The Rise and Fall of America’s Black Wall Street:  
The Story of African American Entrepreneurship in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1836-1921  
By Alicia Murphy  
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The morning of June 21, 1921 is a date that is forever etched into the memory of thousands of Americans, yet completely lost on millions of others. This date marked the collapse of America’s Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, one of the best examples of a successful African American community in the nation. The disaster began nearly three weeks before in the early morning hours of May 31, after angry white mobs broke into downtown stores and converged on Tulsa’s black neighborhood known as Greenwood. Black men stood armed and ready to defend their families, hard work, and businesses. Many within the community had stood just as ready to defeat the enemies of freedom and democracy years earlier when they fought in the “Great War.”¹ The black community could not look to the civil authorities to help
defend their property, as the head of the police department and many of its officers were participants in the atrocity.

The vicious mob headed toward the Greenwood area to attack and destroy the vibrant black section of Tulsa, with the local police fully participating, around 9:30 P.M. on May 31. The black men of Tulsa fought valiantly against the aggressive mobs that were determined to destroy the many successful businesses of Greenwood. They did not distinguish between the young and the strong, the elderly, women or children. In the face of such an attack, the black community was simply outnumbered and outgunned. The situation grew even worse when the National Guard was later called in on the side of white Tulsa. When the smoke cleared, every African-American within the city limit had been killed, wounded, imprisoned, arrested or placed in confinement.

How had such a terrible event gotten started in the first place? The incident that led to this bloodbath started in an elevator in downtown Tulsa. Dick Rowland was a black man who earned his living as a shoe shiner for the affluent white men of Tulsa. He was just nineteen years old and had dropped out of school to earn a lucrative living from the shoeshine business. Recently he had met Sarah Page, a white girl who was a seventeen year old divorcée. She ran the elevator at the Drexel Building. Dick’s employer who owned the shoeshine parlor on 319 Main St. had arranged for him to use the dirty cubicle that served as the black’s restroom at the top of the Drexel Building. Rowland often rode the elevator to get there. This is where he met and became acquainted with Sarah. The two of them became good friends. He had even introduced Sarah to his aunt Damie Rowland, who expressed her concern over some of the people Dick began to hang out with as a result of his new job. The money that he was earning from shining shoes created a whole new circle of friends – a circle of people that included Sarah
Page. The exact extent of the relationship between the two is not clear, yet that relationship would place them both at the center of this catastrophic event in America’s history.

Damie Rowland had a right to be concerned about her nephew Dick. She had raised him since he showed up on her door steps when he was just six years old. He and his two older sisters were homeless and slept under railroad trestles and sought shelter from the rain in the woods. They survived by depending on the kindheartedness of community members like Damie. When he appeared on her doorstep, she was barely making it herself. He was without shoes and wore a man’s shirt. His first and only words to Damie were “I’m hungry.” He was invited in and Damie prepared a sandwich and a glass of milk for him. They made an agreement that if he would help with the chores then she would feed him. Damie found the young boy so charming and endearing that he worked his way into her heart. Jimmie Jones as his parents had once called him, had just inherited for himself a surrogate mother and a new name. His two older sisters agreed to this arrangement as they felt this would mean one less mouth to feed. Damie bought Jimmie some used shoes and clothes. Their arrangement worked well because he worked in her small store sweeping and stocking shelves. She made him a bed out of pallets and he slept in the dining room. Jimmie was a popular figure for Damie’s customers as he brought laughter to many of them. Damie cared for Jimmie as if she had birthed him out of her own body. Jimmie entered school and excelled in his studies. Then he decided to go by the name of Dick Rowland.²

It was Sarah Page whom Dick Rowland had the altercation with on May 30 192. She was taken to the police station but was evasive about her story. She informed the officers that she would not press any charges against him. In the eyes of some of the authorities, it was no longer an issue of innocence or guilt. A black man had been accused of attacking a white girl. Before any investigation could get started, a white mob would already be coming for Rowland.³
It did not matter that Sarah’s credibility was challenged by the sheriff who had delivered her divorce papers from her ex-husband living in another state. He knew she was from Kansas City and came to Tulsa to live with a relative. He stated that Sarah was a questionable character based on the allegations of her former husband. He commented that if only half of the allegations within the decree were true, then Sarah was indeed an unsavory character. This validates the concerns that Damie had over the company Rowland was keeping as a result of his new job that earned him so much money. Sarah left town soon after walking out of the police station and never followed through on pursuing her allegations of rape. Whatever version of the story is believed, the facts are that May 30, 1921 Dick Rowland would step onto the Drexel elevator for the last time. His encounter with Sarah would become the match that lit a racial fire.

In the early afternoon of May 30 1921, which happened to be Memorial Day Dick came home to his Aunt Damie, as he called her, under severe distress. He explained that as he had stepped into the elevator so many times before, he lost his footing. He was excited by the activities of the day and the many customers he was serving. He stumbled in the doorway of the elevator and accidently stepped onto Sarah’s foot. Her foot was already in pain from an ingrown toenail. She was angered by his clumsiness and the pain he had caused her. She began to beat Dick over the head with her purse and even broke its handle. Rowland responded by grabbing her arms and holding them. In this same instant, the elevator door opened and Sarah screamed that she was being attacked! Rowland realized the ramifications of her accusation as a clerk ran out to respond to Sarah’s panicked yell. He fled from the Drexel Building and hurried to his Aunt Damie. Through his tears over what he feared was to come, he explained to Damie that he must hide for fear of his very life. He knew he was certain to be accused of attempted rape.
Rowland knew all too well what became of young black men in 1920s America if they were accused of attacking a white woman. They were lynched. Lynching in fact was a mechanism used to control and extinguish the rising aspirations of the African American population. It was used to exercise cruel punishment on mostly black men who crossed socially acceptable boundaries. The years that led up to 1921 were filled with vigilante acts of mob violence against blacks. In the year 1919, there were sixty-one lynchings and these are simply the ones that were recorded. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led a movement to end these gross atrocities. This organization had been founded in part to stop this practice.

Lynchings were used as illegal execution of a victim by a mob. A justice of the peace in Virginia by the name of Charles Lynch had a reputation for handing out rough justice and is credited with the name. The crime was originally committed by whites against blacks but was extended to whites who protested against black mistreatment. This sadistic act included torture, mutilation of body parts, castration, and dragging before setting the victim aflame. After the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a white supremacist group with deep seated hatred toward blacks, was reorganized in 1915, the number of murders increased throughout the country dramatically.6

Knowing all of this, the men of Greenwood had much reason to be concerned for the life of Dick Rowland. This is what Rowland was facing as he had stepped over one of the strictest boundaries; that of being accused of attacking or raping a white female. The written law in Oklahoma should have protected Rowland from any possible threats, but socially acceptable violence against blacks frequently usurped any legal code of conduct.7 As an aftermath of African-American slavery, the fight was still on to keep this population suppressed and
subjugated to white rule. The laws that were enacted such as the “Jim Crow” laws of segregation were extensions of this agenda.

The local newspaper called the *Tulsa Tribune* sensationalized the account that Sarah Page first gave to the police and headlined the story “Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator.” It went on to refer to Rowland as “Diamond Dick.” The article reported that Rowland had assaulted Sarah, tore her clothes off and scratched her. This story was fabricated to ignite the white community with its implications of an attempted rape and set them on edge. Unfortunately, the inflammatory article accomplished just that but has since disappeared from the papers archives. However, Richard Jones the editor of the Tulsa Tribune did write another article in *The Collier’s Weekly* that stated:

“There are good Negros who are kind and courteous. They are helpful, and the Southerner has affection for them. But there is a black man who is a beast. This is a physical fact for the traditional New Englander, for instance, does not know and can not comprehend. That bad black man is a bad man. He drinks the cheapest and vilest whiskey. He breaks every law to get it. He is a dope fiend. He holds life lightly. He is a bully and a brute. ⁸

The *Black Dispatch* wrote a counter article and entitled it “The False Story Which Set Tulsa on Fire.” This paper reported that Rowland was charged with attempted assault and arrested. In the article, Sarah Page was said to have observed Rowland scanning the halls and later he entered the elevator to attack her. She reportedly said that, upon hearing her screams, a clerk from a nearby store came and scared the Negro away. The same account reported that Rowland denied the assault allegations but admitted to touching her arm. However, the whites were not interested in what actually transpired, and the black community was soon hearing threats of a lynching.⁹ The men of Greenwood were determined to prevent this from happening.

This concern was not exaggerated as the men were well aware that the Tulsa Police Chief John Gaston was present at a previous lynching of a black man and refused to intervene. Also, a
man by the name of Claude Chandler was taken out of the county jail by masked men under Gaston’s authority and met the same fate. These two murders had taken place within the past year in 1920. An investigation by the state of Oklahoma revealed that public officials had complied with the horrific acts. With all of these elements in place a fire was soon to erupt and the community in Greenwood was preparing for the worst.

These were realities that the black population of Tulsa had struggled against for some time. Blacks had first migrated into the area around 1830 with the Five Civilized Tribes who settled there as a result of President Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act. Oklahoma had over 28 black townships due to the fact that approximately one third of those who walked the Trail of Tears alongside the tribes were African Americans. Most of them were slaves of the Indians who were forced west. The first governor of the Oklahoma Territory was a black man named Mcdade who was himself a target of hatred and death threats from organized groups like the KKK. All this history might have surprised some of the whites who participated in the attacks on the descendants of this group in 1921. Blacks were well established in Oklahoma before ancestors of the white mob arrived in the 1880s. The goal of the original settlers - both Indian and African-American – was to create a multi-ethnic community among the Five Tribes and the blacks so both would advance after the ending of After the Civil War. They saw no conflict regarding their future status within the country. They considered it a successful merger. They had intermarried and prospered and was ready helped to grow the country peacefully together.

However, the race was soon on to ensure that Oklahoma would come into the Union under white rule. This would also guarantee that the state would conform to the social and legal racial attitudes of the nation. In 1907 when Oklahoma became a state, the legislature moved
quickly to pass laws that would solidify segregation. This also resulted in the black community’s support and protection of each other as witnessed in Greenwood.

The Greenwood community in Tulsa was a good example of how blacks worked together to build a successful neighborhood, even in the midst of such white prejudice. It was established in 1908 by black businessmen; and by 1921 there were over 11,000 residents operating a variety of successful businesses that were patronized by both white and black Tulsans. An African-American attorney by the name of Andrew J. Smithman began printing the *Daily Tulsa Star* here in 1913. This paper highlighted the events and happenings within and without the black community from the black perspective. It provided a voice for the black population in the world of journalism.

A prominent entertainment spot was the Dreamland Theater which was owned by Lola Williams who operated a chain of theaters. Here the community enjoyed silent films, theatrical reviews and live musicals. The theater seated over 750 people and sadly was one of the places where survivors of the riots in 1921 sought out shelter and orchestrated a rescue plan. However, it became the object of the mob and was destroyed as a result of an overhead bombing. This was one of four theaters which included the Peoria, Regal and Rex Theaters. Greenwood was indeed a source of pride, entrepreneurship, resources and wealth. This community was a safe haven and provided cultural validation for the black community.13

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13 Footnote reference.
The Greenwood community also boasted a hotel called the Redwing Hotel that provided first rate accommodations for its customers. A bus line was available to the residents that was owned and operated by Simon Berry who ran his buses downtown to accommodate the African American community who worked there. At its peak, Berry’s bus company was earning $500 daily, a tremendous amount of money in this era. Berry proudly reinvested back into his community and purchased land to establish a park for local residents to enjoy. This park included a dance hall, picnic area, and a swimming pool. Berry conducted his enterprise for over twenty-five years and later sold it to the city to consolidate transportation efforts around Tulsa. He agreed to sell on the terms that African Americans would be allowed to ride, and that black drivers would still operate the routes in the Greenwood district.14

Berry and his business partner James Lee also operated an airline charter service that many of the black and white businessmen patronized. They were taken to their destinations with Simon Berry as their pilot. Another form of local transportation was Your Cab Company that was utilized by the local residents. The Greenwood district at its height boasted fifteen grocery stores, four movie houses, two newspapers, four drugstores, a library, an ambulance service, funeral homes, a hospital, four chili parlors, nightclubs and thirteen churches. The community
had their own lawyers, doctors, dentists and schools. The members of Greenwood embraced and supported their very wealthy as well as their working class. This was a city within a city that allowed the black community to meet their social, educational, health, civil, entertainment and provisional needs.¹⁵

Another shining example of the Greenwood district was the schools of black Tulsa. Booker T. Washington High School was established in 1913. Ellis Woods was the principal who was committed to a first class academic curriculum. Freshmen were required to learn Latin, English, Algebra, Ancient History and Domestic Science and vocal music. The sophomore class mastered Geometry, Domestic Art, Medieval and Modern History, economics and manual training. To continue building upon these educational blocks, juniors studied Commercial Arithmetic, business spelling, chemistry, English history, civics, domestic science, and vocal music. The senior class graduated having been trained in American history, psychology, trigonometry, bookkeeping, drawing and shorthand. Woods was successful in adding to the elite and educated population of Greenwood.¹⁶

Yet none of these accomplishments mattered to the angry white mob that was bent on destroying Greenwood in the summer of 1921. The mob started the first fire broke around 1:30 A.M. at the popular intersection of Archer and Boston. The fire department was prevented from helping to extinguish the destructive fires that were first set in the business district and expanded
throughout the community. A resident notified the authorities that the arsonist had not yet reached the homes of the wealthier citizens and if they would respond quickly, the homes could be saved. Within a short time after his call, white men were sent into the area. They destroyed, looted and burned the affluent homes of Tulsa’s black elite. The oldest living survivor of the riot, a man named Otis Clark, who is today 108 years old said that “whites were jealous of the prosperity and felt that the blacks were living too good.” They wanted to run the blacks off and take over our area.”

The Greenwood community had continued to thrive even in the face of an economic downturn due to the drop in the states once lucrative oil business. The whites highly resented this since they regarded the blacks as second class citizens who should not succeed on a level equal or above their own. This belief was not limited to Oklahoma but was a prevalent attitude among many white Americans. Tulsa just happened to have the right environment and attitudes on both sides to explode into such an outcome. The majority of blacks were determined to grow and prosper and the whites were determined to stop them.

Upon hearing the rumors that there were plans to lynch Rowland, many of the men of Greenwood headed toward the courthouse. They were met by the sheriff who insisted that they go home. Their presence was not welcomed and many were told by whites in the area “niggas go home.” One white man even tried to wrestle a gun from one of the men of Greenwood and a shot was fired. This was interpreted as a declaration of war. People began to scatter and the white mobs began to arm themselves and head for Greenwood. This sequence of events provided them with the excuse they needed to destroy the blacks who they hated and resented to begin with. Even more angry whites – now well armed – headed across the tracks into Greenwood.
As a result, the rapid gunfire was continuously exchanged as angry white mobs crossed the borders of Greenwood with indiscriminate shots ringing out and determined black men firing in return. However, the black men of Tulsa were not prepared for the overhead attack that consisted of airplanes flying and unleashing bomb fire from the sky. The hate-filled whites of Tulsa were set on seeing the black community be destroyed and devastated. They incorporated every means to accomplish this end including the use of airplanes.

In response to the unrest in Tulsa, Governor James Robertson declared martial law at 11:29 A.M. on June 1, 1921. Now the white men concentrated their efforts on assisting the local fire department and placing under arrest all the blacks who had not been imprisoned already. Instead of being rescues, the people of Greenwood were being further victimized by the National Guard. This reflected the racist attitudes that were prevalent, and openly expressed, again not just in Oklahoma but throughout the whole country.18

The community of Greenwood endured the second phase of the dehumanization with their imprisonment and interment. There were several sites that were chosen to detain the survivors of the traumatic events of the previous night’s civil war. Locations included the Convention Hall, McNulty Baseball Park and the Tulsa Fairgrounds. Black Americans were herded into stalls just as their ancestors were herded onto slave ships as chattel several generations before. Their sleeping arrangements at the Fair Ground consisted of being housed in the pens reserved for cattle and pigs.19 The aftermath of the riot continued to serve as a reminder to the black residents of Greenwood about the cruel realities of being black in 20th century America. They were held against their will under armed guard by their attackers and the National Guard.
However, when the white community realized that their businesses and homes could not be run without the black community, a system was set up to get their workforce back. One device that was implemented was the edict of green cards. White men were required to come and verify that their workers were among the prisoners and make sure that “their” blacks would be supervised and kept under strict control. A prominent black architect had a white associate vouch for him to gain his release from the camp. The local paper praised the usage of the green tags and reported that they helped separate the good blacks from the bad ones. It also helped the so-called “good Negroes” by ensuring that they would not be idle but would instead maintain conduct acceptable to the whites. As reported in the Tribune:

“The green card does something more than to help the city get rid of the bad Negro. It is the certificate of the industry and decency to every Negro who carries it. It marks him as of the better class, just as the absence of the card brands the other fellow as one to be looked upon with suspicion, if not to be got rid of. In this hour of our reconstruction let every good negro who is entitled to his green card, get it without delay.”

Many blacks and whites claimed that if the men of Greenwood had not gone to the courthouse, this massacre would not have occurred. This was a common response whenever African Americans would resist oppression, racism and brutality. However, many would argue that the racist inflammatory headlines orchestrated by the Tribune were the important factor that incited and encouraged the violence against the blacks of Greenwood.
Furthermore the situation was not that simple. The Tulsa riot was the climax of what has been called the “Red Summer” that involved the invasion of black neighborhoods along with the lynching and pre-meditated murders of African Americans in several prominent cities such as Chicago, Washington, D.C., Elaine, Arkansas and others throughout the nation. African Americans were experiencing the backlash over their rising status as free and equal citizens under the law. Many whites, not just in the South but also in the North and West could not accept racial equality. They wanted blacks to remain as second-class citizens. Blacks fought just as hard to advocate for themselves and break away from the injustices that had dehumanized their ancestors. They were determined to live and benefit from the prosperity that their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents had bestowed upon the nation via their contributions and free labor when the Civil War ended.

Tulsa began an immediate cover up of the riot and directed their brand of restoration of law and order onto the victims of this racial conflict. Ironically, the man who stood at the center of it all was fully exonerated. Dick Rowland dropped from the historical record never to be heard from again. One of the methods of cover up was mass graves that were dug to bury the bodies in the aftermath of the riot. White and black Tulsans reported on the horrors of seeing the bodies driven through the streets on wagons or being a part of the groups that dug the holes to dump the bodies in. It was reported that bags of lime was brought into the city to clean the communal space that the blacks were utilizing to relieve themselves in confinement. The blacks say the lime was brought in to cover the stench of the mass graves dug to dispose of the bodies.

In the aftermath, funerals were forbidden for the victims. Survivor Otis Clark said that the KKK was behind much of the cover up and had actually been allowed to take over. This added insult to injury as the blacks were denied a decent burial. Clark remembered that the Klan was
the main power in Tulsa for the past three or four years. He said that the whole story about this riot has not been told and during a radio interview stated that “this was the worst riot in all of America.” The KKK’S meeting place was located just four blocks west of the black community. This created a very hostile and tense situation for the Greenwood community.

White children, who were safely in school on the days following the tragedy, watched from the windows as dark brown corpses passed by their schools. It was reported that many of the teenage boys left school early on the day of the riot to participate in the attack on the black community. Some snuck out and met men who had tired from the all night attack. They handed their weapons on to some of these eager young boys to continue the massacre.

Another tactic that Tulsa used for the cover-up was forming a committee called the Executive Welfare Committee, later called the Reconstruction Committee. It was set up to do the necessary work to bring Tulsa back to normalcy. The chairman of the committee L.J. Martin stated, “Tulsa can only redeem herself from the countrywide 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.” However, just the opposite
approach was taken. There was never any money that was raised to provide relief to the victimized community. It was the final decision of the committee members that no money would be accepted to help rebuild or relieve the Greenwood residence. Many cities were offering their assistance and the aid and relief was denied. A policy was put in place that stated that this matter was a local one and that all forms of assistance would be handled by the people of Tulsa. The leaders of the city began using ordinances and rezoning efforts to actually steal the land from the distressed blacks.  

A lawsuit was filed by attorney B.C. Franklin, a member of the Greenwood community, from a tent erected in the burned out community successfully defeated the city’s plans to take the land and relocate Greenwood. The mayor of the city appointed The Reconstruction Committee to implement all the proposed plans for rebuilding the Greenwood section. He remarked “Let the Negro settlement be placed further to the north and east, a large portion of this district is well suited for industrial purposes than for residences.” On June 7 the decision was made that the Real Estate Exchange was organized to access and appraise the value of all the properties in the burned area. This plan was endorsed by the white political powers, businessmen and citizen organizations.

The next phase was to convince the vulnerable blacks to sell their properties to them. Another tactic pursued by the city was to pass Fire Ordinance 2165 in which the buildings that were partially burned would now be considered part of Tulsa’s fire limit. The city under these new zoning laws placed the structures under an ordinance that said any building within these limits must be made of concrete, brick or steel. The second requirement was that they must be built at least two stories high.
The goal of these strict guidelines was to prevent the community from utilizing the inexpensive bricks that were readily available, and drain the community financially so that rebuilding would be almost impossible. The insurance companies proved to be another force against the community. They rejected the claims of the property owners citing no coverage for fires that were caused by civil insurrections or riots. In the end, the city placed the blame of the riot squarely on the backs of the black community, and it was ultimately these residents who would have to rebuild Black Wall Street.\textsuperscript{25} Several of the survivors moved, and never returned to this Greenwood that was now the historic site of their painful holocaust.

However, many began to indeed rebuild by erecting tents and shacks to provide shelter for themselves; they were determined to hold on to the land and legacy that they and their ancestors had worked so hard for. Unfortunately for many, they were simply not able to erect a decent home to take them through the winter. Several people became severely ill or died as a result of their fragile living conditions. Eventually, Greenwood was able to rebuild itself and was active until the 1950s with the advent of the middle class white suburbs.

The community successfully rebuilt itself without acquiring any loans from the banks who denied them mortgages. They depended upon their own individual wealth, friends and family to move forward. Professionals such as Doctors Patrick, Payne and Lythcott, who was Greenwood’s ear, throat and nose specialist, served the community. Simon Berry owned the Royal Hotel that sat next to the Jackson funeral home. The community boasted a café, dress shops, grocery store and bowling alley. Several respected attorney’s including Dr. Franklin who successfully defeated the Fire Ordinance operated alongside the new newspaper \textit{The Oklahoma Eagle}. Community members could receive a degree at the American Business College. The
barber shops, drugstores, eatery’s and lounges and a cab company that existed before the riot were back in business.

By 1922 most of the buildings in the first block of Greenwood were standing tall. The buildings were rebuilt to resemble the ones that were burned to the ground. Many of the Greenwood businesses thrived even during the Great Depression. There was a directory that was published called the Negro Business Directory and a Greenwood Chamber of Commerce was established. Unfortunately, as War World II was coming to an end Greenwood’s heyday was ending as well. By 1978 there were only two businesses that remained one was the Oklahoman Eagle.

This is a testament to the spirit of African Americans who continued to prosper in the face of pure hatred and jealousy. The “East End Relief Committee” was in awe of the endurance of the blacks of Greenwood and said:

The courage with which Tulsa Negroes withstood repeated attempts of the city administration to deliver the burned area over to certain land grafters is the subject of most favorable comment all over the country. The rapidity with which business buildings and residences are being rebuilt, in most instances, better than before is proof in wood and brick and in stone, of the black man’s ability to make progress against the most cunningly planned and powerfully organized opposition.” 26
One of the pillars in the community was the Mount Zion Baptist church that had recently been completed and was completely destroyed during the riot. However, through the fundraising efforts of the congregants the church was rededicated on Sunday, October 21, 1952. The church cost $300,00 and was constructed with buff bricks and stone masonry. It boasted a stained glass picture that revealed a picture of the River Jordan. The Latimer brothers, W.S. and J.C., architects who were graduates of the Tuskegee Institute oversaw the rebuilding project. The community viewed this accomplishment as a testament to the community’s triumph over hatred and evil.

Visitors into the area after the rebuilding, who also visited prominent black communities all over America, were in awe of the community of Greenwood. It was thriving and segregation played a huge role in its success. This would all change in the 1950s. Interestingly enough the civil rights actions that broke down segregation walls, also served as a breaking point for Greenwood. A chapter of the National Urban League formed in 1951 and its mission was to end race based social and economic inequalities. The success of their organization and others like
them served to be a double edge sword for Greenwood. The walls of segregation began to fall and so did economic interest and incentives. The black dollars that were previously untapped by whites were now sought after and welcomed. Greenwood could not survive this new reality. Segregation was one of the key ingredients of its success. The community would now be forced to compete with the downtown stores, and became the victim of the Housing Act of 1949.

As a result a new enemy was on the horizon and it did not convene yielding guns or airplanes; it came with weapons of wrecking balls and cranes in the name of “Urban Renewal.” In an effort to expand the outlying areas of many major cities as a result of white flight, Greenwood was again the victim of invasion and destruction. Highways were built that ran directly through the area and cut the last vein of activity. The decision was made by city officials to run Interstate 224 right through the major vein of Greenwood, thereby succeeding at what the rioters of 1921 were not – stopping the last heartbeat of Greenwood.

Today the focus in Greenwood is preserving its legacy, the business of Greenwood are as forgotten as the riot was for seventy five years. The Greenwood Cultural Center was dedicated on October 19, 1995 to honor those who built and rebuilt the community known as America’s Black Wall Street. The two people who spearheaded the movement to gain funding for the cultural center were Oklahoma State Representative Don Ross and Oklahoma State Senator Maxine Cissel Horner. They were successful at convincing the majority all white legislatures to approve the funds for this project. It began with the restoration of Mabel Little’s affluent home which is now called the Mabel B. Little Heritage House. This was established in 1986 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only original built home in the area that is still standing. The next phase of building was the Goodwin-Chappelle Gallery that features African American art, artifacts and history. The last phase was the Oklahoma Jazz
Hall of Fame that recognizes musicians from Oklahoma, and the Opal L. Dargan Renaissance Hall named after a prominent community activist.

It serves as a monument to preserve the cultural and the history of African Americans in Tulsa. The Greenwood Cultural Center is a symbol of integration and interracial collaboration. Individuals form a variety of social, racial and economic backgrounds helped to bring the center to its completion. It serves as a monument to preserve the culture and history of African Americans in Tulsa; but was built on top of the ashes of America’s Black Wall Street.\textsuperscript{28}
Endnotes

1 Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land; The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press), 34.


4 Tim Madigan, *The Burning; Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, 51.

5 Ibid., 49-54.

6 *Spartacus Educational* accessed 12 March 2011 [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAlynching.htm]; Internet.


10 Ibid., 26.


15 Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma - Pt. 1 04 February 2011 available from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nsna5B79784]; Internet


17 Voices of Oklahoma with Otis Clark accessed 1 May 2011 available from [http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com/otis_clark.html]; Internet


19 Ibid., 92.


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