

Tulsa Race Riot Massacre

The Tulsa Race Riot and Massacre of 1921 was a widely unknown piece of history until it was rediscovered around 50 years later. It is a significant part of our history, so it is important to learn about it. This one event affected racism in Tulsa that is still seen today.

In 1905, oil boomed in Tulsa and everyone started moving here. Black and white businesses grew and became wealthy. Racism was still a huge problem. Areas were still segregated but the Greenwood district became a thriving community for African Americans.

On May 30, 1921, Dick Rowland, an African American shoe shiner, was about to go to the bathroom. The bathroom for black people was on the top floor. On the elevator up, something happened. Most people later thought he just tripped and grabbed on a white girl, while some believed he attacked her, which was later confirmed false. The newspaper said he attacked, and a mob of white people grew. The white girl refused to say what happened but said he should not go to jail. But the police arrested him anyway and guarded him from the white mob who thought he should be killed. Blacks came to help the police stand guard, but they said no. One white man demanded a black man give him his pistol, but he refused. A shot was fired. Nobody knows who fired the shot. A shoot-off began as the mob chased the black men back into Greenwood, burning houses down on the way. Children hid under beds and floorboards. They looted and burned most of the houses, stores and businesses. Some protected their properties; some fled their properties. The mob stopped the firemen from coming in to take down the fires.

They called Martial Law to protect Greenwood. Even though the whites were doing most of the damage and murder, they rounded up over 4,000 black people and put them in animal cages, giving them food but no medical care. They finally released them from the cages after about two weeks. 191 businesses were burned down and 1,256 homes. Nobody knows the exact amount of deaths that occurred but the Tulsa Tribune reported 176 in the newspaper the day after. The next day, it changed and said only 30 people died. New York Times said 33 people died. But the Red Cross, who was there helping the people, said about 300 died. Today, most people believe the Red Cross's report.

Red Cross provided tents, medical care and jobs for the African Americans. Tulsa had committees that were supposed to help Greenwood recover but all they did was put their land on sale to white people for cheap. Insurances would not even pay for repairs because they said it was the African Americans' fault since it was a riot. The area never recovered.

The Grand Jury, consisting of only whites, voted that it was all the blacks' fault. The newspaper did not talk about the event for 50 years and it was not included in any school history books until 2012!

It is sad that so many people died and that this has been hidden from us for so many years. It is important for us to learn about it because we can learn from our mistakes. We can try to make things better and keep learning from our history to improve the effects of racism today.

Bibliography

Harris JD, PHD, Duchess. The Tulsa Race Riot. Abdo Publishing. Minnesota, 2020.