



HR0449

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, "Black Wall Street" was a prospering
3 African-American neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that went up
4 in flames 98 years ago; incredibly, most Americans have never
5 heard of the shameful events of June 1, 1921, when whites
6 firebombed the neighborhood and an estimated 300
7 African-Americans were murdered; and

8 WHEREAS, During the course of 18 hours on May 31 and June
9 1, 1921, more than 1,000 homes and businesses in Tulsa,
10 Oklahoma were destroyed and estimates of 50 to 300 people were
11 killed during the race bombing; and

12 WHEREAS, By early 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma was a modern city
13 with a population of more than 100,000; most of the city's
14 10,000 African-American residents lived in the Greenwood
15 District, a vibrant neighborhood that was home to two
16 newspapers, several churches, a library branch, and scores of
17 black-owned businesses; and

18 WHEREAS, On May 30, 1921, an incident involving Dick
19 Rowland, an African-American shoe shiner, and Sarah Page, a
20 white elevator operator, in the Drexel Building in Tulsa would
21 rapidly escalate into one of the single worst incidents of
22 racial violence in American history; the most common

1 explanation is that Rowland stepped on Page's foot as he
2 entered the elevator, causing her to scream, and Rowland was
3 arrested by the police; and

4 WHEREAS, On May 30, 1921, the Tulsa Tribune, the city's
5 afternoon daily newspaper, reported that Rowland had attempted
6 to rape Page; by 7:30 P.M., hundreds of whites had gathered
7 outside the Tulsa County Courthouse demanding that the
8 authorities hand over Rowland, but the sheriff refused; at
9 around 9 P.M., after reports of the dire conditions downtown
10 reached Greenwood, a group of approximately 25 armed
11 African-American men, many of them World War I veterans, went
12 down to the courthouse and offered their services to the
13 authorities to help protect Rowland but were rebuffed by the
14 sheriff; at around 10 P.M., a false rumor hit Greenwood that
15 whites were storming the courthouse, prompting a second
16 contingent of African-American men to go back to the courthouse
17 and offer their services to the authorities, who were once
18 again turned away; as the group was leaving, a white man tried
19 to disarm a black veteran and a shot was fired, an incident
20 that became the start of the race bombing; and

21 WHEREAS, Over the next 6 hours, Tulsa was plunged into
22 chaos as angry whites, frustrated over the failed lynching,
23 began to vent their rage at African-Americans in general;
24 furious fighting erupted along the Frisco railroad tracks,

1 where black defenders were able to hold off members of the
2 white mob; an unarmed African-American man was murdered inside
3 a downtown movie theater, while carloads of armed whites began
4 making "drive-by" shootings in black residential
5 neighborhoods; by midnight, fires had been set along the edge
6 of the African-American commercial district; in some of the
7 city's all-night cafes, whites began to organize for a dawn
8 invasion of Greenwood; and

9 WHEREAS, During the early hours of the race bombing, local
10 authorities did little to stem the growing crisis, and Tulsa
11 police officers had deputized former members of the lynch mob;
12 local units of the National Guard were mobilized, but they
13 spent most of the night protecting a white neighborhood from a
14 nonexistent black counterattack; and

15 WHEREAS, Shortly before dawn on June 1, 1921, thousands of
16 armed whites had gathered along the fringes of Greenwood; after
17 daybreak, they poured into the African-American district,
18 looting homes and businesses and setting them on fire; numerous
19 atrocities occurred, including the murder of A. C. Jackson, a
20 renowned black surgeon, who was shot after he surrendered to a
21 group of whites; at least one machine gun was utilized by the
22 invading whites, and some have claimed that airplanes were used
23 in the attack; black Tulsans fought hard to protect their homes
24 and businesses, with particularly sharp fighting occurring off

1 of Standpipe Hill, but were outgunned and outnumbered in the
2 end; and

3 WHEREAS, Following the race bombing, a brief period of
4 martial law was followed by various legal maneuvers; even
5 though Dick Rowland was exonerated, an all-white grand jury
6 blamed black Tulsans for the events that transpired; despite
7 overwhelming evidence, no whites were ever sent to prison for
8 the murders and arson that had occurred; and

9 WHEREAS, The vast majority of Tulsa's African-American
10 population had been made homeless by the race bombing; despite
11 efforts by the white establishment to force the relocation of
12 the black community, black Tulsans had already begun the long
13 and arduous process of rebuilding Greenwood within days;
14 thousands were forced to spend the winter of 1921-1922 living
15 in tents; and

16 WHEREAS, The deep scars left by the race bombing remained
17 visible for years, and it became a taboo subject, particularly
18 in Tulsa, for many years; in 1997, a state commission was
19 formed to investigate the race bombing; the commission
20 recommended that reparations be paid to the remaining
21 survivors, while a team of scientists and historians uncovered
22 evidence supporting long-held beliefs that unidentified
23 victims had been buried in unmarked grave sites; and

1 WHEREAS, It is important that the people of the State of
2 Illinois and the nation do not forget this terrible tragedy;
3 therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
5 HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
6 we mourn the loss of life and the loss of the black economy of
7 Tulsa, Oklahoma that took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921.