



The Southwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association

Representing Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, & New Mexico

E: southwest@nblsa.org | W: www.swblsa.org

Statement on Tulsa Race Riots

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



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February 26th, 2025

OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SWBLSA RE: TULSA RACE RIOTS (1921)

The Southwest Region of the National Black Law Student Association (or SWBLSA) is dedicated to promoting the educational, professional, and social needs of Black law students. Accordingly, it is imperative that we address racism and attacks on our community with swiftness.

In 1906, a prominent Black town in Tulsa, Oklahoma began its development by way of Ottawa Gurley, who purchased a tract of land with intentions to create opportunity for the Black community.¹ This community, later popularized as *Black Wall Street* to many and less commonly, as *Little Africa*, was located in the Greenwood district of Tulsa, and boasted varying Black-owned businesses. Tulsa's Black Wall Street, one of the wealthiest Black communities in the United States at the time, featured over 100 businesses including 41 grocery stores and meat markets, 30 restaurants, 11 boarding and rooming houses, 9 billiard houses, and 5 hotels.² The community also had over 30 professionals including but not limited to doctors, lawyers, dentists, and real estate professionals.³

The birth of Tulsa's Black Wall Street was not one of solely opportunity, but one of necessity. It came to be because Tulsa was racially segregated, and the Black community endeavored to build a thriving economy where they relied on themselves to survive and it was quite a successful effort.⁴ That was until the vicious attack on Black Wall Street in 1921. For an estimated eighteen hours, using guns, explosives, and fire, white mobs unleashed a violent attack on this community.⁵ The attack was said to start from an incident involving Dick Rowland, an African American shoe shiner, and Sarah Page, a white elevator operator.⁶ While the exact events May 30, 1921, remain unclear, the most common account suggests that Rowland accidentally stepped on Page's foot as he entered an elevator, prompting her to scream.⁷ The following day, the Tulsa Tribune, the city's afternoon newspaper, reported that Rowland, who had been arrested

¹Gara, A. (2020, June 18). *The baron of black Wall Street*. Forbes. Retrieved February 3rd, 2025, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/antoinegara/2020/06/18/the-bezos-of-black-wall-street-tulsa-race-riots-1921/>

²*Black Wall Street* | Tulsa Library. (n.d.). Retrieved February 9th, 2025, from <https://www.tulsalibrary.org/black-wall-street>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ | *Oklahoma Historical Society*. (n.d.). Oklahoma Historical Society | OHS. Retrieved February 9, 2025, from <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=TU013>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*



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by the police, had attempted to rape Page.⁸ Then, tragedy ensued. The attack spanned 35 blocks, resulting in up to 300 deaths, over \$31 million dollars in property damage, destroyed nearly 200 businesses and displaced many community members, leaving an estimated 10,000 people homeless.⁹

In September of 2024, the United States Department of Justice (hereinafter referred to as the “DOJ”) announced that they would launch an investigation into the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot.¹⁰ This decision came after the request of Damario Solomon-Simmons, an attorney for the last known survivors of the massacre, 110-year-old Viola Fletcher and 109-year-old Lessie Benningfield Randle.¹¹ In June 2024, the Oklahoma Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit from survivors seeking financial restitution, ruling that the destruction of the Greenwood district didn’t fall under the state’s public nuisance statute.¹² Following this, Solomon-Simmons urged the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the massacre under the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act.¹³

Last month, January 2025, the DOJ released a 127-page review on the Tulsa Massacre detailing. The review detailed prosecution infeasibility, the legal analysis of these hate crimes, statute of limitation, and other relevant information pertaining to the attack.¹⁴ The report characterized the massacre as a horrific act of depravity and bigotry. It also acknowledges the profound and lasting trauma that has reverberated through generations, as well as the enduring consequences of destroying a once-thriving community. SWBLSA hereby our appreciation for both this investigation and for this report. However, verifying the accounts of what is already known offers no meaningful benefit to the survivors and descendants of those who lived in Greenwood. Accordingly, we call on Oklahoma’s Supreme Court to reconsider this matter, and rectify what was a great atrocity that left a lingering stench in the state.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Research Guides: This month in Business History: Black Wall Street in Tulsa, OK Destroyed on 6/1/1921.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 8, 2025, from <https://guides.loc.gov/this-month-in-business-history/june/black-wall-street-destroyed>

¹⁰ Murphy, S. (2024, September 30). *Justice Department will launch civil rights review into 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre* | AP News. AP News. Retrieved February 8, 2025, from <https://apnews.com/article/1921-tulsa-race-massacre-justice-department-review-ea6551dc40c73996c3bf7e0a3ad3b06d>

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Review and evaluation Tulsa race massacre. (2025). In *www.justice.gov* (No. 144-59N-731). U.S. Department of Justice | Civil Rights Division. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/media/1383756/dl>



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We invite interested parties to review the report. To both commemorate those who came before us and to best dismantle opportunities for history to repeat itself, it is imperative that in our free time, we study that history.

This attack -- fueled by white supremacy was not a mere misunderstanding. It was an act of racial violence, a punitive measure, and an excessive showing of force. It was clear and comprehensive disrespect. It continued a pattern that carries a burden much too heavy to bear. It furthered a hateful narrative that has claimed the life of Black people all over. Simply put, it was **terrorism**. We denounce hatred -- especially in the form of violence against our community.

Oluwademilade Ogunlade

Chair, SWBLSA

southwest@nblsa.org

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Carlos Pollard, Jr.

Attorney General, SWBLSA

swblsa.ag@nblsa.org

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