



# UNKNOWN:

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ONE OF THE MOST VIOLENT RACIAL INCIDENTS IN U.S.  
HISTORY YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF

# Abstract:

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Learning about history, specifically American history during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many people will know about the violence that came with the racism. After the Civil War, the South did everything in their power to make sure that the African American community still suffered, by putting into place what are known as The Jim Crow Laws. The Jim Crow Laws created a concept that was known as “separate but equal”, in other words it was legal segregation that got around the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendment. With these laws came more suffering for the newly freed African American slaves. The Jim Crow Laws weren't the only thing that would trouble African American communities of the South. The second wave of the KKK came about in the 1920s, which included 50,000 members by 1925. The KKK were responsible for countless acts of violence against many African American communities, as well as the ongoing discrimination. The communities that were affected the most were the ones in the deep south. This became apparent for one African American community in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The events that occurred on May 30, 1921, would forever change the community of Greenwood, and would go down in history as one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S history. Even though it's one of the worst racial incidents of U.S history, it's also considered the most unknown and unheard incidents. The incident is formally known as the Tulsa Race Riots or Tulsa Race Massacre; an event that lasted 18 hours as white mobs stormed, killed and destroyed the predominately African American community, Greenwood. Just recently, there was a mass grave that was discovered in Tulsa that is believed to be connected to the race riots, and about 800 people are believed to be buried in the mass grave.



# The Tulsa Race Riots of 1921

On May 30, 1921, a young African American teen named Dick Rowland entered an elevator of a local office building, The Drexel Building. Once on the elevator, Rowland was met with a white female elevator operator named Sarah Page. At some point Page screamed, causing Rowland to flee the scene. The police were called, and by the next morning Rowland was arrested.

Due to the location and time period that the incident occurred, not much was reported about the riot. Therefore, there is no follow up information about Rowland's trial or conviction; not a lot is reported about him after his arrest.



"Dick Rowland (AKA "Diamond Dick Rowland") (born c. 1902)





By that time though, rumors about the incident had already reached the prominently white neighborhood of Greenwood, Oklahoma. This angered the community fiercely, and by that evening a white mob had already begun to gather around the courthouse demanding that Rowland be handed over. Around 9 p.m. though, a group of 25 African American men had also come to the courthouse to offer their help with guarding Rowland.

"African Americans detained during the Tulsa Race Massacre, 1921. The photo shows a small truck loaded with people. A woman sits with her legs dangling from the back of the truck. An armed man rides on the running board of the automobile." (Tulsa History)



For the next 18 hours, the white mob would ravage, destroy, and desecrate the homes, buildings, and businesses of the African American community of Greenwood. The city was nearly leveled due to attacks from the angry white mob, that occurred all night.



“An intersection in the Greenwood District following the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.”(Tulsa History)



# Aftermath of the Riots:







“The west side of the 100 block of North Greenwood Avenue following the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The back of the photograph contains a handwritten caption stating, "Williams Building, N. Greenwood looking north. This is the west side of the 100 Block N. Greenwood. Photo by Hooker." The 1920 Tulsa city directory lists the following businesses on the west side of the 100 block of North Greenwood: 102 Williams Building 104 Tulsa Waffle House 106 Bell & Little Restaurant 108 A. F. Bryant 110 C.L. Netherland, barber 112 Gurley Building & Hotel 114 Alexander & Alexander Cleaners 116 T.E. Hughes, restaurant 118 Samuel Stokenbery, soft drinks 120 Dixie Theatre 120 1/2 Samuel Stokenbery, shoe shiner 122 1/2 W. H. Smith 122 1/2 C. E. Corbett, lawyer 124 Elliott & Hooker, clothing 126 J. R. Bell” (Tulsa History)



“The destroyed Dreamland Theatre, located at 127 North Greenwood Avenue in Tulsa, OK, following the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. John Wesley Williams and wife, Loula Cotten Williams, owned and operated the theater.” (Tulsa History)





“An African American man lying dead beside the railroad tracks during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The man's white shirt contains a large blood stain. Another photograph of this scene in the collection confirms that this location is near the Saint Louis & San Francisco "Frisco" Railway Depot.” (Tulsa History)

“An African American man lying dead in a street of the Greenwood District following the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The man's head and shoulders have been covered with a page from a newspaper.” (Tulsa History)







“An American flag lies on the ground in front of an area of Oaklawn Cemetery. Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019. in Tulsa, Okla., where a 25-by-30 foot apparent pit, consistent with a common grave, was located during initial scanning for unmarked graves related to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.” (Mike Simons/Tulsa World via AP)



## In Recent Years:

Newspapers claim around 100 African Americans were believed to be injured or dead, unfortunately this is quite an understatement. As of December 2019, a mass grave was discovered in Tulsa Oklahoma, and is believed to be connected to the race riots of 1921. An estimated 800 bodies are believed to be buried in the mass grave.



“Angela Berg, an anthropologist with the state medical examiner’s office, during a search in October for possible mass graves from a 1921 massacre in Tulsa, Okla.”Credit...Mike Simons/Tulsa World, via Associated Press



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