

Dear Reader,

When I was a kid, I dreaded history class. Not just any history—American history. Black Americans were hardly present in my textbooks; I knew there was more to learn, but we always studied the same handful of people, the same handful of events, and only during Black History Month. I was in my mid-twenties, with a degree in journalism, when I began to educate myself on Black history—which is very much *American* history—and realized how empowered I felt by this knowledge.

Even so, I was still surprised a few years ago when I first heard about the 1921 Tulsa race massacre. Just three hours from where I grew up in Missouri, Tulsa was a town my family and I had visited several times, and one I'd always considered safe in an area of the country that didn't always feel so for Black people. How was I unaware of the destruction of the historic Greenwood District, a thriving neighborhood of Black business owners and professionals so successful in the early twentieth century that Booker T. Washington dubbed it “Black Wall Street”?

Because white Tulsans didn't want to discuss it. At the time, many were ashamed of what had happened, and even if they weren't, public officials had concerns that the violence of this devastating event would scare people away from Oklahoma, which had been a state for only fourteen years. And Black survivors of the massacre were sad, angry, and fearful of history repeating itself.

But eventually, people began to talk again. About the thousands of homes and businesses—almost forty city blocks—burned to the ground. About the thousands of innocent Black Tulsans taken prisoner as they watched an angry white mob murder their families and

friends. About Dick Rowland and Sarah Page, the ambiguous pair at the center of this story who were all but forgotten as the violence, looting, and fires raged on.

Black American history is beautiful and horrific, full of progress and setbacks that have defined the story of the United States since its founding. But no matter how it looks, everyone deserves to know the truth about the past and how it informs the present. I am honored to share with you the story of the Greenwood District and the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

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