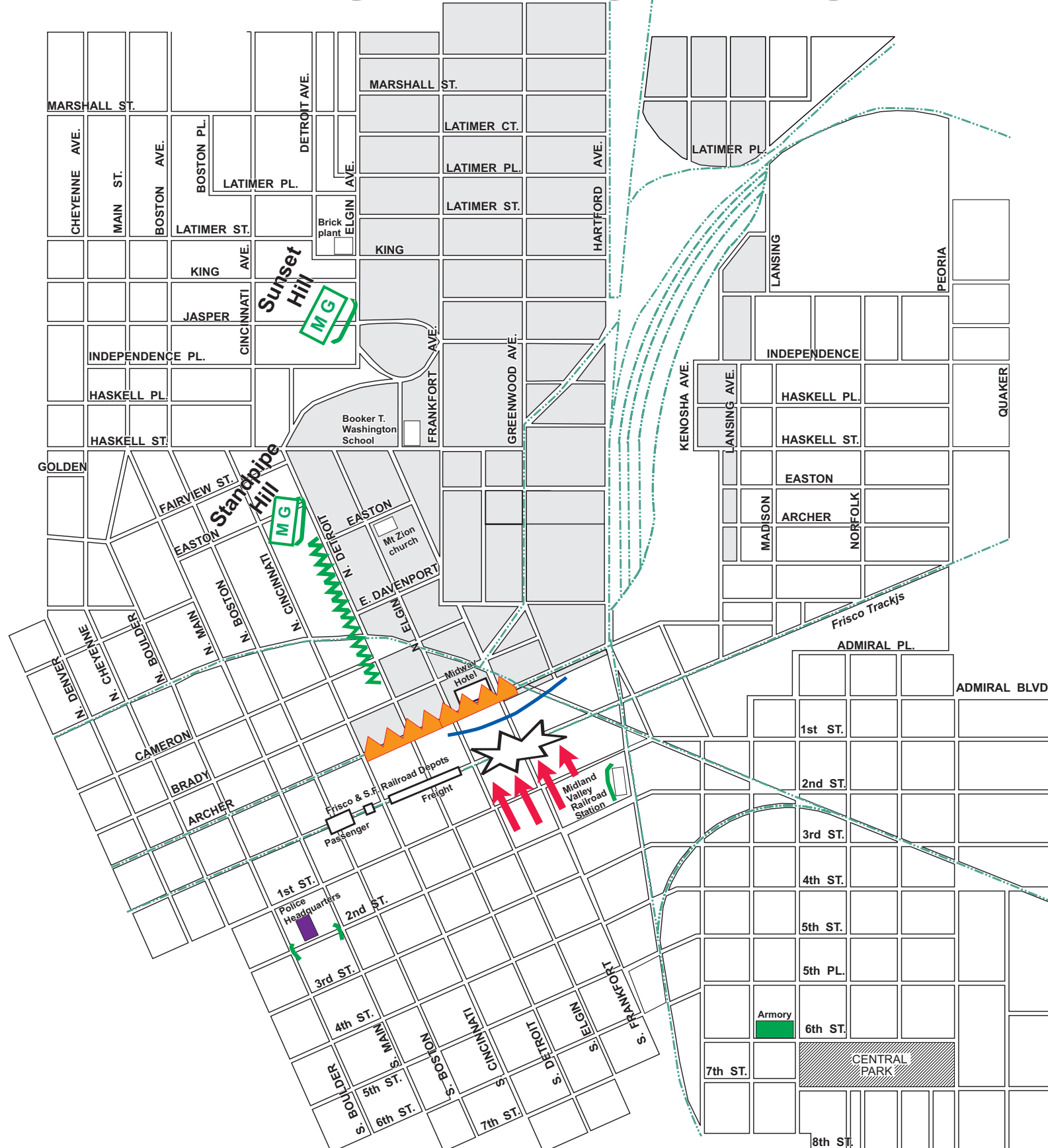
- ◆ The heaviest occurred along the Frisco tracks. From midnight until 1:30 a.m., scores--perhaps hundreds--of whites and blacks exchanged gunfire across the tracks. At one point during the fighting, an inbound train arrived, its passengers forced to take cover on the floor.

- ◆ By 1:00 a.m., whites also had set the first fires in black neighborhoods. African American homes and businesses along Archer were the first targets, and when a crew from the Tulsa Fire Department prepared to douse the flames, rioters waved them off at gunpoint. By 4:00 a.m., more than two dozen homes and businesses, including the Midway Hotel, had been torched.

- Initially, the local guardsmen--all of whom were white--were deployed downtown. One detachment blocked off Second Street in front of police headquarters, while others led groups of armed whites on “patrols” of the business district. Police officials also presented the guardsmen with a machine gun, which guard officers had mounted on the back of a truck. This particular gun, as it turned out, was in poor condition, and could only be fired one shot at a time.

- ◆ About 2:30 a.m., word spread that a trainload of armed blacks, from nearby towns, would be arriving at the Midland Valley railroad station. Guardsmen were rushed to the depot, but the rumor proved false.

- ◆ A half hour later, reports reached guard officers that white residences on Sunset Hill were being fired upon, resulting in the death of a white woman. Guardsmen, with the machine gun, were then deployed along the crest of Sunset Hill. They were still there when dawn brought an end to Tulsa's longest night--and ushered in its longest day.



Calls to Arms

Tulsa, Oklahoma

May 31 to

June 1, 1921

11:00 p.m. To 5:00 a.m.

Even though it was after 10 p. m. when the riot broke out, news of the fighting spread quickly--and unevenly--across Tulsa.

◆ In the city's African American neighborhoods, word of what had happened at the courthouse was followed by even more disturbing news. A light-skinned black man, who could "pass" for white, had mingled with some white rioters downtown. There, he overheard talk of attacking black neighborhoods. Returning home, he told what he had heard to Seymour Williams, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, who began spreading the word among his neighbors on Standpipe Hill.

◆ But along the southernmost edge of the black community, the oncoming gunfire had already confirmed that far more than a lynching was underway. While many black men and women began taking steps to protect their homes and businesses, others sat tight, hoping that daybreak would bring an end to the violence. A few others began to leave town. Some, like Billy Hudson, a laborer who lived with his family on Archer Street, were killed as they fled Tulsa.

◆ White neighborhoods were also the scenes of much activity. As word of what whites began calling the "negro uprising" spread across town, crowds of armed whites began to gather at hastily-arranged meeting places. When one such crowd, perhaps three-hundred strong, met at 15th and Boulder, a white man standing on top of a touring car told everyone to go to Second and Lewis, where another group was meeting. There, perhaps six-hundred whites were told of plans to invade black Tulsa at dawn.

◆ The Tulsa police, meanwhile, were scattered all over town. Officers had been sent to guard roads leading into the city, including a half dozen policemen who were positioned at the Ice Plant by the 11th Street bridge. Local National Guard soldiers were dispatched to guard the City Water Works and the Public Service Company's power plant on First Street.

◆ Word of what was happening in Tulsa also had made its way to state officials in Oklahoma City. At 10:14 p.m., Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett, commandant of the Oklahoma National Guard, received a long distance telephone call from Major Byron Kirkpatrick, a Tulsa guard officer, advising him of the worsening conditions in the city. Kirkpatrick phoned again at 12:35 a.m., at which point he was instructed by Governor J. B. A. Robertson, who was also on the line, to send a telegram--signed by the police chief, the sheriff, and a judge--requesting that state troops be sent to Tulsa. Kirkpatrick had some difficulty, however, securing the required signatures, and it was not until 1:46 a.m. that the telegram was received at the State Capitol.

◆ At 2:15 a.m., Kirkpatrick spoke again with Adjutant General Barrett, who informed him that the governor had authorized the calling out of the state troops. A special train, carrying one-hundred National Guard soldiers, would leave Oklahoma City, bound for Tulsa, at 5 a.m..



The Invasion of Black Tulsa

Tulsa, Oklahoma

June 1, 1921
5:08 a.m.

Any hope that daybreak would bring an end to the violence was soon laid to rest.

- ◆ During the final pre-dawn hours of June 1, thousands of armed whites had gathered along the fringes of downtown. They were divided into three main groups. One crowd assembled behind the Frisco freight depot, while another waited nearby at the Frisco and Santa Fe passenger station. A third crowd had assembled at the Katy passenger depot. All told, the white rioters may have numbered as many as 10,000.
- ◆ Smaller bands of whites had also been active. One such group hauled a machine gun to the top floor of the Middle States Milling Company grain elevator off First Street, setting up the gun to fire north along Greenwood Avenue.
- ◆ Shortly before daybreak, five white men in a green Franklin automobile approached the whites who were massed behind the Frisco freight depot. "What the hell are you waitin' on?," one of the men hollered, "Let's go get 'em." But the crowd would not budge, and the men in the car set off alone toward Deep Greenwood. Their bodies, and the bullet-ridden Franklin, were later seen in the middle of Archer, near Frankfort.
- ◆ Several eyewitnesses later recalled that when dawn came, at 5:08 a.m., an unusual whistle or siren was sounded, perhaps as a signal for the invasion to begin. In any event, the white mobs soon made their move. While the machine gun in the granary opened fire, the white rioters poured across the Frisco tracks. Up at the Katy depot, the stream of whites on foot was soon joined by dozens of others in cars, heading east on Brady and Cameron.
- ◆ While African Americans fought hard to protect the black commercial district, the sheer numerical advantage of the whites soon proved overwhelming. John Williams, an entrepreneur who resided in the family-owned Williams Building at Greenwood and Archer, held off the white invaders with both a rifle and a shotgun before he fled north, along the Midland Valley tracks. Mary E. Jones Parrish, who later wrote the first book about the riot, also fled. Dodging bullets, she and her young daughter ran north up Greenwood Avenue toward the section line at Pine Street.
- ◆ Soon, however, other perils appeared. As whites poured into the southern end of the African American district, as many as six airplanes, manned by whites, appeared overhead, firing on black refugees and, in some cases, dropping explosives.
- ◆ Gunfire also erupted along the western edge of the black community. Particularly fierce fighting broke out along Standpipe Hill, where 40 to 50 National Guard soldiers traded fire with African American riflemen, who had set up defensive lines off of Elgin and Elgin Place. On Sunset Hill, the white guardsmen opened fire on black neighborhoods to the east, using both their standard issue 30-caliber 1906 Springfield rifles, as well as the semi-defective machine gun given them by the Tulsa Police Department.



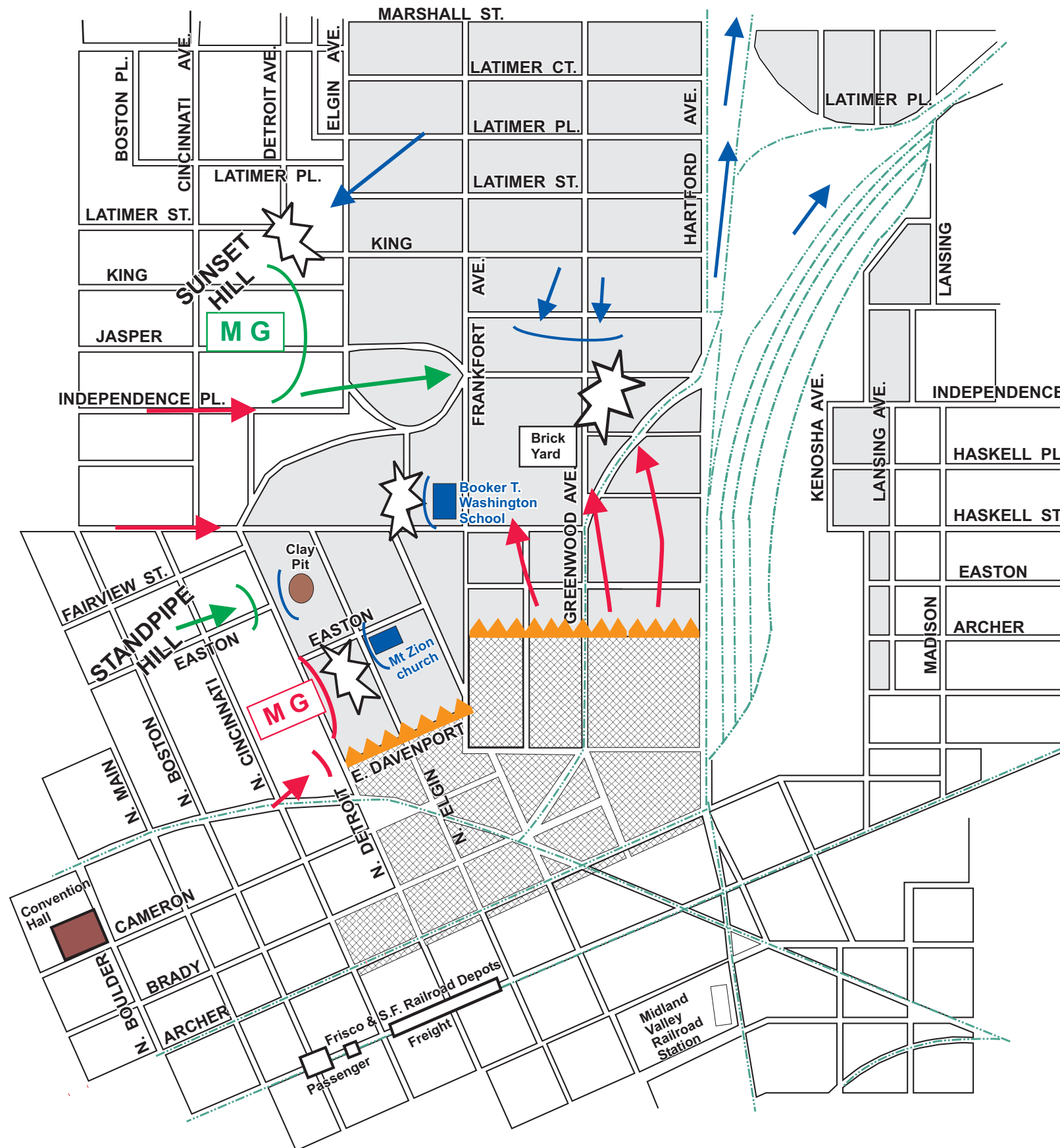
The Fight for Standpipe Hill

Tulsa, Oklahoma

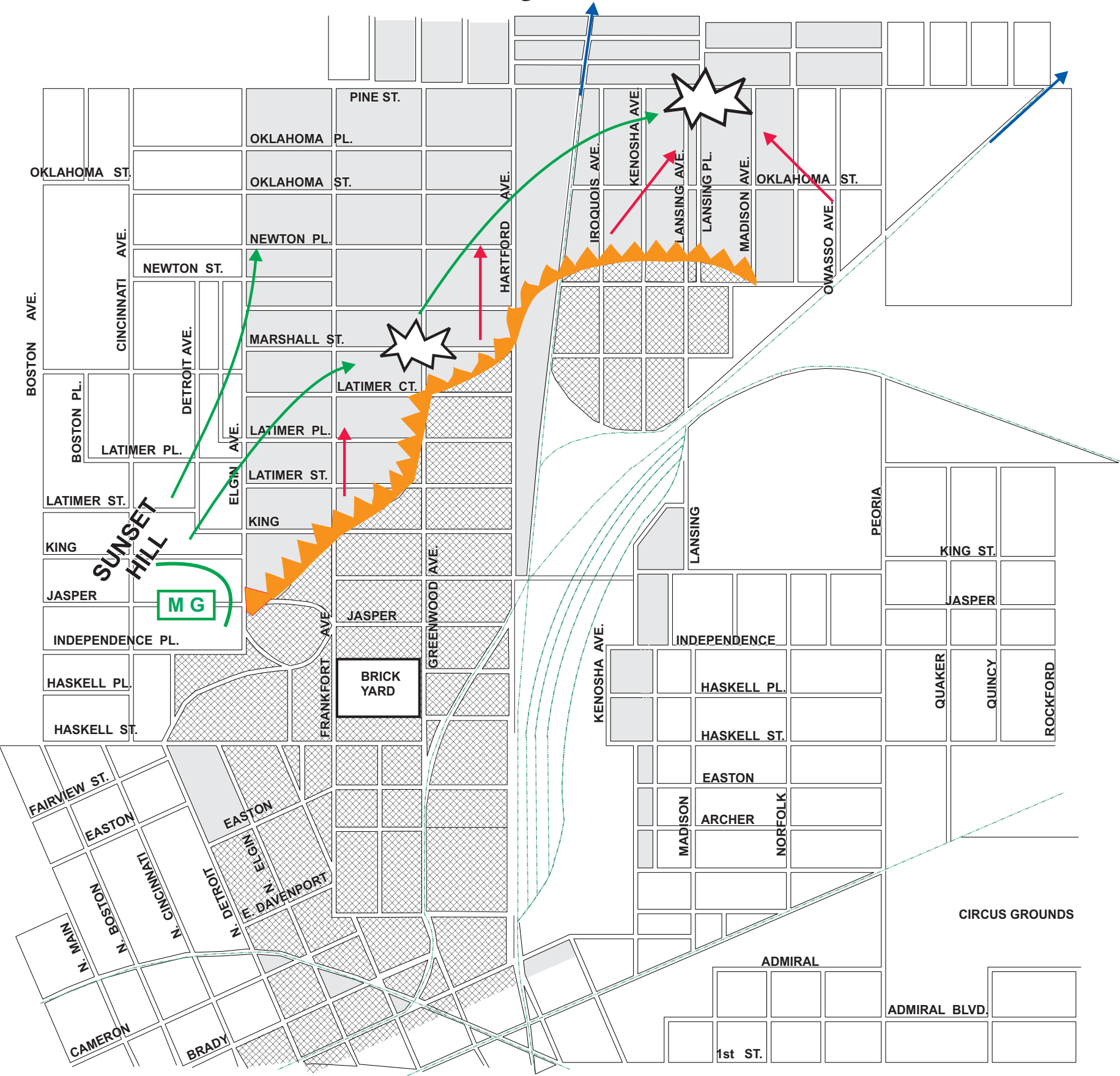
June 1, 1921

5:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.

- ◆ As the wave of white rioters descended upon black Tulsa, a deadly pattern soon took shape.
- ◆ First, the armed whites broke into African American homes and businesses, forcing the occupants into the street, where, at gunpoint, they were marched off to Convention Hall. Anyone who resisted was shot, as were, it appears, men in homes where firearms were discovered.
- ◆ Next, the whites looted the homes, pocketing small valuables, and hauling away larger items on foot.
- ◆ Finally, the rioters set the homes on fire, using torches and oil soaked rags. House by house, block by block, the wall of destruction moved northward.
- ◆ Some of the fires, it seems, were set by whites in uniform. Eyewitnesses later reported that white men clad in World War I army uniforms—probably members of the ‘Home Guard,’ a loosely organized group of white veterans—were observed setting fires in Deep Greenwood. Others claimed that some Tulsa police officers set fire to black businesses along Archer.
- ◆ African Americans fought back. Black riflemen positioned themselves in the belfry of the newly completed Mount Zion Baptist Church, whose commanding view of the area below Standpipe Hill allowed them to temporarily stem the tide of the white invasion. But when whites set-up a machine gun—perhaps the same weapon that was used at the granary—and riddled the church tower with its devastating fire, the black defenders were overwhelmed. Mount Zion was later torched.
- ◆ Black attempts to defend their homes and businesses were undercut by the actions of both the Tulsa police and the local National Guard units, who, rather than disarming and arresting the white rioters, instead began imprisoning black citizens. Guardsmen on Standpipe Hill made at least one eastward march early on the morning of June 1, rounding up African American civilians, before being fired upon off Greenwood Avenue. The guardsmen then returned to Sunset Hill, where they turned over the imprisoned black Tulsans to police officers.
- ◆ White civilians also took black prisoners, sometimes with murderous results. At about 8:00 a.m., Dr. A.C. Jackson, a nationally renowned African American surgeon, surrendered to a group of young white males at his home at 523 N. Detroit. “Here I am, I want to go with you,” he said, holding his hands above his head. But before he stepped off his front lawn, two of the men opened fire, killing him.
- ◆ Others went less quietly. A deadly firefight erupted at the site of an old clay pit off of Standpipe Hill, where several black defenders went to their deaths fighting. Stories have also been handed down over the years about Peg Leg Taylor, who is said to have singlehandedly fought off more than a dozen white invaders. And along the northern edge of Sunset Hill, the white guardsmen briefly found themselves under attack. Black Tulsa was not going without a fight.



Wall of Fire



Tulsa, Oklahoma

June 1, 1921

8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m

- ◆ Despite a valiant effort, black Tulsans were simply outgunned and outnumbered.
- ◆ As the whites moved north, they set fire to practically every building in the African American community, including a dozen churches, five hotels, 31 restaurants, four drug stores, eight doctor's offices, more than two dozen grocery stores, and the black public library. More than a thousand homes weretorched, the fires becoming so hot that nearby trees and outbuildings also burst into flame.
- ◆ The fighting, meanwhile, continued--though now with a startling new development. After the firefight with African Americans gunmen to the north, the National Guard troops on Sunset Hill then joined in the invasion of black Tulsa, one detachment heading north, the other to the northeast.
- ◆ Initially, the guardsmen met with little armed resistance. About halfway across the district, however, they exchanged fire with black defenders in houses. A second skirmish broke out near the section line, where guardsmen joined with white rioters in assaulting a group of African Americans who were holed up in a concrete store.
- ◆ As black Tulsans fled the city, new dangers sometimes appeared. Stories have persisted for years that in some of the small towns outside Tulsa, local whites assaulted black refugees.
- ◆ Not all whites shared the racial hatred of the rioters. Mary Korte, a maid for a wealthy Tulsa family, hid African refugees at her family's farm east of the city, while on the Sand Springs highway, one white man opened his home to a terrified group of black strangers fleeing Tulsa. Wwhen a recent immigrant from Mexico saw an airplane flown by white gunmen bearing down on two lost African American boys walking along North Peoria Avenue, the woman ran out into the street and scooped the children up into her arms, saving their lives.
- ◆ As the battle for black Tulsa raged northward, it soon became evident--even in neighborhoods far from the fighting--that on June 1, there would be no business as usual. One white assistant grocer arrived at work that morning only to find the owner locking up the store. It was 'Nigger Day,' the boss declared, heading off with a rifle in hand.
- ◆ Downtown, at the all-white Central High School, several white students bolted from class when gunfire was heard nearby. Running north, toward black Tulsa, an elderly white man--headed in the opposite direction--handed one of the boys his gun, saying that he was finished shooting for the day.
- ◆ And along the city's southern edge, in the well-to-do neighborhood off of 21st Street, carloads of white vigilantes started going from house to house, rounding up African American maids and butlers at gunpoint, and hauling them off toward downtown.
- ◆ Even miles away out in the country, people knew that something was happening in Tulsa. Ever since daybreak, huge columns of dark smoke had been rising up, hundreds of feet in the air, above Tulsa.
- ◆ The smoke was still there, four hours later, when the state troops finally arrived in town.

Arrival of the State Troops

Tulsa, Oklahoma

June 1, 1921

9:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.



◆ The special train from Oklahoma City carrying Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett and the 109 soldiers under his command pulled into the bullet-scarred Frisco passenger station at 9:15 a.m. The soldiers, who arrived armed and in uniform, were all members of an Oklahoma City-based National Guard unit. But in Tulsa they came to be known, by both blacks and whites, as simply the “State Troops.” All of them were white.

◆ By the time the State Troops arrived in town, Tulsa’s devastating racial conflagration was already ten and one-half hours old. Much, if not most, of the African American community had been put to the torch. Scores and scores of blacks and whites had already been killed, while the city’s four remaining hospitals--Frissell Memorial Hospital, which was black, had already been burned--were filled with the wounded.

◆ While the majority of black Tulsans had either fled to the countryside, or were being held against their will at one of a handful of internment centers, there were still pockets of armed resistance to the white invasion along the northern edge of the African American district. Perhaps one-third of black Tulsa’s homes and businesses were standing.

◆ The State Troops did not, however, immediately proceed to where the fighting was still in progress. Led by Adjutant General Barrett, one detachment marched to the Tulsa County Courthouse, where an unsuccessful attempt was made to contact Sheriff McCullough. Others began taking over custody of imprisoned African Americans--largely domestic workers who lived in quarters on the Southside---from armed white vigilantes. One account of the race riot also claims that the State Troops also broke ranks and ate breakfast.

◆ They certainly had the time. After the failed visit to the courthouse, Adjutant General Barrett then went to City Hall, where after conferring with city officials, he contacted Governor J. B. A. Robertson and asked that he be given authority to proclaim martial law.

◆ Remarkably, while the State Troops were occupied downtown, some of the finest African American homes in Tulsa had still escaped the torches of the rioters. Located along Detroit Avenue, near Easton, they included the homes of some of Tulsa’s most prominent black citizens, among them those of Dr. R. T. Bridgewater, *Tulsa Star* editor A. J. Smitherman, and Booker T. Washington High School principal Ellis W. Woods.

◆ For several hours that morning, John A. Oliphant, a retired white attorney who lived nearby, had been telephoning police headquarters. Even though the homes had already been looted, they had not yet been burned. Oliphant believed if a handful of officers could be sent over, the homes could be spared. But, so far, he had not any luck.

◆ Oliphant’s hopes were raised when he observed the arrival of the State Troops, figuring they would soon enter the neighborhood. Instead, Oliphant later testified, between 10:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. four Tulsa police officers finally arrived on the scene. Rather than protecting the homes, the officers set them on fire.

◆ By the time the State Troops finally marched up the hill, it was too late. The houses were already gone.

June 1, 1921

◆ By the time martial law was declared at 11:30 a.m. on June 1st, the race riot had nearly run its course. Scattered bands of whites--some of whom had been awake for more than twenty-four hours--continued to loot and burn African American homes, but many were simply going home. Along the northern and eastern edges of black Tulsa, where houses were mixed with stretches of farmland, the white rioters had a difficult time distinguishing African American homes from those of neighboring whites.

◆ Following the martial law declaration, the State Troops finally began to head toward what remained of Tulsa's African American neighborhoods, disarming whites and sending them away from the district. While black eyewitnesses later condemned both the Tulsa police and the local National Guard units for their actions during the riot, they largely praised the State Troops.

◆ Convention Hall having been filled to capacity, black Tulsans were also taken to the Fairgrounds and to McNulty baseball park. A few blacks also found refuge at First Presbyterian Church, and other white churches downtown. Crowds of whites often cheered as the imprisoned African Americans were led away.

◆ Additional detachments of State Troops—namely, National Guard units from other Oklahoma towns—arrived in Tulsa throughout the day, and with their help, the streets were finally cleared. All businesses were ordered to close by 6:00 p.m., and one hour later, only members of the military or civil authorities—or physicians and relief workers—were allowed on the streets. Adjutant General Barrett later claimed that by 8:00 p.m. order had been restored. Normalcy, however, was another matter.

◆ Perhaps as many as three-hundred Tulsans--some say more--both white and black, had been killed or lay dying. Even before the sun set on June 1st, the gravediggers were at work. They would stay busy for days to come.

- ◆ There were a couple of other details. Sheriff McCullough quietly slipped out of town with Dick Rowland. Sarah Page refused to prosecute, and Dick Rowland was exonerated.

