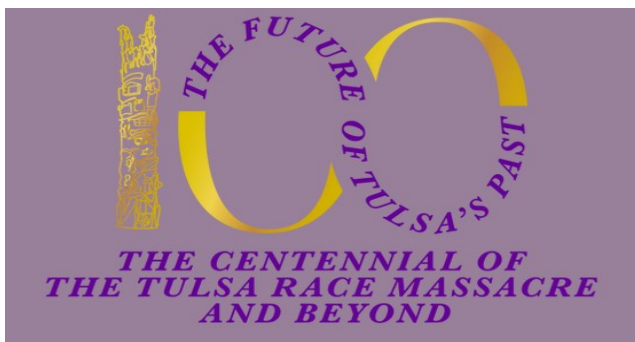


**Tulsa Race Riots / Tulsa Race Massacre / Black  
Wall Street Massacre / Greenwood Massacre**

No matter what you call it, it marks one of “the single worst incidents of racial violence in American history”.



**Who was Dick Rowland?**

At the age of 19, Dick Rowland, a black man, held a job shining shoes in a white-owned and white-patronized shine parlor on Main Street in downtown Tulsa. At the time, Tulsa was a segregated city where black people were not allowed to use toilet facilities used by white people. There was no separate facility for blacks at the shine parlor where Rowland worked, and he had to use a segregated "Colored" restroom on the top floor of the nearby Drexel Building on S. Main Street.

On May 30, 1921, Rowland entered the Drexel Building elevator. The story from there is he tripped and, trying to save himself from falling, grabbed the first thing he could, which happened to be the arm of the elevator operator, a 17 year old white girl named Sarah Page. Startled, Page screamed, and a white clerk in a first-floor store called police to report seeing Rowland flee from the elevator. The white clerk reported the incident as an attempted assault. Rowland was arrested the next day, on May 31, 1921. Upon his arrest, Rowland was taken to the city jail, a broken down, bug-infested jail that was inadequate. Later that afternoon, an anonymous call to the city jail, threatened Rowland's life. After review of the situation, it was suggested to take Rowland out of town for his safety, but the sheriff refused, feeling his prisoner was safer in a secured cell than on the open road. Rowland was then moved to the county jail four blocks away. The county jail was on the top floor of the new county courthouse and could only be reached by a single elevator and four flights of stairs locked off from the jail. Deputies were then ordered to use the only elevator, take it to the top floor and then disable it and barricade themselves in the jail with Rowland.

**This was the start of the Tulsa riots of 1921.**

**May 31 - June 1, 1921**



### What is Black Wall Street?

Black Wall Street was an African American self contained town in Tulsa, Oklahoma that flourished. Named Greenwood, the inhabitants created their own economy.

O. W. Gurley is considered the father of the Greenwood district. He arrived in Oklahoma and purchased land and sold pieces of it to other African-Americans.

The Greenwood business district was established in 1906 and became one of the most prosperous black communities in the country. The citizens of Greenwood controlled all the commerce within the triangle of Greenwood, Archer and Pine. Black Wall Street had banks, hotels, cafes, a bus system, hospital, newspapers, drug stores, libraries, churches, clothing and grocery stores,

a post office, night clubs, offices of black doctors, lawyers and dentists, theater houses and a superior school system. Citizens of Greenwood were wearing the finest clothes and they all had the newest cars. African-Americans controlled and operated everything within the area.

### *“Built for Black People By Black People”*

In early 1900's, Tulsa became the city with the most African-Americans and with Tulsa's change in racial demographics it motivated white animosity against black economic progress. Whites resented that blacks no longer accepted second-class citizenship in their own town. Many whites believed they were members of the divinely superior race, and couldn't understand why some blacks were worth \$1 million. Many of the white citizens in Oklahoma were former residents of Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas and didn't leave their prejudices behind in the Deep South. Many resented the success of black citizens in Greenwood.

The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, Black residents in Greenwood feared racial violence and the removal of their voting rights. Lynching's were common across the country, particularly during the Red Summer of 1919, where anti-Black riots erupted in major cities across the United States, including Tulsa. *The Tulsa Star* encouraged Black residents to take up arms and to show up at courthouses and jails to make sure Black people who were on trial were not taken and killed by white lynch mobs. This is exactly what happened when the word got out that Dick Rowland was arrested for sexual assault on a white woman.

When an angry white mob went to the courthouse to demand that the sheriff hand over Rowland a group of about 25 armed Black men went to the courthouse to offer help guarding Rowland. As word of a possible lynching spread, a group of around 75 armed Black men returned to the courthouse, where they were met by some 1,500 whites. A shot was fired by an unknown participant and the night of terror started.

## *Tulsa Tribune story adds fuel to fire*

The Tulsa Tribune, the afternoon newspaper printed a front-page inflammatory story, "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in an Elevator." Within an hour of the paper's release, there was "lynch" talk amongst the whites.

Page first said Rowland raped her, but recanted her story and said Rowland just tripped and fell onto her, and unfortunately, Rowland was still arrested. The white supremacists didn't care about the truth. Both black and whites were armed at the courthouse, and a fight broke out, then shots were fired. The blacks were outnumbered and retreated to Greenwood.



## ***The Destruction of Greenwood***

The Massacre of Black Wall Street began on May 31st, 1921, and lasted two horrifying days.

A white mob, some deputized, proceeded to Greenwood after outnumbered black citizens left the courthouse. The mob cut the city off from the outside world and they blocked all escape routes.

The mob began terrorizing the entire community, shooting at any black person they saw, burning homes and businesses. Homes were looted by the lower class white women before the men set the homes on fire. It was reported black women were raped and the men were tortured and killed. Firebombs were dropped from airplanes on top of the area.

The attack lasted through the night. Sixteen hours later the Oklahoma National Guard declared martial law at noon on June 1st. Ignoring the mob's rampage, the National Guard began arresting hundreds of black survivors. They were then placed in three detention camps throughout the city.



## ***Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In an Elevator***

A negro delivery boy who gave his name to the police 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 clerk, police say.

Rowland denied that he tried to harm the girl, but admitted he put his hand on her arm in the elevator when she was alone.

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

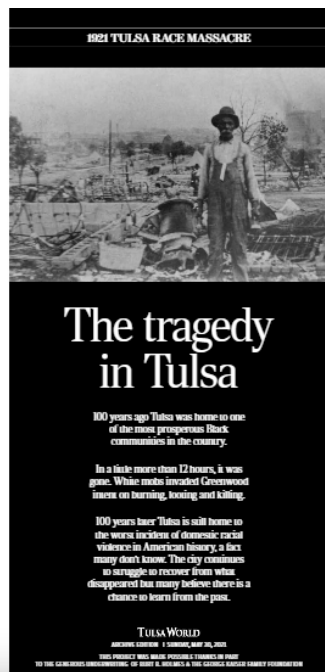


In order to understand the Tulsa Race Massacre it is important to understand the complexities of the times. Dick Rowland, Sarah Page and an unknown gunman were the sparks that ignited a long smoldering fire. Jim Crow, jealousy, white supremacy, and land lust, all played roles in leading up to the destruction.

- ◇ Tulsa's change in racial demographics motivated white animosity against black economic progress. Whites resented that blacks no longer accepted second-class citizenship and feared white supremacy was threatened.
- ◇ Whites responded to black pride with "social control," which included segregation and lynching's. An attempt to put "blacks" in their place.
- ◇ The Tulsa World newspaper made tensions between blacks and whites worse by suggesting the Ku Klux Klan should restore order to the community.
- ◇ A false narrative that the riot happened because the uprising of lawless black people.
- ◇ The police also played a role by contributing in the riot by giving white supremacists guns and deputizing them which multiplied the police force overnight.
- ◇ False report from Sarah Page and the dismissal of her retraction of the story.

**In the wake of the violence a whole town was destroyed in the worst race riot in American history just to keep white society ahead of blacks and attempting to put African-Americans in their place.**

- Over 9000 people lost their homes
- 150-300 people died. The number of reported deaths varied greatly depending on who was reporting it and it changed daily.
- It is reported that 800 people were injured
- \$1.5 million in real estate and \$750,000 in personal property was damaged (Approximately totaling \$32.65 million today)
- 35 city blocks were burned down
- 1256 residences in Greenwood was destroyed
- As many as 6,000 Black Greenwood residents were interned at three local facilities after martial law was ordered.



The case against Dick Rowland was dismissed at the end of September 1921.

The dismissal followed the receipt of a letter by the County Attorney from Sarah Page, in which she stated that she did not wish to prosecute the case.

After the dust settled, whites blamed blacks for the destruction of the Greenwood community, even though there was clear evidence that whites invaded the town with the intentions of burning and bombing the community.

No one was held accountable for Greenwood's devastation.

For the full story go to:

[https://issuu.com/tulsaworld/docs/trmsection?](https://issuu.com/tulsaworld/docs/trmsection?fbclid=IwAR1Qrk4WiGBI_ZULdJO9hgir1ti6CxKAEBjxLELaQ1BmfipM5hAIKjw23II)

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