

"[T]he Black community was sacked. A complete community was burned to the ground. There was looting that took place, a tremendous amount of looting. Two and three years after the riot, Black people started to recover some of their goods, furniture and furs and other properties that were in the homes of some white people. So it was about economics. Blacks were affluent."

- James Homer Johnson, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

During the Tulsa Race Massacre, some Black residents believed that if they were "respectable" and did not fight back with the white rioters, they would be free from the violence, but they were still targeted.

"What Greenwood [Avenue] meant to the Black community was the very center of activity, commercial, social, religious. It was the whole ball of wax. They had a tremendous amount of employment in the Black community through these businesses. Every conceivable type of business was on Greenwood. You had dance halls; you had taverns, barber shops, beauty shops, restaurants, jewelers. So any time you wanted to find out what was going on or who was in Tulsa all you had to do was be on Greenwood Thursday night through Saturday night."

- James Homer Johnson, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

Tulsa passes a segregation law in 1914.

An estimated 300 people were killed and approximately 35 blocks of commercial and residential property within the Greenwood District—known as Black Wall Street—were destroyed.

“There was this dispute happened on the elevator in one of the big stores downtown, and they accused a negro man about it. The white people threatened to mob him and our men threatened to get them if they did...[Then] blood was running on Greenwood like water.”

- Rosa B. Skinner, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

Groups of black residents in Greenwood armed themselves and tried to protect landmarks, businesses, and homes in Greenwood from the white attackers.

“During the riot, my father’s business was burned to the very ground. My father had kept his money in a safe in that store. The only money that my father had [after the massacre] was money that I had saved from little coins that had been given to me from time to time. I had a little Blue Boy bank that stood on the upright piano that we had in our home. The marauders had looted everything. They had gone through every drawer; they had taken everything that they wanted. But they had missed seeing that Blue Boy bank. I had 13 dollars, I think it was something like 13 dollars and 30 cents, and that was my father’s capital. From that amount of money we had to do whatever had to be done to maintain ourselves.”

- Hobart Jarrett, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

Even with the success of Greenwood, many Black residents had a fear of success because they thought their success would bring violence from whites in Tulsa.

"We left our home because it was right at the foot of a high hill called the Brickyard Hill, and the machine guns were on top of that hill and they were shooting down over our home. In fact we were fortunate we didn't get killed because we were just in the midst of where the bullets were coming. So we closed our home and walked several miles. We didn't get back until the next day and it was three buildings that we lost. They were all paid for; we didn't owe anyone anything. We had decided to get out of debt and pay cash for everything, and we thought we had it made. After we lost everything we only had fifty dollars in cash money. We had to start all over again."

- Mabel B. Little, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

"It was always a hostile relationship between the Black and white community, and part of it was because the Ku Klux Klan was located just west of the Black community, on Main and Eastern. This was about four blocks west of where the primary Black community was located. We had to pass by this to go to places of employment and to go to and from school. There was always a potential for violence there. As kids we had to fight our way to school. Or run."

- James Homer Johnson, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

The Indian Removal Act and Trail of Tears moved Native Tribes and many former slaves into Oklahoma Territory (1830-1840s).

A court blamed the Black people of Greenwood for the “riots,” and Whites were never charged for crimes in the Tulsa Race Massacre on June 26, 1921.

“It wasn't a riot. It was a massacre. Back in 1921, they used the fact that it was a riot technically to not pay insurance claims. It was only because of our own strength, of saying ‘no, we're not going anywhere, we're going to come back and we're going to rebuild.’ But the government did not help with that. The business community did not help with that. It was our own strength and belief in ourselves that rebuilt Greenwood.”

- Vanessa Hall-Harper, Tulsa native and City Councilor representing the Greenwood district

“The big old trucks was full of men with them shotguns. I just knew everybody was going to be killed. They was loading us up, taking us to a place and we didn't know where we was going. [T]hey told us we had to go there 'cause they was separating the men from the women and children.”

- Rosa B. Skinner, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

"I remember my mother putting us, my sisters and my brother, under the bed. I remember the white people coming into our house with torches, setting the curtains on fire and setting our house on fire. One stepped on my finger while I was under the bed and my sister put her hand over my mouth to keep me from screaming."

- George Monroe, Tulsa Race Massacre survivor

Many White residents became resentful of the success that the Greenwood District and its Black residents were having.

The Greenwood District was founded in 1906 by O.W. Gurley as an all-black township in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It eventually became so successful and profitable that it was called "Black Wall Street."