



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's Reparations for the 1921 Race Riots

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



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July 7, 2025

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

The Southwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association (SWBLSA) solemnly acknowledges the City of Tulsa's historic announcement of a \$105 million reparations package for the descendants and community affected by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. This moment reflects a critical step toward repair, restoration, and justice for a community that suffered one of the most egregious acts of racial terrorism in American history.

In 1906, Ottawa Gurley, a wealthy Black landowner and businessman, purchased land in Tulsa, Oklahoma with a vision: to establish a safe and prosperous community for Black families in an era of systemic racial segregation and economic exclusion.¹ The result was Greenwood, a flourishing Black neighborhood later known as "Black Wall Street." Greenwood thrived as a self-sufficient and prosperous district, home to over 100 Black-owned businesses — including 41 grocery stores and meat markets, 30 restaurants, 5 hotels, 11 boarding houses, a hospital, schools, and Black professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and real estate agents. It was a beacon of Black excellence, resilience, and enterprise.²

That prosperity was violently interrupted in the early hours of June 1, 1921. After an incident involving Dick Rowland, a young Black shoe shiner, and Sarah Page, a white elevator operator, which was widely believed to have been a misunderstanding, the Tulsa Tribune ran a racially inflammatory headline that incited white mobs.³ For nearly 18 hours, a coordinated and militaristic assault was launched on the Greenwood District. Mobs on the ground looted and burned 35 blocks of homes and businesses.⁴ Over 300 Black men, women, and children were killed, more than 1,100 homes were destroyed, and thousands of survivors were displaced into internment camps. Insurance claims were denied, perpetrators were never prosecuted, and for decades, the massacre was actively suppressed from the historical record.⁵

SWBLSA recognizes the recent reparations package spearheaded by Tulsa's first Black mayor, Monroe Nichols, as a long overdue but essential act of redress. The plan includes \$24 million

¹Antoine Gara, The Baron of Black Wall Street, *Forbes* (June 18, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/antoinegara/2020/06/18/the-bezos-of-black-wall-street-tulsa-race-riots-1921/>

² *Id.*

³ U.S. Dep't of Just., *Justice Department Announces Results of Review and Evaluation of Tulsa Race Massacre* (Jan. 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-results-review-and-evaluation-tulsa-race-massacre>. ↩

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*



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for affordable housing and homeownership, \$60 million for historic preservation, and \$21 million in scholarships, small-business grants, and victim identification.⁶ It is a blueprint for what meaningful repair can look like, a shift from symbolic apologies to tangible investment. But we know this is just one step. The legacy of Greenwood's destruction echoes the enduring racial wealth gap, discriminatory housing practices, and systemic disinvestment in Black communities across America. As future legal professionals, advocates, and policy shapers, we are reminded that law can be both a weapon of oppression and a tool for liberation. Our charge is to ensure it serves the latter.

In a moment where DEI and civil rights programs are being rolled back at the federal level, SWBLSA reaffirms its commitment to amplifying Black voices, defending Black history, and fighting for legal and legislative measures that protect Black futures. The Greenwood story is not simply a tragic past, it is a mirror held to the present and a call to action for the future.

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⁶ Petula Dvorak & DeNeen L. Brown, Tulsa Mayor Announces Reparations for 1921 'Black Wall Street' Massacre, *Wash. Post* (June 3, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/06/03/tulsa-mayor-reparations-race-massacre/>.



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