

## **The Massacre**

The Tulsa Race Massacre occurred when a White mob destroyed the Greenwood District, a Black neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma and home to Black Wall Street, a hundred years ago. This was one of the largest racially motivated massacres in American history.

The mob drove through Greenwood, shooting Black people, looting and burning their homes and businesses. Witnesses said airplanes flew over Greenwood dropping firebombs. Many Black residents fought back, but they were greatly outnumbered.

The mob destroyed 35 square blocks of Greenwood, burning down over 1,200 homes and 60 businesses. Hundreds of homes that were not burned down were looted as well. Some estimates put the death toll at 300, while others believe it was much higher.

While a handful of Black Tulsans were charged with offenses related to the massacre, none of Tulsa's White residents were charged with murder or looting. Although Black residents filed \$1.8 million dollars in massacre-related claims to their insurance companies, all the claims were denied. Still, the rebuilding began within a few months. Greenwood was fully restored by the 1930s.

## **The Aftermath & Cover-Up**

“Missing military records. Missing fire marshal records. Missing insurance claims. Missing funeral home records. Missing cemetery records. Missing bodies. Is this just coincidental? Not likely...There had been a pattern of deliberate distortion of facts regarding the riot [massacre] and even the destruction of vital documents” wrote Eddie Faye Gates, a member of the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1912.

How and why did this happen? During the massacre, a minimum of 4,000 Black Tulsans were arrested and placed in internment camps by the Oklahoma National Guard. During the time they were detained, according to oral histories of survivors, bodies of massacre victims were buried in unmarked graves. Following the massacre, important documents, including newspaper accounts, were removed from public record. White Tulsans didn't want evidence of their family or friends participating in the massacre. They also wanted to avoid negative publicity the massacre could bring to the city. Tulsa's Black residents sought to avoid passing on additional pain to their children by talking about the massacre. Together, this led to what historians call the “conspiracy of silence” which is covering up the historical past of the race massacre, so it was not talked about or included in official history books.

## The Search for the Truth

The Oklahoma City Bombing resulted in an influx of reporters to the state of Oklahoma, at the same time as the 75th anniversary of the race massacre. Pressure mounted from reporters and Black leaders, including Oklahoma State Senators Don Ross and Maxine Horner, who wanted to uncover the truth about the events of the massacre, record essential oral histories from survivors, and seek reparations for the victims. As a result, Oklahoma created the Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Eddie Faye Gates noted “It is said that history is the lie agreed upon. Well, nowhere has that statement been proven more true than in Oklahoma after the powers that be agreed upon a lie about a riot that went unchallenged for 75 years. It was not until...[the Commission] that lie began to unravel.”



*Oklahoma Senator Don Ross & Commissioner to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 Eddie Faye Gates*



*Oklahoma Senator Maxine Horner & Commissioner to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 Eddie Faye Gates*