



HR0450

LRB098 12391 GRL 46762 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of Representatives wish to acknowledge the Tulsa, Oklahoma race riot of May 31 and June 1, 1921; and

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

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

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WHEREAS, On May 30, 1921, an incident involving Dick Rowland, an African-American shoe shiner, and Sarah Page, a white elevator operator, in the Drexel Building in Tulsa would rapidly escalate into one of the single worst incidents of racial violence in American history; the most common explanation is that Rowland stepped on Page's foot as he entered the elevator, causing her to scream, and Rowland was arrested by the police; and

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

18          WHEREAS, Over the next 6 hours, Tulsa was plunged into  
19          chaos as angry whites, frustrated over the failed lynching,  
20          began to vent their rage at African-Americans in general;  
21          furious fighting erupted along the Frisco railroad tracks,  
22          where black defenders were able to hold off members of the  
23          white mob; an unarmed African-American man was murdered inside  
24          a downtown movie theater, while carloads of armed whites began

1 making "drive-by" shootings in black residential  
2 neighborhoods; by midnight, fires had been set along the edge  
3 of the African-American commercial district; in some of the  
4 city's all-night cafes, whites began to organize for a dawn  
5 invasion of Greenwood; and

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

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

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

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

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

22           WHEREAS, It is important that the people of the State of  
23 Illinois and the nation do not forget this terrible tragedy;

1 therefore, be it

2       RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
3 NINETY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
4 we acknowledge the Tulsa, Oklahoma race riot of May 31 and June  
5 1, 1921 and express our regret at this terrible event in  
6 American history.