

The Massacre

The Tulsa Race Massacre occurred when a White mob destroyed the Greenwood District, a Black neighborhood in Tulsa and home to Black Wall Street, in 1921. 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. The Oklahoma Commission formed to investigate the massacre in 1997 concluded that the total property damage was approximately \$1.8 million. The additional loss of other assets, including cash, personal belongings, and commercial property, might bring the total to over \$200 million. 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.

The Aftermath

Following the massacre, the American Red Cross reported that thousands of Black Tulsans, then homeless, were forced to spend months, or, in some cases over a year, in tents in the makeshift survivor camp. Many suffered disease and malnutrition.

Black Tulsans faced many obstacles as they hoped to rebuild from the massacre. The City of Tulsa tried to prevent them from rebuilding by blaming Black Tulsans for starting the massacre, which caused their insurance companies, who would normally pay for damages, to refuse to pay on their claims. Further, Black Tulsans were not allowed to borrow money from banks to rebuild their homes.

Overall, the survivors of the massacre faced the death of loved ones, denial of insurance funds to rebuild, loss of property, physical injury, and emotional trauma.

The Resilience of the Greenwood Community

In the end, the rebuilding of Greenwood after its systematic destruction was left entirely to the victims of that destruction. Despite the challenges the people of Greenwood rebuilt! It was by “blood, sweat, and tears of the determined African American Tulsans who worked together to regain what had been lost” stated historian Hannibal Johnson. Greenwood was rebuilt by the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1940s it was the most successful Black-owned neighborhood in the country. This moment shows the determination, strength, and resilience of the Greenwood Community.