Tulsa Race Massacre, 1921

- Post Reprint: “His arrest sparked the Tulsa Race Massacre. Then Dick Rowland disappeared.”
- Post Reprint | Book Excerpt: “Where are the bodies from the Tulsa race massacre?”
- Post Reprint: “Tulsa survivors are entitled to more than symbolic justice”
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- Student Activity: Covering a Centenary Commemoration
- Student Activity: Different Angles to Tell the Story
DeNeen Brown, after a visit with her family in Oklahoma, was sent as a reporter by The Post to see what was to be found there. This results in the September 2018 story about the discovery of mass graves. One of the worst episodes of racial violence in U.S. history becomes a story she will follow in print and documentaries. She digs into records and documents, reads the 2001 report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, interviews Tulsans and witnesses the search in cemeteries.

Scott Ellsworth, a native Tulsan and professor, grew up in Tulsa where the riot was taboo in polite conversation. To find the truth of what did happen “would be a life’s calling for this White Tulsan. As a young historian, [he] started speaking with survivors and hearing memories and stories handed down about where the bodies were buried.” He takes readers to Oaklawn Cemetery.

A provost professor of civil rights law calls upon her experience as a young lawyer to tell of the unfinished business of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission of 1999. And Karen Attiah, a Washington Post columnist, is moved by the arts in “Light and Darkness” as the 100-year commemoration of the destruction of a community takes place.

Read their pieces and do suggested activities. Together they give a clearer picture of what happened in Tulsa on May 31 and June 1, 1921, and its impact on the present. It is a time of remembering and unearthing the untold stories.
He liked to call himself “Diamond Dick.”

Dick Rowland, a tall teenager with velvet skin, wore a diamond ring as he shined shoes in downtown Tulsa. Rowland, 19, had recently dropped out of Booker T. Washington High School, where he was a star football player, because he was making so much money polishing the shoes of oilmen in a city that billed itself as the “oil capital of the world.”

On May 30, 1921, Rowland took a break from his shoe stand inside a pool hall and walked to the Drexel Building to use the only public restroom for Black people in segregated Tulsa.

Rowland passed Renberg’s, a department store that occupied the first two floors of the Drexel Building, and stepped into an open wire-caged elevator operated by a 17-year-old White girl named Sarah Page.

What happened next remains murky, according to historians and reports about one of the worst episodes of racial violence in U.S. history. Rowland may have accidentally stepped on Page’s foot, prompting her to shriek. Or tripped and bumped into her.

When the elevator doors reopened, Dick Rowland ran, and a clerk in Renberg’s called police.

Rowland was arrested and accused of assaulting a White girl. Though the charges were eventually dropped and Page later wrote a letter exonerating him, the accusation was enough to infuriate White Tulsa.

Three hours after the Tulsa Tribune hit the street with the headline “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator,” hundreds of White men gathered at the Tulsa courthouse, where Rowland was being held.

Black World War I veterans who wanted to protect Rowland from being lynched rushed to the courthouse to defend him. A shot was fired and “all hell broke loose,” a massacre survivor recalled later.

“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...
An Integrated Curriculum of The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

A photograph depicts a morbid scene from June 1, 1921.

One fact many historians agree upon is Dick Rowland was not his original name. “He was born Jimmy Jones,” around the year 1903, said Marc Carlson, director of special collections at the University of Tulsa’s McFarlin Library. “He was probably 3 or 4 years old when he told people he wanted his first name to be Dick. He liked the name Diamond Dick, which is what he was calling himself,” Carlson said.

James T.A. West, an instructor at Booker T. Washington High School and three other Black men. Dick Rowland attended the school before dropping out.

Who was Dick Rowland?

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Dick Rowland is pictured in the 1921 yearbook for Booker T. Washington High School. “He could have dropped out after picture taken,” Carlson said.

Ellouise Cochrane-Price, the daughter of the newspaper’s founder, knew [much] about Dick Rowland, the teenager whose arrest was a catalyst for the massacre,” said Kristi Williams, an educator and a community organizer in Greenwood.

In Tulsa, Rowland has become almost a mythical figure and a subject of legend and folklore.

“Who is Dick Rowland in history? We know he was a hard-working Black man, whom racists falsely accused,” said Black Oklahoma state Rep. Regina Goodwin (D). Goodwin said from her research that she believes Sarah Page never accused Rowland of anything. And Page disappeared, too.

Dick Rowland and Sarah Page survive the massacre, “all the pain and the turmoil,” Goodwin said, “and they leave Tulsa with not even the smell of smoke on them.”

Who was Dick Rowland?

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“He and his two sisters were orphans in Vinita,” a small Oklahoma town about 60 miles from Tulsa, Carlson said. “They were unofficially adopted by a woman named Damie Ford.”

He was probably 3 or 4 years old when she took him in. Ford eventually moved to Tulsa and married Dave Rowland, whose last name is sometimes spelled Roland Rolland in public records.

A John Roland is listed in the 1920 Census in Tulsa on East Archer Street with Damie Rowland and Dave Rowland. John Roland, historians say, was still a child when he told people he wanted his first name to be Dick.

“He liked the name Diamond Dick, which is what he was calling himself,” Carlson said.

Dick Rowland is pictured in the 1921 yearbook for Booker T. Washington High School. “He could have dropped out after picture taken,” Carlson said.

Ellouise Cochrane-Price, the daughter
of massacre survivor Clarence Rowland and a cousin of Dick Rowland, claims Dick and Sarah not only knew each other before he stepped on the elevator but were in love and were planning to defy Oklahoma’s ban on interracial marriage.

“They were planning on getting married,” she told an audience at the Oklahoma Black Caucus gala last month. “They had spent many Sundays over my grandma’s house, at family dinners.”

When the White mob gathered outside the Tulsa courthouse, she said, “the mayor, the sheriff and the marshal were aware that Dick had not attacked Sarah. There had been no attempted rape of any kind. However, that information was not given up or not received by the mob that was gathered to hang Dick Rowland.”

In September 1921, the charges against Dick Rowland were dropped, according to records.

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In a 1970 interview with Tulsa historian Ruth Avery, Damie Rowland said he had asked her about people who died in the massacre and those who survived. He left the tent before dawn.

“He wrote to her every month from Kansas City,” Madigan wrote. He told her that Page was in Kansas City, too.

“Dick said that Sarah felt terrible that the police had arrested him for something he didn’t do, but she never talked at all about the burning and killing set in motion by her lies,” according to Madigan. “If Dick still loved Sarah, he didn’t say.”

Then her name disappeared from Dick’s letters and not long after that, he moved to Oregon, where he found work in shipyards along the coast.

Damie Rowland told Avery that she continued to receive letters from Dick, until the 1960s. Finally, Damie told Avery, she received a letter from a friend of Dick, saying he had been killed in an accident on the wharf.

Carlson said Rowland may have been killed in a port explosion in Oregon.

But Dick Rowland’s name does not appear on the list of people killed in that explosion.

“He was probably using a different name altogether,” Carlson said. “I suspect when you are in the center of something like this, he was probably terrified to be more public. We have no documentation whatsoever. That’s part of the folklore around the whole massacre. There is a lot of stuff we don’t know. Unless something concrete shows up, we will never know.”

DeNeen L. Brown, who has been an award-winning staff writer in The Washington Post Metro, Magazine and Style sections, has also worked as the Canada bureau chief for The Washington Post. As a foreign correspondent, she wrote dispatches from Greenland, Haiti, Nunavut and an icebreaker in the Northwest Passage.

FOR FURTHER STUDY
Read more about Tulsa, the ‘Black Wall Street,’ where one of the U.S.’s worst episodes of racial violence took place in 1921. “They were killing black people” by DeNeen Brown, published September 28, 2018.
**BOOK EXCERPT**

Where are the bodies from the Tulsa race massacre?

Historian Scott Ellsworth on the big remaining question a century after a White mob destroyed Greenwood

White mobs attacked Tulsa’s Greenwood district, known as Black Wall Street, beginning on May 31, 1921, killing an untold number of Black residents and burning more than 1,000 homes, businesses, churches and schools. For decades afterward, state and local officials tried to suppress records of the massacre.

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Shortly after 7 one morning last July, two bright red pickups emblazoned with the official seal of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey pushed through the back gate at Oaklawn Cemetery in Tulsa. Several hours later, a grid was laid out and city workers arrived with a track hoe. At exactly 11:17, once the crew had relocated a butterfly bush and three baby garter snakes curled up among its roots, the first bucketful of dirt was removed. The climactic stage had begun in the long search for the graves of the victims of the race massacre of May 31 and June 1, 1921.

It had taken decades of work to get to this moment, years of digging through old papers, maps and newspapers. Years of speaking with scores of people, White and Black, who had seen something as a child, or whose parents or grandpar-
ents had told them stories in the dimming evenings of their lives. Years of ups and downs. Whatever the result would turn out to be, this was an important step for Tulsa, a clear marker in the city’s long struggle to face up to its past. It was an unprecedented moment in American history as well: Here, in this aging cemetery in the heart of the country, was the first time the government — federal, state or local — was actively setting out to locate, recover and rebury with honor the remains of historic victims of American racism.

Maybe two years after the riot, a young massacre survivor, Elwood Lott, went with his grandfather to a second Tulsa cemetery, Rolling Oaks, to decorate the grave of an aunt who had recently died. Pointing to a stand of trees, Elwood’s grandfather told the boy that some of the riot victims had been buried beneath them. “To me, it was ghostly like,” Lett, then in his 80s, told me when I first spoke to him more than 20 years ago, “as if I could hear people’s voices.” He grew philosophical. “It’s a sad kind of thing to know that they did that to the people, and to have nothing to show. Now, you take the Holocaust, they’ve got something to show. They got those bones, and clothing, and bodies of kids. But for the riot, they ain’t got nothing to show.”

He was onto something, though neither he nor any survivors but a handful in their 100s are around to appreciate it. There may well have been something beneath those trees — and finally there might be something “to show.” No graves were found that July day last summer at Oaklawn or at additional sites in Rolling Oaks, but in late October, the months of searching yielded 12 coffins in a single Oaklawn patch. On Tuesday, the 100th anniversary of the massacre, exhumation will begin there and eventually at the other sites. Can the remains be linked definitively to the 1921 carnage? Can they be identified? And where are the rest? To this day, nobody knows how many people died in the Tulsa race massacre.

The survivors called it “the riot.” Sitting at their kitchen tables or in front of a tele-
vision news camera crew many years later, this was the term they used to describe the horrific events they endured in 1921. Sometimes they would say “race riot,” but most of the time the one-word version would do. Over the years, other names surfaced. Some referred to the tragic happenings as a race war. Others called it a disaster, the Tulsa event, a pogrom. In an interview with a journalist some 20 years ago, I likened it to an American Kristallnacht. That wasn’t a stretch. Today, the term of choice is massacre, as in the Tulsa race massacre. All of these terms capture something of what took place. But in truth, none of them can describe it completely.

Greenwood, the African American Tulsa neighborhood later known as Black Wall Street, had been burned to the ground, block after block meticulously destroyed by White rioters. Homes, movie theaters, restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, churches and Frissell Memorial Hospital were torched, the Colored Library Branch raided, its books burned in the streets. More than 1,000 homes and businesses were looted and razed. Thirty-five square blocks were reduced to cinders and ashes. But there was never an “official” death toll. While a handful of the dead were identified by name in the pages of the Tulsa World and the Tulsa Tribune, there was abundant evidence of casualties — many casualties — that never made it into the pages of either newspaper, let alone home to their loved ones for a proper burial.

For exactly 100 years, the victims of the massacre simply have been gone.

The sparks that led to it had their origins in an elevator in downtown Tulsa on Memorial Day in 1921. The best we can tell, a 19-year-old African American shoe shiner named Dick Rowland tripped as he entered the elevator in the Drexel Building. He shot out his hands to break his fall but caught the shoulder of the 17-year-old White elevator operator, Sarah Page. She screamed, and Rowland ran out of the building. The next day, the Tulsa Tribune, the afternoon White newspaper, published a fantastic write-up of the incident, claiming that Rowland had sexually assaulted Page, as well as an editorial with the headline “To Lynch Negro Tonight.”

A White lynch mob gathered outside the courthouse where Rowland was jailed. The mob grew to more than 1,000 by 9 p.m. A half-hour later, a group of 75 Black veterans appeared at the courthouse and offered to help protect Rowland. They were turned away. As they were leaving, an elderly White man tried to disarm a tall Black vet. A shot went off, and the massacre began. No longer focused on Rowland, the White mob turned its rage on any African American it could find. Sixteen hours later, Greenwood was gone.

The low end of the estimates of those killed may be the number cited in the textbook used in my ninth-grade Oklahoma history class in 1969: 20 Blacks and nine Whites.

Other estimates only went up and up. On June 1, the Tulsa Tribune reported that seven Whites and 68 Blacks had died. The next day, the New York Times declared, “85 whites and negroes die in Tulsa riots,” while the front-page headline in the Tulsa World announced, “Dead estimated at 100.” A day earlier, the Los Angeles Express claimed that 175 people were killed.

A “relief statistics” report written in the riot’s immediate aftermath by Maurice Willows, an American Red Cross administrator, listed 222 “families with no father (missing or dead),” 87 “families with no mother (missing or dead)” and 1,250 “telegrams sent or received (relative to riot victims).”

Elsewhere in his report, Willows wrote: “The number of dead is a matter of conjecture. Some knowing ones estimate the number of killed as high as 300, other estimates being as low as 55. The bodies were hurriedly rushed to burial, and the records of many burials are not to be found. For obvious reasons this report cannot deal with this subject.”

Right after the massacre, Tulsa’s White city fathers told the world that they would rebuild Greenwood. Instead, they tried to steal the land where the African American business owners whose companies or shops were destroyed in the 1921 race massacre.

The Black Wall Street Memorial in Tulsa lists the names of African American business owners whose companies or shops were destroyed in the 1921 race massacre.
African American lawyers took the city rebuilding on their own land. A group of African American property owners from the city and county offices. Photographs grew and cemetery documents disappeared from state archives. In Tulsa, police, grand jury from Oklahoma City vanished from the after-action reports of the National Guard troops sent to Tulsa. For 50 long years, Tulsa’s murderous spring lay hidden. Official records began to go missing. The after-action reports of the National Guard troops sent to Tulsa from Oklahoma City vanished from the state archives. In Tulsa, police, grand jury and cemetery documents disappeared from city and county offices. Photographs grew scarce. At the Tulsa Tribune, someone removed a front-page article and part of the editorial page from the May 31, 1921, edition in the bound volumes of the newspaper before they were microfilmed by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Oklahoma history textbooks published in the 1920s and 1930s made no mention of the riot. By the late 1940s, the first generation of post-massacre Tulsans was coming of age that had no knowledge of the event whatsoever. It was as if it hadn’t happened.

Buried beneath lies and obfuscation, hatred and heartbreak, shame and guilt, reminders of what occurred were quietly swept away. Those who dared to speak about it faced threats and censure. In time, even the landscape of the massacre changed beyond recognition. The Drexel Building fell to a wrecking ball, while the courthouse where the lynch mob had gathered was demolished and the land sold.

Greenwood, of course, rebuilt itself. But in textbooks and local histories, a fairy tale version of the city’s past arose, one in which the massacre either didn’t happen or was of no importance. Rather than face up to the past, residents talked about the truth only in certain parts of town, and then only quietly. “Tulsa lost its sense of honesty,” was how the historian John Hope Franklin, who grew up in Greenwood, once put it.

Especially in well-to-do White neighborhoods on the city’s south side, simply talking about the riot at all was discouraged. In the 1960s Tulsa that I grew up in, the riot was not discussed in the newspapers or on television, there were no books about it that you could check out of the library or purchase at a bookstore, and the ministers and Sunday school teachers at First Presbyterian Church never mentioned it, nor did any of my neighbors or Little League coaches or Boy Scout leaders. Even so, by age 12 I had already caught wind that something had happened years earlier. More than once, I heard adults discussing “the riot” when I came into the room, only for them to change the subject. From older kids, I heard tales of bodies floating down the Arkansas River, which flowed only one block away from my boyhood home on East 24th Street, and other stories about machine guns, and airplanes dropping things. As a child, I had no way of finding out if any of it was really true.

Little did I know that working to answer that question would be a life’s calling for this White Tulsan. As a young historian, I started speaking with survivors and hearing memories and stories handed down about where the bodies were buried.

“Oh, boy. Here comes the Grim Reaper,” an old friend said to me not too long ago as I met him at a Tulsa breakfast spot. It was mostly a joke, but it contained an edge of truth. For many White Tulsans, learning the unvarnished reality about the massacre has been neither an easy nor a welcome process. Some have found it to be disturbing and distasteful, others have found it to be painful. Some have pushed back against every revelation, while others want it all to simply go away. And the search for the graves has not only brought some of the emotion behind these positions into high relief, it has served as a proxy for the nation’s deeper racial divide.

Tulsa is far from the only place in America where those who fell to racist violence were buried in unmarked graves. In patches of woods and in mountain hollers, on windy plains and in unmapped cemetery plots and prison grounds, victims of Jim Crow violence lie scattered across the land. Some were cut down by Night Riders. Others were lynched, shot, beaten to death. Murdered by the thousands, together they form a grim accounting of segregation’s evil grip. Most lie in graves that will never be found, because the knowledge of where they were buried has been lost. But not for all. In cities and towns across the country, there are those who know where the bodies are buried. It is time for them to speak. It is time for us to listen, to remember and to honor those we lost, pulling them from the myths and mists of time in a way that is valuable to the present fraught moment.

Scott Ellsworth is the author of “The Ground Breaking: An American City and Its Search for Justice” (Dutton), from which this essay is adapted. He teaches in the Afroamerican and African studies department at the University of Michigan.
Opinion by Suzette Malveaux

Justice is timeless — or at least it should be when government commits the most egregious atrocities against its own citizens. I learned this most poignantly as a young lawyer representing survivors of the 1921 Tulsa race massacre.

One hundred years ago this week, one of the nation’s most prosperous Black communities — the Greenwood district of Tulsa — was destroyed by a White mob in less than 24 hours. This mob killed some 300 African Americans, left more than 10,000 homeless and burned to the ground the entire area known as Black Wall Street. Black Tulsans experienced a horrific wrath and loss of generational wealth. To this day, Greenwood has not fully recovered.

Tulsa survivors are entitled to more than symbolic justice

An unknown photographer captures the image of a group of Black men as they are marched under armed guard to the convention hall during the Tulsa attacks on June 1, 1921.

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, MCFARLIN LIBRARY, THE UNIVERSITY OF TULSA VIA AP

An unknown photographer captures the image of a group of Black men as they are marched under armed guard to the convention hall during the Tulsa attacks on June 1, 1921.
But state and local officials and white-run newspapers initially deemed the massacre a “race riot,” for which Black residents were responsible, so Franklin’s courageous efforts at recoupment were unsuccessful.

To this day, not a single criminal act has been prosecuted for murder, theft, arson or assault in the Tulsa massacre. City and state officials hid evidence and destroyed information. Victims were buried in unmarked graves. Talk of the destruction was squelched, and Oklahoma’s history books excluded it. The coverup was so extensive that even Tulsa’s mayor in 1996 said she had not heard of the 1921 massacre until she was an adult.

But as President Biden reminded Americans on the massacre’s centennial: “Just because history is silent, it doesn’t mean it did not take place. And while darkness can hide much, it erases nothing. ... Some injustices are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous, they can’t be buried, no matter how hard people try.”

Eighty years after the Tulsa massacre, a bipartisan commission found that state and local officials had armed, authorized and commanded the White mob to wreak havoc on their fellow Americans. After a four-year investigation, the extent of the government’s culpability was laid bare. Tulsa and Oklahoma had engaged in one of the most brutal race-motivated massacres in U.S. history.

Now, with this evidence, survivors of the Tulsa massacre could sue the government for violation of their constitutional rights. A “dream team” of advocates was assembled, including Johnnie Cochran, Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree and historian John Hope Franklin. Our team filed a case in federal court in 2003, two years after the report was published. Law professor Eric Miller and I, then young lawyers on the team, drafted the complaint challenging the government-sanctioned massacre.

But our case was dismissed as untimely. Under the statute of limitations, our clients, more than 100 survivors (including Otis Clark, who was then 102 years old), were expected to bring their lawsuit two years after the massacre. That was almost 80 years before the government’s role in the death and destruction would be revealed. Back then, survivors were homeless, destitute and traumatized by this act of domestic terrorism. They were in no position to seek justice.

In recognition of such extraordinary circumstances, the federal judge set aside the two-year statute of limitations. But he also concluded that with the end of the Jim Crow era in the 1960s, it was reasonable to expect plaintiffs to file the lawsuit before the 2001 report’s publication.

It is true that shop owners had taken down the signs specifying “Negro” and “White” customers only, the Supreme Court had struck down “separate but equal” as unconstitutional, and Congress had enacted new civil rights laws. But many survivors, aggrieved by lifelong trauma and unaware of the government’s role in the massacre, still could not have filed then. Systemic racism and intimidation had hardly died with the Jim Crow signage. Regardless, the federal courts concluded it was too late for justice to be done.

This should not be the case. Statutes of limitations are the result of political will, or lack thereof. They reflect our society’s priorities and values by making it easier, or harder, or impossible to challenge misconduct. Legislators decide which claims and claimants matter. Filing deadlines might seem merely procedural, but they can deprive those with little power of the “day in court” promised to every American.

If ever there were an injustice crying out for resolution, it is the Tulsa race massacre. Acknowledging the tragedy is not enough. Faced with such egregious government abuse of power, lawmakers must insist on legal culpability, too. Justice is timeless — and, in this case, long overdue.

Suzette Malveaux is provost professor of civil rights law and director of the Byron R. White Center for the Study of American Constitutional Law at the University of Colorado Law School.
Light and darkness in Tulsa

I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa massacre. At that moment, I just knew I needed something to drink.

It had been a day of endless walking over haunted ground. I took refuge at the Black Wall Street Liquid Lounge coffee shop at Greenwood Avenue and Archer Street. I originally ordered a Rosa Parks lemonade from the menu board. But Dwight Eaton, co-owner and a descendant of a Tulsa massacre survivor, suggested I instead try the “Red Summer,” which mixed hibiscus, mint and lemonade.

“Do you know about the Red Summer?” Eaton asked, as he started to make one for me. I told him I was only now — an educated American in my 30s — coming to learn about the broad racial terror of the summer of 1919, during which scores of Black people were killed and displaced by White mobs in cities all over America. “Tulsa was the Super Bowl,” he said. “But what happened in 1919 was America’s regular season.”

Then he handed me the drink. The red hibiscus mixture sat on top of the lemonade. It tasted fantastic. It looked like blood on concrete.

Over Memorial Day weekend here in Tulsa, it was like that — that same mix of light and darkness. Music and dancing at the Black Wall Street Legacy Festival. Vendors selling T-shirts, hats, ice pops and other goods. Celebrities and activists in town to give speeches.

But I couldn’t shake a feeling of heaviness and dissonance. One hundred
years after the Tulsa Race Massacre, what is there to celebrate? How can we speak of reconciliation between descendants of survivors and perpetrators when white supremacy is still the order of the day? I wasn’t the only one who felt it.

“This should not be a celebration,” said Dwight’s father, Bobby Eaton Sr., whose own father had survived the massacre in 1921. “It should be a commemoration, not a party.” There is still blood in the ground, another customer at the coffee shop noted.

To be sure, it is a good thing that Black people for generations to come will know what Greenwood once was. It is affirming to understand that there were Black towns with enough wealth and resources to rival and even exceed that of White communities of the era.

And now, thanks to a year of pressure over racism and police brutality, more people the world over know that in 1921, after a false report of a Black boy attacking a White girl, a resentful White mob attacked and destroyed the thriving Tulsa enclave of Greenwood, killing as many as 300 Black men, women and children, and forcefully interning thousands more in camps in the aftermath.

Yes, all of this is to be celebrated. It is a victory when the truth of the Black experience pierces the myths that White America has shielded itself with for so long. But at the same time, how do we process how the viciousness of the past and present are intertwined? For despite the rhetoric of renewal and reconciliation, the economic deprivation of Black Tulsans remains palpable.

In Tulsa today, Black people do not own many of the buildings near Black Wall Street, and it is doubly sinister that the city possesses much of the land that once sat under the gorgeous houses that burned and yet has done so little with it. One of the lots is called the “Stairs to Nowhere” — nothingness on display. A highway runs through the heart of the area, hampering the possibilities for Black economic progress.

And there is no washing over the continuing violence, injustice and inequality that still exist here; it’s in your face. Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum opposes reparations for Black survivors and descendants. It is evident in the fact that North Tulsa, where the majority of the city’s Black residents live, was a food desert until a few weeks ago, when a new grocery store finally opened. The indifference to Black suffering is on display when, so far, financial reparations have been denied even to the living survivors of the massacre, yet Tulsa touts a new $465 million city park.

On Monday, pouring rain forced a cancellation of the keynote events and candlelight vigils, and I was left feeling like I had no way to mourn all this with others. But that’s when I was steered toward “Fire in Little Africa,” a multimedia hip-hop project commemorating the massacre by Oklahoma artists. “Listen to a few songs,” said Turner Cooper, an educator who is a supporter of the project. “Then let’s talk.”

And sure enough, an imploration in the lyrics lifted me — “keep on shining.” In the music, I heard the light and dark reconciled, by artists wielding the subversive power of hip-hop to speak about Black power, pride, pain and promise at once. The combination of levity and resistance in the same space offered me some healing.

The battle for justice in Tulsa is far from over. But as long as there are artists, there is hope.
Covering a Centenary Commemoration

Washington Post reporters and columnists and a historian and educator wrote about the Tulsa race massacre of 1921. What are the possibilities for covering the complexities of a hundred-year-old event that brought so much destruction? Who was involved? What happened after the event? Where are the bodies buried? When will restitution take place? Why did it happen? Why should readers know about it?

Read DeNeen Brown’s “His arrest sparked the Tulsa Race Massacre. Then Dick Rowland disappeared.” Also read an excerpt, “Where are the bodies from the Tulsa race massacre?” from Scott Ellsworth’s book, the guest commentary of Suzette Malveaux, “Tulsa survivors are entitled to more than symbolic justice,” and the column, “Light and darkness in Tulsa.”

Respond to the following questions on your own paper.

1. What is your impression of Dick Rowland from the details given in the first six paragraphs of DeNeen Brown’s article?

2. What role did the following play in the events that followed Rowland’s arrest?
   a. The press
   b. Black WWI veterans
   c. White men at the Tulsa courthouse
   d. An anonymous gunshot

3. From records, what damage resulted in the next hours on May 31 and June 1, 1921?

4. Paragraph 7 reads: “Rowland was arrested and accused of assaulting a White girl. Though the charges were eventually dropped and Page later wrote a letter exonerating him, the accusation was enough to infuriate White Tulsa.”
   a. What do we learn about Page in the remaining article?
   b. Answer the question, Who was Dick Rowland?
   c. Could the destruction of the Greenwood community been avoided? Explain your response.

5. Give examples of Karen Attiah’s column being a personal narrative.

6. What is the theme of Attiah’s column?

7. Tulsa native, historian and author Scott Ellsworth brings another dimension to the story of the devastation of Greenwood. What is the significance of beginning in Oaklawn Cemetery?

8. Trying to find the answer to what question became a life’s calling for Ellsworth?

9. After reading the entire book excerpt, write five questions that cover the information provided. Be sure that your questions cover Black and White responses, then and now.
   Also, include answers to your questions.
10. Read Suzette Malveaux’s guest commentary. What is your unique background that she brings to the centennial of the Tulsa race massacre?

11. She summarizes the findings of a bipartisan commission that studied events eighty years after they took place. What did the commission conclude?

12. What complications did the survivors face in the lawsuit they brought against the government?

13. Define the following terms before reading the last two paragraphs: statutes of limitations, political will, procedural, egregious, culpability.


15. Having read and considered these four approaches to telling the story of the demise of the Black Wall Street, what else would you like to know? Is there a story you want to follow-up? What other aspect of the story needs to be told?
Different Angles to Tell the Story | Tulsa Race Massacre

The media has different modes available to tell the story of current events for its readers and viewers. The centenary observance of the Tulsa race massacre provides a case study to look at news coverage — from the White House to graveside in Tulsa, print and interactive approaches, historic context and personal narratives.

Events took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921. In less than 24 hours physical Greenwood, the African American neighborhood known as Black Wall Street, was destroyed, burned and looted — businesses, homes, hospital, library and churches. Thirty-five square blocks.

Post reporter DeNeen Brown has done extensive research in and about the race riot and its aftermath. Read “His arrest sparked the Tulsa Race Massacre. Then Dick Rowland disappeared.” This is a Retropolis section article — “The past, rediscovered” — that includes print articles, podcasts (Retropod) and some recorded articles. In addition select one of these three to read: The book excerpt, “Where are the bodies from the Tulsa race massacre?” or guest commentary, “Tulsa survivors are entitled to more than symbolic justice.” or the column, “Light and darkness in Tulsa.”

Write a personal essay (or commentary) in response to the content of the works you selected to read.

Select one of the following articles to add to your background knowledge of current and historic events and perspectives. What does this selection add to the other works that you read? How does reading more than one source, written for different audiences, and using different formats enrich your understanding of an event or issue?

NEWS ARTICLE | EXECUTIVE ACTION
Biden commemorates the 100th anniversary of Tulsa race massacre
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/06/01/joe-biden-live-updates/

KidsPost GALLERY
100 years later: The Tulsa Race Massacre
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/100-years-later-the-tulsa-race-massacre/2021/05/30/1315db32-bfd6-11eb-9c90-731aff7d9a0d_gallery.html

NATIONAL
Tulsa Race Massacre centennial events proceed amid hiccups
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/tulsa-race-massacre-centennial-events-proceed-amid-hiccups/2021/05/30/c5f8dedc-c14f-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html

‘They was killing black people’
DeNeen Brown Early Reporting | Originally Published September 28, 2018

INTERACTIVE | SLIDESHOW | DeNeen Brown REPORTING
“The devastation of the Tulsa Race Massacre”

NEWS | RETROPOLIS | PERSONALIZE AN ISSUE
One of the last survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre — 107 years old — wants justice
Viola Fletcher, who lived through the Tulsa Race Massacre a century ago, testified before Congress on May 19 on the push for reparations.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/05/19/viola-fletcher-tulsa-race-massacre-survivor/?itid=lk_inline_manual_71