United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property
   Historic name: Greenwood Historic District
   Other names/site number: Deep Greenwood; Negro/Black Wall Street; Gurley Addition
   Name of related multiple property listing: NA

   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location
   Street & number: 100-300 Blocks N. Greenwood Avenue and 419 N. Elgin Avenue
   City or town: Tulsa
   State: Oklahoma
   County: Tulsa
   Vicinity: ____________

3. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
   I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets
   the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
   Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
   In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I
   recommend that this property be considered significant at the following
   level(s) of significance:

   ___X national ___X statewide ___X local

   Applicable National Register Criteria:
   ___X A ___B ___X C ___D

   ____________________________
   Signature of certifying official/Title:                        Date
   ____________________________
   State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

   In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register
   criteria.

   ____________________________
   Signature of commenting official:                          Date
   ____________________________
   Title: State or Federal agency/bureau
   or Tribal Government
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

4. National Park Service Certification
I hereby certify that this property is:
___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) __________________________

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:  X
Public – Local  X
Public – State
Public – Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box.)

Building(s)
District  X
Site
Structure
Object
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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Number of contributing resources previously in the National Register _11____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/Business office
COMMERCE/Professional office
COMMERCE/Specialty store
COMMERCE/Department store
COMMERCE/Restaurant
DOMESTIC/Multiple dwelling
DOMESTIC/Hotel
RELIGION/Religious facility
DOMESTIC/Single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/Business office
COMMERCE/Professional office
COMMERCE/Organizational
COMMERCE/Specialty store
COMMERCE/Restaurant
RELIGION/Religious facility
RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Prairie School; Commercial Style

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Late Gothic Revival; Classical Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE, WOOD, CLAY TILE

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Greenwood Historic District (Maps 1-6) is a discontiguous district composed of thirteen buildings in the lower (southern) section of the Greenwood community, an area known historically as “Deep Greenwood” and the “Negro/Black Wall Street.” The district consists of two sections: 1) twelve resources including one nonhistoric and nine historic brick commercial buildings currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the 100 Block North Greenwood Avenue (NRIS #SG100006631), Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (NRIS #RS 100002547), and the Sam and Lucy Mackey House, all of them aligned along the 100-300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue; and 2) the separate, but historically related, Mount Zion Baptist Church (NRIS #08000847), about one block west of the Mackey House at 419 N. Elgin Avenue. Eleven of the district’s twelve historic buildings were completed between 1922 and 1928; the twelfth historic building, Mount Zion Baptist Church, was built between 1948 and 1952. Together, the twelve historic buildings represent an era of massive reconstruction that took place in the Greenwood community after it was destroyed by fires set by an angry white mob during the infamous Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 (Map 5). All twelve historic buildings possess good or high levels of integrity and contribute to the district; the only noncontributing building (ONEOK Field Building) dates to 1981 and does not meet the recommended fifty-year age for National Register eligibility. Visual connectivity exists between properties in the 100 and 300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue by way of the open view corridor through the I-244 underpass that separates the 100 block from the 300 block (Map 6; Photos 9-10). Resources in the district share certain commonalities; all are relatively small-scale, one- to three-story buildings with brick walls and entrances on their primary, street-facing facades. Historic architectural styles
include Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements (Commercial and Prairie School) and Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals (Late Gothic Revival and Classical Revival). Eleven historic properties in the district have already been listed in the National Register: two individually, Mount Zion Baptist Church (NRIS #08000847) and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (NRIS #RS100002547), and nine as contributing resources to 100 Block North Greenwood Avenue (NRIS #SG100006631). The Sam and Lucy Mackey House, built in 1926 and moved to its current location a half-block to the south in 1986, is the only undesignated historic resource in the district. Together, these properties reflect Greenwood’s historic composition: a mix of commercial, residential, and institutional resources built in a compact, densely populated African American enclave whose expansion was limited by segregationist policies both before and after the 1921 massacre.

Narrative Description

The purpose of the Greenwood Historic District nomination is to provide a larger context for identifying, evaluating, and designating historic resources within the African American Greenwood community from its inception in 1905 to 1967, when massive demolition for the Crosstown Expressway commenced through “Deep Greenwood.” Eleven of the district’s thirteen resources are already listed in the National Register either individually, as in the case of Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church and Mount Zion Baptist Church, or as contributing properties to 100 Block North Greenwood Avenue. This nomination seeks to expand on the historic contexts developed in those previous nominations to embrace other historic properties and districts within the larger boundaries of historic Greenwood (Map 4), that have the potential for National Register designation. While this is typically the role of a Multiple Property Submission (MPS), that opportunity may still be a viable approach for future survey and scholarship; in the meantime, this nomination serves as a vehicle to recognize the extraordinary national significance of Greenwood in the areas of Social History and African American Heritage from Greenwood’s inception in 1905, to the start of its demise with the widespread demolition of historic fabric in 1967.

Street and Development Patterns

To adequately convey the district’s level of significance, it is first necessary to briefly describe the historic development patterns within the larger Greenwood community. The segregated African American community dates to 1905, when O. W. Gurley built two buildings – a frame house and a two-story brick grocery store – at the intersection of N. Greenwood Avenue and what was then E. N. First Street, now Archer Street. The intersection lay north of the Frisco and Katy railroad tracks, which served as both a tangible and a symbolic boundary between white Tulsa to the south and what would grow to become a large African American community to the north.

Shortly after building his house and store, Gurley platted Greenwood’s first addition, the forty-acre Gurley Addition, where a mixture of commercial, domestic, religious, and educational properties soon cropped up. Within a few years, other residential and commercial buildings
Greenwood Historic District

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Name of Property

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appeared along N. Greenwood Avenue and in the surrounding new additions that sprang up around the avenue. Greenwood’s physical development occurred in two distinct sections: lower Greenwood, also known as “Deep Greenwood” and the “Negro/Black Wall Street,” a densely packed mixed-use cluster extending from the Frisco tracks on the south to King Street on the north, and upper Greenwood from King Street north to Pine Street, an area that wasn’t fully built-out until after the massacre. In lower Greenwood, streets were laid out diagonally in conformance with the original Tulsa townsite plat. In upper Greenwood, streets followed a regular north-south/east-west grid with standard rectangular lots and blocks for single-family dwellings with uniform setbacks, orientation to the street, and front yards.

Growth continued throughout Greenwood in the 1910s and early 1920s until 1921, when the community was almost entirely destroyed in the infamous Tulsa Race Massacre. Some 35-40 city blocks filled with homes, businesses, schools, and churches were burned to the ground by white invaders during the massacre. Despite its near eradication, residents immediately began to rebuild Greenwood. At the peak of its reconstruction from the mid-1920s to the early-1950s, Greenwood’s boundaries in north Tulsa extended generally from the Frisco railroad tracks on the south, to Pine Street on the north, and from Cincinnati Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) on the west, to the east side of Lansing Avenue on the east. The main north-south transit corridor through the community was, and remains, N. Greenwood Avenue.

The historic district in this nomination lies entirely in the lower part of Greenwood. Like historic “Deep Greenwood,” the district reflects the mixture of property types: commercial, domestic, and religious, that once covered that section of the larger community. The commercial buildings, Mackey House, and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church in the 100-300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue, and nearby Mount Zion Baptist Church at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, are among the last surviving historic resources still extant in the lower, original section of the African American community.

Discontiguous District

The discontiguous district lies in the lower (southern) part of Greenwood known historically as “Deep Greenwood” and “Negro/Black Wall Street.” The district is comprised of one non-historic and nine historic brick commercial buildings aligned in two parallel rows along the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, the Classical Revival style Vernon A.M.E. Church and Prairie School style Sam and Lucy Mackey House, both in the 300 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, and the separate, but historically related, Late Gothic Revival style Mount Zion Baptist Church, at 419 N. Elgin Avenue. Though they display different stylistic influences, all of the buildings have brick walls with primary entrances on their main, street-facing facades. Of the thirteen resources, only one (the ONEOK Field Building) is non-historic; its more recent construction date, 1981, makes it a noncontributing property in the district (Maps 3 & 5).

1 The house is sometimes called the Prince-Mackey House for Sam and Lucy Mackey’s daughter whose married name was Prince. In this nomination the house is referred to as the Sam and Lucy Mackey House for the couple who built the house. Note that it has more recently been renamed the Mabel B. Little Heritage House in honor of a noteworthy Greenwood activist.
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

The commercial rows and church/dwelling node are physically and visually connected by N. Greenwood Avenue, the neighborhood’s historic central spine; the contiguous Mount Zion Baptist Church lies in close proximity to the Greenwood Avenue properties and is visible from behind the Mackey House and Greenwood Cultural Center. All but one of the contributing resources were completed in the first wave of Greenwood’s reconstruction (1922-1928) in the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. Mount Zion Baptist Church was built later but within the reconstruction era, 1948-1952. Together they form a cohesive collection of resources that are able to convey a sense of time and place by their shared historic associations, physical characteristics, and proximity to one another, and to Greenwood Avenue.

Overall physical description
The lower section of the historic district, once known as “Deep Greenwood,” contains thirteen resources – all buildings – within the contiguous district boundary. The district contains ten commercial resources, nine of which are contributing, two contributing churches, and one contributing dwelling. A description of each building follows later in this section of the nomination. Twelve of the buildings lie in close physical proximity to one another along N. Greenwood Avenue; visual connectivity between the N. Greenwood Avenue buildings is maintained between the 100 and 300 blocks through the view corridor by way of the underpass beneath Interstate 244 which cuts through the neighborhood overhead. The contiguous resource, Mount Zion Baptist Church, lies a short distance to the west of N. Greenwood Avenue, at 419 N. Elgin Avenue. (Maps 1-6).

To the south of the district lie multiple interconnecting railroad tracks known as the Frisco tracks, which served as the historic boundary between white and black Tulsa. To the west lies ONEOK Field (built in 2010), the home field of Tulsa’s Minor League baseball team. The contiguous part of the district runs north from the commercial 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue to include the Sam and Lucy Mackey House on the west side of the 300 block, and Vernon A.M.E. Church on the east side of the 300 block. Behind the Mackey House to the west lies the Greenwood Cultural Center and parking lot, built in 1995. About thirty feet south of the House stands the 1921 Black Wall Street Memorial, a stone monument erected in 1996. Behind Vernon A.M.E. Church to the east lies an undeveloped landscape that was scraped for highway construction and/or redevelopment.

Commercial buildings once lined both E. Archer Street (east-west) and N. Greenwood Avenue (north-south) at the intersection of the two streets, as well as all the way north on N. Greenwood Avenue to E. Pine Street. Today, commercial resources associated with the historic African American community survive only in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, north of Archer Street. The one-, two-, and three-story mixed-use buildings in the 100 block are of brick construction, with storefronts on the ground floor and living or office spaces above. All but one were built immediately after the riot to replace similar buildings that burned; they were constructed on the same footprints as their pre-massacre predecessors. The one exception is the

2 The contiguous Mount Zion Baptist Church was not rebuilt immediately after the massacre due to debt incurred in the construction of the original church. The current building dates to 1948-1952, at the height of the neighborhood’s development.
ONEOK Field Building at 122-138 N. Greenwood Avenue; it was built in 1981 on the burned-out ruins of the Dixie Theater. As a non-historic building, it is a noncontributing resource in the district as it has not yet reached the recommended 50-year age for National Register eligibility.

At the northern end of the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, the elevated Interstate 244 cuts across the avenue. The Interstate is a product of the 1950s-1960s interstate highway program that obliterated entire blocks of commercial buildings and residences to make way for the construction of the Crosstown Expressway (IH-244) (Map 6). Urban Renewal and redevelopment initiatives in the 1970s removed hundreds of other buildings in Greenwood. A short distance north of IH-244 are two significant resources located across the street from one another. Vernon A.M.E. Church, on the east side of N. Greenwood Avenue, was rebuilt on its original foundations after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The Sam and Lucy Mackey House, on the west side of the avenue, was originally built at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue in 1926 to replace the family home destroyed in the massacre. Threatened with demolition in the 1980s, the house was moved a short distance to its current location where it was restored in 1986. It has since been renamed the Mabel B. Little Heritage House and is interpreted as a house museum with furnishings and ephemera dating to its occupation by members of the Mackey family.

Behind the Mackey House to the west and attached to it by a semi-permanent covered canopy, lies the Greenwood Cultural Center, built in 1995; to the south of the house stands the “1921 Black Wall Street Memorial,” erected in 1996. These modern resources do not represent or reflect historic building traditions or architectural styles in the Greenwood community; instead, they were built to commemorate the history of Greenwood and the loss of Black Wall Street in the 1921 massacre. Because they do not meet the recommended 50-year age, and do not possess design elements, materials, type of workmanship, feeling, or association with the historic Greenwood community, they are excluded from the district.

Mount Zion Baptist Church is the only discontiguous property in the district. Located at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, the church lies immediately north of Interstate 244 and about one block west of the Mackey House and Greenwood Cultural Center in the 300 block of N. Greenwood Avenue. The church is surrounded by nonhistoric redevelopment, including parking lots for the cultural center and Oklahoma State University-Tulsa campus buildings. However, the congregation and original church date to the earliest settlement in Greenwood. The original sanctuary was destroyed in the massacre. Due to debt incurred in the original construction of the church, the congregation could not immediately rebuild. The congregation finally obtained funds to rebuild in 1948, and work was completed in 1952 amid the final phase of Greenwood’s reconstruction.

**Integrity**

All of the district’s historic resources were completed in the post-massacre reconstruction era: 1922-1952. Therefore, the integrity of individual resources and the district as a whole were assessed based on the dynamic decades of regrowth after the massacre. Overall, the district’s integrity is very good. Rebuilding efforts followed pre-riot patterns, with delineated commercial

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3 The 1962 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map indicates that the theater was reduced to ruins in a fire.
and residential districts. The street grid is also similar today to its pre-massacre configuration. Many of the district’s buildings were constructed on their original footprints or in their original locations. The biggest detriment to the district’s integrity came during Urban Renewal initiatives in the 1960s, when a wide swath of historic buildings was cleared, and Interstate 244 was built across lower, “Deep Greenwood” (Map 6). The clearing of land also led to other nonhistoric infill such as the university buildings located between Deep Greenwood and the residential area to the north.

The district as a whole possesses historic and architectural integrity as follows:

**Location** – High integrity. The district is located in the Greenwood neighborhood, a historically black neighborhood just north of downtown Tulsa. The district’s commercial and religious resources remain in their original, post-massacre locations. Criterion Consideration B is applied to the historic Mackey House due to its relocation from 356 to 322 N. Greenwood Avenue to save it from demolition in the 1980s. Its present location at 322 N. Greenwood Avenue is less than half a block south of its original address at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue.

**Design** – High integrity. The district’s historic buildings have been altered very little since their construction in the reconstruction era, 1922-1952, and the addition of an education wing for Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church in 1959. Modifications to the commercial buildings include the addition of fabric awnings on the storefronts in the mid-1980s; though the original wood windows were replaced with vinyl-clad windows at the same time, fenestration patterns and light configuration remain intact to their original construction. These are relatively minor, reversible alterations and the buildings retain their historic appearance to a high degree. Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church, including its educational wing, and Mount Zion Baptist Church retain their historic architectural design to a high degree. The Mackey House was relocated and rebuilt using its original frame structure; reportedly, the original brick was removed prior to the relocation and used to re-clad the house when it was restored on its new site. It was carefully rebuilt according to its original appearance from 1926 to 1986, when it was moved.

**Setting** – Medium/Low integrity. The setting for Mount Zion Baptist Church has low integrity, since surrounding land cleared during Urban Renewal now contains nonhistoric infill such as parking lots and university campus buildings; also, Interstate 244 looms above the church on the south. Integrity of setting for the commercial properties is maintained to a moderate degree by their adjacent alignment. Though the elevated Interstate highway cuts across the northern end of the commercial row, and a large nonhistoric baseball field is located adjacent to the commercial block on the west, the two parallel rows of commercial buildings appear much the same relative to one another and to their historic appearance as a discrete commercial strip in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue. The Mackey House and Vernon Chapel possess little integrity of setting as they are surrounded by nonhistoric buildings, parking lots, and vacant landscapes.
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Tulsa County, Oklahoma
Name of Property

**Materials** – High integrity. The building materials used in the district have not been altered since their construction, with only a few exceptions such as the vinyl-clad replacement windows in the commercial buildings. The predominant exterior material in district buildings is red brick, a common building material used during the historic period for both commercial and religious buildings, and some houses. Though the majority of single-family dwellings in Greenwood were frame buildings, the Mackey House was built of concrete block and clad in red brick; it reflects the preference for concrete and brick as more permanent than frame construction and wood siding in the aftermath of the 1921 fires that consumed the community.

**Workmanship** – High integrity. Historic workmanship in the district is evident, especially in the churches, which have been altered very little since their construction and thus retain their original appearance to an exceptional degree, as well as in the Mackey House, whose restoration was done with great care to reflect its architectural details and fine craftsmanship. Renovation of the commercial buildings in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue resulted in some minor deviation from the original handiwork but only to a minimal degree; they retain their ability to convey an authentic sense of history. All of the resources have been well-maintained.

**Feeling** – Fair/Good integrity. As with setting, the feeling of the historic district is fair or good given (or despite) surrounding nonhistoric resources and the deleterious effects of massive demolition for highway construction and Urban Renewal. Though a large, elevated highway runs overhead, and the historic residential section in the lower section of Greenwood was lost to Urban Renewal and redevelopment, including Oklahoma State University – Tulsa, the commercial core, historic churches, and the Mackey House still convey a good sense of Greenwood’s character and appearance from the reconstruction period (1922-1959), through the end of the period of significance in 1967. It is a testament to Greenwood’s enduring significance that the district retains as much integrity of feeling as it does.

**Association** – High integrity. Greenwood was built by and for African Americans in an era of strict racial segregation. The district, composed of two African American churches, nine African American commercial buildings and a stylish house built and occupied by an African American couple, retains its historic association with Tulsa’s largest and, arguably, most significant segregated neighborhood, to an exceptional degree. After the devastating massacre destroyed most of the neighborhood’s buildings in 1921, residents rebuilt their homes, commercial buildings, and churches, and newcomers added to them such that the reconstructed neighborhood grew larger and more densely developed than before the devastation. Those associations still resonate, not only in the city of Tulsa, but now, after extensive media recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, to the entire nation.
Inventory of Properties

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Property Descriptions: Resource numbers are keyed to District Map 3

1: 100 N. Greenwood Avenue
   Williams Building, 1922
   Contributing Building

   The Williams Building is a wedge-shaped, three-story commercial building built of red, wire-
   struck brick. Located on the northwest corner of N. Greenwood Avenue and E. Archer Street, its
   angled southernmost corner is chamfered to parallel Archer Street. On the front (east) façade,
   the first floor has a double entry door flanked by two storefront windows with multi-light
   transoms. A second, single door is located at the northern end of the storefronts. The upper two
   floors each contain three paired windows. The chamfered corner is one bay wide with one
   transomed storefront window and a paired window on each of the upper floors. On the angled
   rear façade, the windows are single-wide. The building is flat-roofed, with a row of dark-colored
   soldier bricks at the parapet. Bands of these contrasting bricks are also found between floors,
   atop the storefront windows, and at the building’s corners, where they interlock in a zipper-like
   pattern. The upper floor windows have concrete sills and lintels, and a simple concrete coping is
   found between each floor on the front and corner elevations. A concrete sign just below the
   parapet reads “1922 WILLIAMS BLDG.” All windows have intact window openings and non-
   historic replacement window sash.

2: 101-105 N. Greenwood Avenue
   Botkin Building, 1922
Contributing Building

The Botkin Building is a three-story red brick building at the northeast corner of Greenwood and Archer. As the southernmost buildings on the block, this building and the Williams Building across the street are highly visible and act as “gateway” to the commercial district and the Greenwood neighborhood beyond. The Botkin building, like the others on the block, is a flat-roofed commercial building with storefronts along the first floor and offices above.

The main façade, which faces west to Greenwood Avenue, contains three storefronts, each with an inset single-entry door. Above each storefront is a multi-light transom. The southernmost storefront, which corresponds to the corner unit, is larger than the other two. This corner unit also has a large window with multi-light transom on the south elevation facing Archer Street. A single door at the eastern end of the Archer Street façade is the only other opening on the ground floor. The second and third floors contain paired windows with concrete sills—four each on the main elevation, and five each on the Archer elevation. On both façades, dark-colored brick is used to create a striking decorative motif. A double band of dark header bricks encircle each façade—vertically along the edges, and horizontally across the parapet—to create a border. The dark bricks also encircle the door and window openings. Concrete “corner blocks” are found on each of the upper floor windows. The single-entry door on the Archer façade is topped by arched dark bricks with an oversized concrete keystone. The building’s decorative parapet is the same on the west and south elevations. On both, a pediment-shaped projecting triangular section contains a simple concrete panel reading, “BOTKIN.” The pediments are accented by a concrete coping. Although fenestration patterns are unchanged, windows have nonhistoric replacement sash.

3: 104-108 N. Greenwood Avenue
   Altheda-Bryant Building, 1924-1925
   Contributing Building

The Altheda-Bryant Building is a long two-story brick commercial building. The first floor contains five storefront windows and four single entry doors. The upper floor has five paired windows and one tripled window. Between the two floors is a concrete coping. Surrounding each of the upstairs windows is a projecting row of bricks connected by concrete corner blocks, and between each of the windows is a decorative pilaster-like brick detail. The building has a decorative embossed parapet that features both triangular- and square-shaped projections. Under one of the triangular shapes is a concrete panel that reads “ALTHEDA,” and under the other is a panel that reads “BRYANT BLDG.” All windows have non-historic replacement window sash, but historic window openings were maintained. Surrounding the northernmost entry door and storefront window is a whimsical veneer of multicolored clinker bricks and stones; these are arranged to create arches over the window and door openings and crenellations along the top. The dark, burned bricks in this medieval-looking veneer were salvaged from the ruins of riot-burned buildings.

4: 107-109 N. Greenwood Avenue
The building at 107-109 N. Greenwood Avenue is a two-story commercial building with two storefronts and three paired windows on the second floor. The brickwork in this building is notable, as the façade is of dark-colored brick, with red brick used to create complex decorative patterns. A wide band of mixed red and dark bricks form a textured, ribbon-like band between the first and second floors. A smaller version of this is found along the flat parapet, and a soldier course of alternating red and dark bricks tops the upper floor windows. Each storefront contains a single-entry door and a multi-light transom. A third entry door is located between the two storefronts. The window openings are of historic size and configuration but contain nonhistoric replacement sash.

5: 111 N. Greenwood Avenue
Unnamed, 1923
Contributing Building

The last building on the east side of the block, 111 N. Greenwood Avenue, is a simple one-story commercial building made of red bricks. The front elevation contains a central single-entry door flanked by two storefront windows. A three-light transom spans the entire storefront. Above this is a subtle decorative band of soldier and header bricks. The flat parapet is adorned only by a simple concrete coping. The building’s north wall has no window or door openings.

6: 112-118 N. Greenwood Avenue
Neeley and Vaden Building, 1923
Contributing Building

The two-story building at 112-118 N. Greenwood Avenue is a yellow brick building with three storefront windows and four single entry doors on the first floor. Over each storefront is a multi-light transom window. The second floor has eight regularly spaced single windows, each with a concrete sill. Above the windows is a decorative row of red soldier bricks. Red bricks also trim the sides of each window and run along the top of the storefront transoms. The parapet is plain, with a simple concrete coping along the top. Three inset diamonds decorate the building at parapet level. The largest diamond, in the center of the building, reads “1923.” The fenestration pattern is intact, but the window openings contain nonhistoric replacement sash.

7: 120 N. Greenwood Avenue
Unnamed, 1923
Contributing Building

The red brick building at 120 N. Greenwood Avenue is two stories tall with brick dentils at its parapet. The ground floor storefront features a chamfered inset entry flanked by two storefront windows and topped by multi-light transoms. A second entry door is to the north of the storefront. The storefront has been altered by the addition of tile and glass block. On the second
floor are two paired windows and one single window, each of which have concrete sills and lintels and nonhistoric sash. The window openings match the historic pattern.

8:  **122-138 N. Greenwood Avenue**  
ONEOK Field Building, 1981  
Noncontributing Building  

The nonhistoric ONEOK Field Building is a two-story brick building whose first floor serves as an open breezeway connecting N. Greenwood Avenue to the baseball field located behind the block. The first floor has three large rectangular openings for passage into the breezeway. The second floor contains offices that are accessed by a stairway within the downstairs breezeway. Five sets of paired windows with raised brick trim are on the second floor. The parapet is unadorned. The ONEOK Field Building is the district’s only noncontributing building. Built in 1981, it does not meet the 50-year age recommended for National Register eligibility.

9:  **140 N. Greenwood Avenue**  
Smith Building, 1923  
Contributing Building  

The Smith Building is a two-story red brick commercial building with Mission Revival and Art Deco elements. Its façade is symmetrical, with three distinct bays. The center bay has an entry door topped by a curved, pediment-like concrete panel with the words “SMITH BLDG 124,” which may have been the building’s address at one point in time. To each side of the entry door are identical but mirrored storefronts, each with a single door, a large storefront window, and a multi-light transom. Above the first floor is a wide concrete molding feature. The second floor maintains its historic fenestration pattern, with three paired windows, each with a concrete sill and lintel. Window sash is nonhistoric. The embattled parapet features a central Mission Revival-style peak and two shorter square projections at either side. At the parapet peak and at the far outside edge of each floor are strap-like concrete decorative details.

10:  **144-146 N. Greenwood Avenue**  
Unnamed, 1923  
Contributing Building  

The building at 144 N. Greenwood Avenue is a small two-story brick building with two identical storefronts on the ground floor, each with a single-entry door, storefront window and a narrow multi-light transom. The second floor contains two sets of paired windows, each with a concrete sill and lintel. Window openings are preserved but sashes are nonhistoric. This is the northernmost building on the west side of Greenwood. The north elevation has second-floor windows only, and a metal stair to a second-floor door. Brick dentils at the parapet level are found on both elevations.

Each of the ten resources above were included in the 100 Block North Greenwood Avenue, which was listed in the National Register in 2021 (NRIS #SG100006631).
The original Vernon Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church on this site was a frame church. In 1914, it was torn down and a brick basement for a new church was erected in its place. But those plans were put on hold when the basement was reduced to ruins in the conflagration of 1921. After the massacre, the congregation began building a brick sanctuary above the reclaimed basement by 1926; the church was completed and opened for services in 1928.

The sanctuary, located at 311 N. Greenwood Avenue, is a three-story edifice that can best be described as Classical Revival in style. The exterior walls are built of dark red brick.

The church has a rectangular footprint and two squat towers flanking a central entry. The towers create a three-bay front (west) façade, with a central double door topped by two floors of stained glass 1/1 double hung windows above. The tower bays have one stained glass 1/1 double hung window on each floor. The south side elevation has three large arched stained glass windows that sit above a band of simple, utilitarian windows on the ground floor.

Classical Revival elements are found in the decorative details. The central portion of the entry façade features three-story pilasters topped with a pediment, and the entry doors are surrounded by a temple-like arrangement of columns and entablature. The uppermost windows in each flanking tower are also pedimented. Cornices are dentiled building wide.

The sanctuary originally had either a flat roof or a very low-pitched roof. Today a nonhistoric low-pitched metal roof spans the central portion and is visible above the entrance bay. The towers are topped with short four-sided domes.

A one- and two-story education wing was built along the north side of the sanctuary in 1959. It has a painted, concrete block exterior. On the west elevation, the one-story wing is front-gabled with double doors accessed by a front-gabled portico supported by slender columns. It features ten 2/2 hung windows and a metal slab door on the north elevation. The two-story section of the education wing is devoid of openings on its exposed north and west elevations.

The church, including the education wing, was individually listed in the National Register in 2018 (NRIS# RS100002547)
The Sam and Lucy Mackey House is a two-story Prairie School style dwelling with red brick walls. The building has asymmetrical massing with a roughly square main volume, a projecting side ell, and a shallow projection at the rear. The main roof and intersecting ell roofs are hipped, with broad overhanging eaves, enclosed soffits, smooth frieze boards, and clay roofing tiles. The brick walls are laid in running bond and have a decorative band of soldier course bricks corresponding to the floor height of the first floor, which it situated approximately two feet above grade. All window openings have concrete sills and non-historic fabric awnings.

The front elevation faces east toward Greenwood Avenue. The main building volume has symmetrical fenestration, with a central entrance flanked by single window openings on the first floor, and four windows on the second floor. The front porch spans the entire width of the main building volume and has a low brick porch wall with the same decorative band of soldier course bricks found on the house. The porch is covered only at its central section, where brick piers and a front-gabled roof shelter the entrance. The entrance has a single door with narrow paneled sidelights. The windows on both floors are 6/6 double hung. The side ell extends to the north of the main building volume. Its elevation contains three 6/6 windows on each floor.

The building’s south side elevation has a flat-roofed porte cochere on brick piers. In the center of the first floor is a single door accessed by a non-historic brick ramp. A pair of 6/6 windows is set to each side of the porte cochere on the first floor. The second floor features a pair of 6/6 windows and a set of three 6/6 windows.

The north side elevation has two sections—on the east is the projecting ell, which contains a band of four 6/6 windows on each floor. The north side of the main building volume has both paired and single 6/6 windows arranged in no particular pattern.

The rear (west) elevation has a single door in its shallow projecting ell. A non-historic covered walkway extends from that door west approximately twenty-five feet to the Greenwood Cultural Center building located on the same lot. The rear elevation also contains 6/6 windows.

The Sam and Lucy Mackey House is situated in a flat, grassy lot with mature trees, concrete walkways, and a curved entrance drive. Immediately south of the house is the 1921 Black Wall Street Memorial, a free-standing monument, commissioned in 1995 and erected in 1996. Behind the house to the west is the large Greenwood Cultural Center, built in 1989 and expanded in 1995. The center contains exhibition and banquet halls, a museum, and administrative offices. Both the Black Wall Street Memorial and the Greenwood Cultural Center are outside the district’s boundaries. They are nonhistoric and do not reflect the historic building traditions, design, materials, or architectural characteristics of the Greenwood community. They are meant not to represent historic Greenwood but to memorialize it to a contemporary and future audience.

Significant for its association with Greenwood’s reconstruction and community pride, the Sam and Lucy Mackey House survives as an important piece of the post-massacre rebuilding story. The original two-story frame Mackey Family home at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue was built ca. 1914 at the corner of Greenwood Avenue and Easton Street (Figure 10). After the house
was destroyed by fire during the invasion of Greenwood in 1921, the family built a new house on the same site. The new house was designed in the Prairie School style and clad in brick instead of wood siding; work was completed in 1926. By the 1970s, the house had lain vacant for years and was threatened with demolition. African Americans in Tulsa rallied to save the building. The city agreed. In 1986 the brick was removed and reserved, and the disassembled structure was moved to its current location, half a block from its original site. After the move, reclaimed brick from the house was added to the structure; otherwise, the house is exactly as it appeared after its original construction in 1926.

The Mackey House boundaries extend 15’ around the building on the north, west, and south, and N. Greenwood Avenue on the front (east) side.

13: 419 N. Elgin East Avenue
Mount Zion Baptist Church, 1948-1952; c. 1996
 Contributing Building

The original Mount Zion Baptist Church was built on this site between 1915 and 1921. Just as it was finished, the church was destroyed in the 1921 massacre. The congregation continued to meet and eventually rebuilt their church over the existing basement, which had been roofed. The new church, built by the Latimer Brothers, was started in 1948 and completed in 1952.

It is a three-story building with a gabled nave and two short transepts. Its style can best be described as a stripped-down Gothic Revival. Square towers of uneven height flank the southwest façade, the taller of which contains rectangular openings for the tower bells. The church is built of buff-colored brick and contains very little in the way of ornamentation.

The building’s most prominent feature are its many windows—stained glass lancet windows at the uppermost level and broad rectangular stained-glass windows below. Cream-colored stone quoining serves as window trim. A stringcourse of the same stone separates the first and second floors.

A large one- to two-story c. 1996 addition is located at the rear (NE) elevation of the main church. The Family Life Center, as it is known, contains offices, a library, dining room, and a gymnasium. The gabled roof features a parapet wall and is sheathed in asphalt shingles. The smaller, one-story part of the addition is clad in a buff-colored brick veneer while the larger two-story part containing the gymnasium features rusticated cast stone (concrete) panels. The addition has an array of window types including diminutive lancet windows along the roofline of the gym, round windows in the gable ends, and 1/1 double hung sash elsewhere. The addition is connected to the church by a narrow hyphen that steps back allowing the church to maintain its prominence.

The church, with its addition, was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2008 (NRIS 08000847).
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark “x” in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemoratory property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
ETHNIC HERITAGE: AFRICAN AMERICAN
SOCIAL HISTORY
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1905-1967

Significant Dates
1905
1921

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
NA

Cultural Affiliation
NA

Architect/Builder
William Shakespeare Latimer, architect
Jayphee Clinton Latimer, architect
Chief Boyd, architect
John Williams, builder
David Weaver, builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Greenwood Historic District (Map 1) is a discontiguous district in north Tulsa, Oklahoma, composed of one nonhistoric and nine historic commercial buildings, two historic churches, and a historic single-family dwelling, now used as a museum. The district represents major property types and early- to mid-twentieth century architectural styles present within the larger
Greenwood community (Map 4) during the Period of Significance 1905-1967. The district is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in the area of Community Planning and Development, and under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture, both at the local level of significance. The district is significant at the local level for its development as a self-contained city-within-a-city due to Tulsa’s strict segregationist policies that excluded African Americans from white businesses, neighborhoods, and schools in the early- and mid-twentieth century. Tulsa’s black residents responded to such “red-lining” by building their own, separate commercial core, residential neighborhoods, churches, and schools in what became known as Greenwood, for its main north-south transit corridor, or the Negro/Black Wall Street. It is also significant in the area of Architecture for its good, largely intact, examples of 1- and 2-part commercial buildings, its Late Gothic Revival and Classical Revival style churches, and its Prairie School-style brick dwelling, which are representative of the level of design and construction in Greenwood at the height of its development in the post-massacre reconstruction era (1921-1959). Furthermore, it is also eligible under Criterion A, in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage: African American, at the national level of significance. The district’s national significance derives from its exclusive development by and for African Americans under legal segregation, its recognition by nationally known African American leaders as a prominent community by the 1910s and early 1920s, its wholesale destruction in the infamous Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, the worst incidence of racial violence in American history in terms of lives lost and property lost, and it’s phenomenal reconstruction in the decades that followed. Though racial intolerance and violence are among the abiding themes of American history, the magnitude of destruction leveled against Tulsa’s largest and most successful African American neighborhood, and the people’s massive and coordinated efforts to reconstruct their community and culture in the Jim Crow era, merit designation at the national level of significance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Areas of Significance

Criterion A: Community Planning and Development (local level of significance)
The Greenwood Historic District is significant at the local level for Community Planning and Development in the early 20th century until 1921, when it was destroyed in racially motivated violence, and as it was rebuilt from immediately after the massacre through the 1950s.

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4 This nomination of the Greenwood Historic District is the first phase of an intended multi-phased program to identify and document historic properties within the larger Greenwood community (Map 4) for their potential for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
Community planning and development in Greenwood began in 1905, when African American farmer and entrepreneur O. W. Gurley erected a home and business at the northeast corner of the Tulsa Townsite. From that point, at the intersection of N. Greenwood Avenue and E. N. First Street, now E. Archer Street, Gurley planned the development of an all-African American business and residential community. Within a few years, brick commercial buildings sprang up in the 100 block of North Greenwood Avenue. By 1918, the area along Greenwood Avenue from the Frisco tracks north to Pine Street and along E. Archer Street west to Cincinnati/Martin Luther King Blvd. had become famous for its black-owned real estate, personal property, businesses, entertainment venues and educational progress. The businesses catered to a sprawling African American residential community that extended a mile north of “Deep Greenwood,” as the business district was known.

About 1906, just after his arrival, Gurley platted the Gurley Addition, to the north of his buildings and at a 45-degree angle to the original Tulsa townsite. It was the city’s first all-black subdivision. Other additions, including the Price, Washington, Northside, and Davis-Wilson subdivisions, soon followed. Greenwood remained the main thoroughfare throughout the district. The residential additions filled with housing starts to accommodate a growing population of approximately 11,000 African Americans by 1920. When much of the district was burned in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, most property owners, with the assistance of family and neighbors, rebuilt their homes, businesses, and institutions, often on the foundations of their burned-out buildings, according to the original plats. Their efforts are reflected in the historic, largely intact commercial buildings in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, the Sam and Lucy Mackey House and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church in the 300 block, and the related Mount Zion Baptist Church, a discontiguous property in the district at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, one block to the west of the Mackey House and Vernon Chapel.

Today, the original street layout and lot/block configuration is most evident along N. Greenwood Avenue and the blocks immediately east and west of it, particularly north of E. King Street in upper Greenwood. North-south running streets, like Greenwood, Frankfort, and Elgin avenues, are arterials, with few houses fronting onto them. The east-west running streets, including King, Latimer Court, Latimer Place, and Marshall, in upper Greenwood are still lined with single-family homes on narrow lots, just as they were originally designed. Although more than 70% of its housing stock was destroyed during the massacre, some houses in upper Greenwood may have survived the fires. Religious resources in the district occupy highly visible or large corner lots on N. Greenwood Avenue and, while the last surviving educational resource, Carver Middle School, is set back from the street, it covers a full city block and is highly visible from the main thoroughfare. Thus, lot, block, and street layout and building patterns established by Gurley and
his contemporaries in the 1900s and 1910s, remain evident in the Greenwood Historic District and the larger Greenwood community.

**Criterion C: Architecture (local level of significance)**

The Greenwood Historic District is comprised of a cluster of commercial buildings, a single-family dwelling, and two churches, all but one of which date to the period of significance (1905-1967) and are contributing resources. Nine one- and two-part brick commercial buildings built in the early- to mid-1920s after the Tulsa Race Massacre, represent the historic “Deep Greenwood” section of the traditionally African American neighborhood. Though modest in ornamentation, they are good, largely intact examples of the type of mixed-use commercial/residential buildings that lined Main Streets in small towns like Tulsa, throughout America in the first half of the 20th century. While interior spaces have been altered for modern uses, the buildings retain their original design, exterior materials, fenestration patterns, and architectural details to a remarkable degree considering the extent of demolition and redevelopment that has taken place around them. Modifications including the replacement of original sash with vinyl windows and the addition of nonhistoric fabric awnings in the 1980s are relatively minor and easily reversible.

Now, as in the past, they house retail and restaurant uses on the first floor and office space on the upper floors. All are of brick construction; some feature original storefronts while others were altered in the early post-World War II era. Modifications include slight changes to the storefronts, some during the historic period, and replacement windows with the openings left intact, preserving the fenestration pattern. All feature transom windows and awnings. One nonhistoric brick structure, the ONEOK pavilion, occupies a lot in the middle of the west side of the street. It is a noncontributing feature in the historic district that fills a gap between two historic buildings. As a whole, the densely developed 100-block of N. Greenwood Avenue reflects the once-thriving business district at the entrance to the Greenwood neighborhood.

In addition to commercial properties, the nominated Greenwood Historic District contains an excellent example of what was likely an architect- or skilled craftsman-designed single-family dwelling, the Sam and Lucy Mackey House. Owned by an upper-middle class family, it was a showplace in the Greenwood community from its construction in 1926 through the 1930s and 1940s. Although it has been moved half a block and reconstructed on its new site, the Mackey House is a good example of the Prairie School style that was popular for residential architecture in the early 20th century. It retains its historic appearance to a remarkable degree and is in excellent condition.

Finally, two historic churches in the nominated district display noteworthy elements of recognized architectural styles. Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church is a good example of a
vernacular take on Classical Revival architecture in the community and Mount Zion Baptist Church is a good example of Late Gothic Revival style architecture. All of the buildings are in good to excellent condition and retain their original design and building fabric to an excellent degree. Typical alterations include rear or additions on churches and the replacement of original windows on commercial buildings with vinyl sash. Such alterations do not detract significantly from the original appearance of the buildings.

Together, the nine contributing commercial buildings, both church buildings, and the Sam and Lucy Mackey House represent the architecture of Greenwood’s reconstruction period, which started immediately after the massacre in 1921, and continued through the 1950s. Therefore, the Greenwood Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, Architecture, at the local level of significance.

**Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage: African American (national level of significance)**

The Greenwood Historic District is also nominated to the National Register in the area of African American Heritage at the national level of significance as a good example of a fully functioning, self-sufficient community founded and developed by and for African Americans in response to racial prejudice and segregationist policies in Tulsa during the early- to mid-twentieth century. Before Greenwood was developed, African Americans lived in scattered “Negro Shanties” or in the homes of whites, for whom they worked as domestics or handymen.

In 1905, however, O. W. Gurley, an African American from Arkansas, set out to develop an area that would serve all of the needs of the city’s African American population. Development commenced north of the San Francisco & St. Louis (Frisco) Railroad tracks, on the north side of Tulsa. In the early 20th century, African Americans flocked to the area where they built houses, churches, schools, and mixed-use commercial buildings. This area in the 100-200 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue gained fame as the “Negro Wall Street” and included shops, groceries, theaters, night clubs, offices, and rooming houses as well as commercial enterprise. Churches and schools dotted Greenwood’s landscape along with grand Victorian homes, Prairie School houses, bungalows and frame vernacular houses. Greenwood housed more than 11,000 African American residents by 1921.

The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 utterly destroyed the early 20th century district, but its residents rebuilt on Gurley’s original plat and expanded to include numerous residential additions. At its peak in the 1940s and 1950s, Greenwood’s population exceeded 20,000 residents. However, beginning in the late 1950s and extending through the 1960s, the community began to decline for a variety of reasons, including desegregation, urban renewal, freeway development, lack of economic development, and the establishment of a university in its midst.
Nevertheless, Greenwood retains important features of its historic development in the Period of Significance (1905-1967). This nomination contains nine brick commercial buildings that represent Greenwood’s famous business district. It also includes the Sam and Lucy Mackey House, which represent the heights to which Greenwood’s professional and business class residents could aspire and two historic churches that served and inspired African Americans in the community. Collectively, these resources attest to the African American community’s early history and development and its resilience and determination to rebuild in the face of almost inconceivable destruction. For these reasons, the Greenwood Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, Ethnic Heritage: African American, at the national level of significance.

**Criterion A: Social History**

Finally, the Greenwood Historic District is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Social History at the national level of significance. The district represents the efforts of African Americans to address the needs and welfare of its “captive” residents under legal segregation: to provide schools, churches, housing, health care and commercial services to a people living within the constraints established and enforced by the white power elite. It represents the extent and lasting effects of racial hatred and violence on segregated communities and the resolve of oppressed people to rebuild their community after its destruction and in the face of continued prejudice and legal subjugation. Furthermore, the district reflects the successful efforts of the power structure to eradicate communities of color under the guise of urban “renewal” and “redevelopment,” as evidenced by the IH-244 overpass which cut a swath of destruction through the lower Greenwood community in the late 1960s. [Greenwood’s significance in the area of Social History is more fully explored in the supporting paragraphs throughout Section 8.]

**Section 8.0: Greenwood Historic District in the Context of Larger Greenwood**

The Greenwood community is a separate African American district north of downtown Tulsa that arose in response to segregationist policies and “red-lining,” a practice used by white city leaders to contain other races within a defined area of the city as drawn, often in red ink, on municipal maps. In Tulsa, as in many other cities throughout the country, these red-lined “Negro” or “Mexican” districts were codified by city ordinances; such laws prohibited non-whites from living in white neighborhoods, attending white schools, and entering white

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5 Such redevelopment is evidenced by the construction of IH-244 which cut a swath of destruction through the lower Greenwood community in the late 1960s. It was somewhat mitigated by later redevelopment in the late 1980s and 1990s with the construction of the Greenwood Cultural Center (dedicated in 1995) and the erection of the 1921 Memorial (1996), which commemorated the loss of the community during the so-called Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Neither the highway nor the cultural center and associated memorial monument are included in the district as they are not representative of Greenwood’s historic building traditions, design or materials during the Period of Significance (1905-1967).
businesses, except through the back door; Greenwood resulted from these attitudes and redlining practices. The African American community grew from O. W. Gurley’s house and store in a corner of Tulsa’s original townsite “on the other side of the tracks” in 1905, to house a population of more than 11,000 by 1921.

But in 1921, a white mob invaded Greenwood and set the entire community on fire, an event historically known as the Tulsa Race Riot, now more appropriately termed the Tulsa Race Massacre. Fires consumed between 35 and 40 city blocks in fires of the African American community. The incident is considered by many scholars to be our nation’s most devastating interracial conflict in terms of lives lost and property destroyed. Although more than 70% of Greenwood burned to the ground in the invasion, the community rebuilt their homes, businesses, schools, and churches – many on the original foundations – through sheer will and determination, with little or no assistance from the city. Greenwood rebounded in the 1920s and expanded through the 1930s and 1940s. At its peak in the 1940s and early 1950s, Greenwood extended from the Frisco Railroad tracks on the south, to north of Pine Street on the north, and from the west side of North Lansing Street, on the east, to Cincinnati Avenue/Martin Luther King Blvd. on the west. These boundaries define the larger Greenwood community.

Beginning in the mid- to late-1950s, Greenwood began to decline due to the combined forces of school desegregation, urban renewal and highway development that wiped out much of the original lower section of the community. Nevertheless, Greenwood retains important historic resources within its larger, traditional boundaries, most of them dating to the period of reconstruction from the 1920s through the 1950s. Among them are several historic churches, a historic school, an intact commercial strip, and dozens of residential properties, most of them modern bungalows, Minimal Traditional, and Minimal Ranch style houses. Landscape and infrastructure resources including the Frisco tracks, Standpipe Hill, and subdivision, street, block and lot design in O. W. Gurley’s 1906 Gurley Addition and other additions are evident in the larger community, mostly in upper (northern) Greenwood. Collectively, these resources attest to Greenwood’s twentieth century history as a fully functional and self-sufficient African American community.

Though other properties within the larger Greenwood boundaries are associated with the African American community and may yet be determined eligible for listing in the National Register, this nomination includes some of Greenwood’s most important cultural resources in the lower (southern) section of the community, where most of the historic fabric has been lost to redevelopment. The district contains commercial buildings, a single-family dwelling, and two historic churches, all of which date to the reconstruction period of Greenwood’s history. These resources represent the residents’ heroic efforts to re-establish their commercial core, homes, and
religious landmarks, and regain their sense of place in the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

The Greenwood Historic District is a discontiguous district containing ten brick commercial buildings, Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church, and the Sam and Lucy Mackey House in the 100-300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue, and a historically related but physically separated property, Mount Zion Baptist Church, at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, a block west of and behind the Mackey House. All but one of the properties date to the reconstruction of Greenwood after the community was destroyed by fire during the infamous Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921; the only nonhistoric resource is a commercial building constructed in 1981. All of the historic resources contribute to the district; the nonhistoric commercial building is the district’s only noncontributing resource due to its less than 50-year age.

The commercial resources in the 100 block are physically linked to Vernon Chapel and the Mackey House along the neighborhood’s historic central spine, N. Greenwood Avenue. Visual connectivity is maintained between the two building clusters by way of the underpass beneath Interstate 244 which cuts through the neighborhood overhead. Though Mount Zion Baptist Church is physically separated from the Greenwood Avenue properties, it lies in close proximity and is historically linked to the district by its early and longstanding presence and influence in Greenwood, its reconstruction after the 1921 massacre, and its continuing importance in the African American community in the early postwar era when the current sanctuary (1948-1952) was built; the church was among the last significant resources built in the lower (southern) section of the larger community before urban renewal and highway construction decimated the area in the 1960s.

Section 8.1: Introduction to Greenwood

People of African ancestry were among the first settlers of Indian Territory, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Some were Native American freedmen and their descendants, while others participated in the Land Run of 1889 or arrived in the Great Migration that saw thousands of Southern African Americans leave the South for Northern cities and Western opportunities. African American pioneers came to Oklahoma Territory hoping for black political power in the territory as well as to establish Black towns for safety, security and a supportive environment free from the violence of white supremacy. In 1900, only 53 African Americans were listed within the Tulsa townsite census district but others no doubt lived in the countryside around the city.  

first, they lived in small clusters of three or four dwellings tucked between railroad lines and industrial nodes. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps noted these groupings as “Negro Shanties” or “Negro Tenants”. By 1905, however, the maps showed a brick commercial building and a frame house at the intersection of N. Greenwood Avenue and E. First (now Archer) Street; this area was the start of the business district that Booker T. Washington later dubbed the “Negro Wall Street.” The following year, Ottawa W. Gurley filed a plat for the Gurley Addition to Tulsa. Intended solely for African American occupation, the addition adjoined the original Tulsa townsite at its northeastern corner. Subsequent additions developed by and for African Americans followed. This was the start of the neighborhood that would become known as “Greenwood” for its main business thoroughfare and central spine, Greenwood Avenue.

Greenwood’s reputation as a prosperous business thoroughfare, attracted thousands of African Americans. These people then had to create a trusted place for commerce for their families and friends to thrive and live due to Tulsa’s segregationist attitudes in the first decades of the 20th century. By 1921, an estimated 11,000 people lived in the district. This area, although separated by the railroad tracks and the northern expanse of industrial construction, became a successful model for thousands of African Americans who lived in segregated cities throughout the country at that time. In 1918, Oklahoma’s African American population was first in the United States in ownership of real estate, personal property, and educational progress. Its prosperity, level of home ownership, community amenities such as schools, hospitals, churches, and its vibrant social life were widely touted in black newspapers and periodicals of the day.

All that was lost the night of May 31st and the morning of June 1st, 1921, when white rioters invaded the Greenwood neighborhood. In a few short hours, Greenwood was consumed by fires sparked by an inconsequential and unsubstantiated affront on a white woman by a black man. When the smoke lifted on June 1st, more than 70% of the Greenwood district – 35 to 40 city blocks – had been burned to the ground. No one has ever been able to accurately account for the number of dead, but scores of African Americans and about a dozen whites lost their lives in the conflagration. In addition, hundreds were injured, and some 9,000 African American men, women, and children were left homeless, many to spend the winter of 1921-22 in tents on their former homesites.

Perhaps even more remarkable than the wanton destruction of a prosperous and viable community was the monumental reconstruction effort that took place in the district immediately following the massacre. Rather than abandon the charred ruins the African American community rebuilt churches, brick buildings, schools, and homes. One- and two-story brick

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7 Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps of the City of Tulsa, Creek Nation, Indian Territory, 1901 and 1903.
buildings flew up in the 100-block of Greenwood Avenue, while hundreds of brick and frame bungalows filled the residential section. “Deep Greenwood”, as the business district was known, once again bustled with retail stores, service industries, professional offices, and entertainment venues including nightclubs, billiard parlors, and movie theaters. The community thrived through the 1920s and 1930s and maintained its prominence through the war years.

During the 1950s, desegregation began to make strides in Oklahoma and by the 1960s, many Greenwood residents moved out of the old neighborhood and took their business to suburban shopping centers far from the urban core. As businesses closed, buildings in the district deteriorated and met the wrecking ball. At the same time, major cross-town freeways slashed through the neighborhood, separating the commercial zone from the residential section. More and more people moved away from the traditional black neighborhoods and bulldozers razed many of the old houses in Greenwood. In 1982, the west side of the neighborhood was redeveloped for a university campus, further erasing historic building fabric in the old settlement.

Today, however, Greenwood retains salient features of its historic development. The Frisco tracks still mark its southern boundary and Greenwood Avenue remains its primary arterial. The street layout, orientation of lots, blocks, and buildings, and physical features such as Standpipe and Sunset hills, remain much the same as when Gurley and other African American developers platted their additions more than 100 years ago. Nine largely intact brick commercial buildings survive from the reconstruction era to represent the once-thriving business district, and scattered bungalows and vernacular dwellings throughout the neighborhood represent the housing types and styles of the historic period. Several churches, including Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church and Mount Zion Baptist Church, retain their historic appearance to a remarkable degree and maintain prominent positions in the district. Altogether, Greenwood retains sufficient resources and integrity to convey the story of its early settlers, the attack by fires and massacre, that nearly destroyed it, and the remarkable reconstruction efforts of its dedicated and determined people.

Section 8.2: Brief History of African Americans in Oklahoma and Tulsa

Indian Territory: 1834-1889
African Americans in Oklahoma pre-date white settlement by many decades. Starting with the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the U.S. Government forced Native Americans, including the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Loachapoka, and other tribes to abandon their traditional homelands in the Southeastern portion of the country in exchange for land in “Indian Territory”, present-day Oklahoma. Whites in Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, and Florida had successfully lobbied Congress for the act to free up Indian lands for white settlement. At the time, Anglo settlement west of the Mississippi was exceedingly sparse, and it seemed a good solution to relocate the tribes to a place that whites did not covet. To get to
Indian Territory, however, Native peoples and their African slaves had to endure extreme hardships including exposure, starvation, and disease during their forced removal from their homeland along the infamous Trail of Tears.

Early Tulsa lay within the boundaries of Muscogee Creek Nation, though the town spread to include parts of the Cherokee and Osage nations. Creek removal commenced in 1834 and about 1836, members of the Lochapoka (Turtle Clan) of the Muscogee (Creek) tribe established an encampment under a large burr oak tree, now known as the Council Oak (NRIS 76001576), on the east side of the Arkansas River. The Lochapoka named the settlement “Tulasi” or “Tallasi” (old town) for their former home in Alabama. As time passed, it became known as “Tulsey Town” and, finally, Tulsa. Since Creeks owned substantial numbers of slaves, those enslaved Africans were among the first residents in the Tulsa area. Chattel slavery in Indian Territory was practiced by the Five Civilized Tribes, a name given to the members of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes as more acculturated than other tribes due to the intermarriages with whites spoke English and some practiced Christianity. There was no great angst in the native community about the morality of enslaving Africans. The harshness of chattel slavery, that notion of living in bondage as property of another human being is an existence of erasure.

In 1846, a decade after Indian Removal, Legus Perryman, a mixed blood Creek of African and European descent, built a trading post near Tulas that did a lucrative business in the settlement until the outbreak of the Civil War, when many Native Americans fled the conflagration. The Creek Nation was divided in its loyalties; about half, 1,675, supported the Union while the other half – likely those who were slave owners – 1,575—fought on the side of the Confederacy.

Creeks returned to the Tulsa area after the war and in 1867, a U.S. Census counted 264 members of the tribe in the Tulsa area. It is not known how many, if any, of the former Creek slaves, known as Creek Freedmen, were among those enumerated near Tulsa that year. It is likely that some settled in the Tulsa area by the last decades of the 19th century as they were listed in the 1900 census rolls. Some freedmen and descendants of the Five Civilized Tribes founded their own “All-Black” towns and settlements in Oklahoma and Indian territories after the Civil War. These segregated communities offered mutual protection and economic opportunities free from white prejudice and interference. In all, about fifty All-Black communities and towns emerged in present Oklahoma between 1865 and 1920.

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Following the Civil War, whites again lobbied Congress to open the western lands to homesteading. Yielding to pressures from their constituents, Congress broke so-called “permanent” agreements with Native Americans to accommodate land-hungry white settlers. During the latter part of the 19th century, whites poured into the territory. Perryman’s trading post at “Tulsey Town” grew to a population of about 200 people by the late 1870s. In 1879, a U.S. Post Office was established at Josiah Perryman’s ranch, just southeast of town. Within a few years, however, it moved to George Perryman’s ranch house, closer to the trading post and cattle yards.

In 1882, the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad extended its tracks to the town to serve the growing Texas and Indian Territory cattle industry. Livestock was driven to the stock yards and cattle-loading chutes that fronted the new railroad line. The cattle business and railroad presence drew even more people to Tulsa and a railroad surveyor laid out a townsite near the railroad depot, anticipating its future subdivision and sale. By the 1890s, Tulsa looked like any small, western town with dirt streets and frame store buildings with false fronts (Figure 1).

Bowing to continued pressure, the U. S. Government opened the unassigned lands of Indian Territory to settlement in 1889. Land would be offered on a first come, first served basis. The Great Land Run was widely advertised throughout the nation and particularly in the American South where African Americans took a strong interest in the opportunity to own their own land in a “new” country. Upon arriving in the territory, some blacks homesteaded farms while others made their way to the All-Black communities. Still others moved to existing towns like Tulsa, whose populations included white, black, and Native American residents.

In 1895, a Federal Judge ruled that Tulsa, formerly a part of Indian Territory and not subject to other laws, could legally incorporate as a municipality. Tulsa’s businessmen, in particular, supported the idea and on January 18, 1898, Tulsa became a duly incorporated city. It had an estimated population of 1,390 people, among them were a handful of people of African descent.

We know where most black Tulsans lived because their houses were identified as “Negro shanties”, “Negro tenants,” and “Negro District” on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, and from other primary sources such as census records and early city directories. By the close of the 19th century, several small, scattered “Negro” enclaves of three or four houses each had emerged at the northern edge of the city. They were clustered near Vernon African Methodist Episcopal

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12 Larry O’Dell, accessed August 8, 2011.
(A.M.E.) Church, whose congregation organized as early as 1895, and the Macedonia Baptist Church, which was founded in 1897. These small residential/church communities were separated from the white residential sections by the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad tracks and a swath of industrial warehouses, mills, and junk yards that covered the northern part of town. The presence of these black residences and churches at the northern, less desirable part of town, would become the foundation for greater African American settlement after the turn of the century.

Section 8. 3: Blacks in North Tulsa at the Turn of the 20th Century

The 1900 Tulsa Townsite Census

Despite the cattle industry and arrival of the railroad, Tulsa remained a sleepy little town in Indian Territory at the turn of the 20th century. Of Tulsa’s 1,290 residents, 53 were listed as “black” in the 1900 census. The census enumerated 14 family groups and a number of single men and women. Some were Freedmen citizens of the Five Civilized Tribes and also of the “Great Migration” of African Americans who left the rural south or border states like Missouri and sought new opportunities in northern cities and the western frontier. Most lived in houses with family members, but some individuals resided in boarding houses. Still others lived in white households where they worked as servants. Those who occupied their own households tended to live in small groups of two or three dwellings housing other African American families. Although the exact location of these clusters is unknown, these are likely the groups of “Negro Dwellings” shown in the northern section of Tulsa on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps a few years later. A few black families recorded in the 1900 census appeared to be living next to whites, but that may be due to distances between households.

Freedmen Settlers

Several black residents of Tulsa in 1900 were associated with Native Americans born in Indian Territory long before whites ventured into the area. William Dunn, for example, came to Indian Territory from Kentucky, but his wife Jennie was a Native American born in Indian Territory, as were her parents. The Dunn’s lived among whites and owned their own home. Robert Grayer, who had been born in Indian Territory before the Civil War, was likely a Creek Freedman. He

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14 Ellsworth states that Vernon AME Church was founded in 1895 but other sources claim that it was founded in 1905, on Greenwood Avenue. It is probable that the congregation pre-dated the erection of the church building on its present site. Regardless, Vernon AME is one of the earliest black churches in Tulsa.
15 Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land, 12
16 Sanborn Map Company, Maps of the City of Tulsa, 1894-1905.
17 U. S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules, Tulsa, Creek Nation, Indian Territory, 1900. This figure is for the Tulsa Townsite precinct. No doubt, other African Americans lived nearby.
18 William Dunn was identified as “black” but his wife, Jennie, was counted as an Indian. There were likely many more African Americans living in the settlements or in the countryside surrounding Tulsa.
19 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900.
and his family lived on a farm just outside of Tulsa. Isaac Sanders and his wife, Lizza, were born in Indian Territory in 1871 and 1875, respectively. Identified in the census as “black,” they were likely associated with one of the Native tribes. These people of African and possibly Native American descent would become known as “Native Negroes” as opposed to those who came to Oklahoma after statehood who were known as “State Negroes”.

**Immigrants from the Southern and Border States**

Many Southern blacks migrated to Indian Territory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the turn of the century, they outnumbered “Native Negroes” in the towns and cities. Most of the black adults in Tulsa at the turn of the century were fairly recent arrivals from the South or from border states like Missouri and Arkansas. Scott Ellsworth, in his book, *Death in a Promised Land*, stated that in 1900, more black Tulsans had been born in Missouri than in Indian Territory. The 1900 census supports his claim. Typically, black immigrants set out for new lives in Indian Territory with their families. Several households matching this description consisted of young couples with small children. Among them were Riley Foster, his wife, Ella, and their children, Otis and Malinda. All members of the household were born in Missouri. Malinda’s birth in Missouri, only a year earlier, indicates that the family was a recent arrival in Tulsa. Thomas Baker, Foster’s partner, lived in the household with the family. The 25-year old Missouri native may have come to Indian Territory with the Riley’s. Next door to the Riley family were Douglas Fredshoe, his wife Lula, and their six-month old son, Dewey. Douglas and Lula Fredshoe were both natives of Missouri but their child, Dewey, had been born in Indian Territory. All of the men in this group performed “job work” or “day labor.”

Asbury Robinson, a day laborer from Georgia, lived in the midst of several white families. A few African Americans lived nearby as servants in white households, including Oscar, Ben, and Mittie Leafton, all natives of Mississippi, and Daisy Lallis, a Missouri native who had relatives nearby. Henry Lallis, also of Missouri, may have been her brother. Henry and his wife Caroline, a native of North Carolina, owned their own house in the vicinity of white families. Lallis worked as a blacksmith. Rum Price and four other African American men lived together in a nearby boarding house. All of the men were day laborers from Missouri. Other black residents in Tulsa at that time included Tennessee native Albert Baskell, who worked a day laborer. Baskell’s wife, Mary, was born in Alabama and worked as a cook in Tulsa.

**Occupations**

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20 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900.
21 Albert Dunn, interview by Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc., June 15, 2011.
22 Ellsworth, 12-13.
23 U.S. Census, Tulsa Townsite, 1900.
24 Ibid.
While most of the city’s African Americans in 1900 worked as day laborers or servants, several were professionals, farmers, or skilled craftsmen. Their families appear to have formed a small community near present Archer Street and Detroit Avenue.  

Augustus Hicks, a preacher from Georgia, was one of the most prominent residents of this area. He owned his own home at 123 N. Detroit Avenue where he lived for many years. Polk Taylor, a Georgian-born lawyer lived nearby with his wife, Marnie, a Texas native. James Kimbrough, a farmer from Missouri, lived near Hicks and Taylor. Kimbrough’s children were noted as “attending school,” indicating that an African American school had been established in the northern sector of town by that time. Kimbrough’s nearest neighbor was Lena Walker. Although she must have made a modest living as a laundress, Mrs. Walker owned her own home. Stone mason Samuel Harris lived in the same area. Harris, a North Carolinian, and his wife, Agnes, a Kansas native, also owned their own home. Both of them had lived in Indian Territory for at least ten years. Their daughter Mina attended school, likely with the Kimbrough children.

**Oil Boom**

In 1901, however, oil was discovered nearby at Red Fork and Tulsa, the closest city with a railroad, was transformed from a cow town to a boomtown virtually overnight. Wildcatters and investors, many with families in tow, flocked to the city to seek their fortunes. Brothers Dan and Gus Patton surveyed a townsite with the railroad line traversing its north side. Central lots and blocks quickly saw hotels, restaurants, dry goods stores, and other businesses spring up along the main streets while outer lots filled with housing starts. An even larger strike was made four years later at Glenn Pool, not far from Tulsa. The rich finds attracted numerous oil companies to Tulsa, the closest city of any size, leading to the town’s nickname as the “Oil Capital of the World.” In the wake of the Glenn Pool discovery, thousands of job seekers rushed to Tulsa in search of work in petroleum and related industries. Builders followed the throngs of workers to Tulsa and within a few years of the discoveries, they had constructed new hotels and rooming houses, banks, restaurants, saloons, dry goods stores and groceries, railroad lines and industrial sites.

African Americans were among the many fortune-seekers who hurried to Tulsa for the business opportunities the town offered. Among them were African Americans – John and Loula

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25 Augustus Hicks lived at 123 Detroit, in the southwestern part of the Greenwood district, by 1907. The others lived near him.


27 Although census evidence shows this community had coalesced near the intersection of N. Detroit Avenue and E. Archer Street by 1900, it wasn’t until the late 1930s that the first water lines were laid in the area by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

28 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900.
Williams – from Mississippi and Tennessee, respectively. When young Bill Williams asked his father why he had come to Oklahoma, John replied, “I came out to the promised land.” Some “Native Negroes” became wealthy when oil was discovered on their allotments as members of various Indian tribes.

**Segregation**

From the start, whether Native or newcomer, African Americans were shunted to the northern, less desirable part of town where industrial development sprang up along the railroad lines. They likely settled in small frame houses and tents near existing enclaves of black families and their churches. By 1905, when Sanborn maps reflected the city’s growth due to the oil strikes, all of the black residential clusters were located in Tulsa’s northern sector, north of the railroad tracks and tucked between industrial complexes. Blacks may have self-segregated themselves for protection and support, but their relegation to the less desirable part of town is likely due to white attitudes about race. Southerners dominated white migration to Oklahoma in the last part of the 19th century and early 20th century and most brought their prejudices with them. Among their most deeply held beliefs were white superiority and strict segregation to prevent “race mixing.” Thus, when new blacks moved to Tulsa in the early 1900s, they were probably routed to the existing black enclaves separated from the white residential section by multiple sets of train tracks and expanses of industrial development including warehouses, cement works, and lumber yards.

**Industrial Zone**

It is not known whether blacks lived near industrial zones solely because they were relegated to less desirable residential areas due to their race, or because the companies provided much-needed jobs for laborers. One of the first large industrial plants in North Tulsa was the Rea-Read & Co. Flour Mill, a large complex of mills, warehouses, and grain elevators. It was located along the south side of the St. Louis & San Francisco (Frisco) railroad tracks, about half a mile northeast of the city’s central post office and close to the “Negro Districts” of North Tulsa. The mill may well have been a source of work that drew African Americans to the area in the early 20th century.

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29 Ellsworth, 1.
30 Albert Dunn, Interview, June 15, 2011.
31 Although the 1900 census does not indicate exactly where blacks lived, it clearly shows distinct enclaves of black families separate from whites. It is possible that the small cluster of homeowners including the Hicks, Walker, Harris, and Kimbrough families, and attorney Taylor Polk and his wife, lay in the northeastern quadrant of town and later arrivals simply joined them, increasing the African American presence in the northeast. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps depicting “Negro Settlements” and “Negro Dwellings” identify enclaves of African Americans in this area by the first years of the 20th century.
Building industries, responding to Tulsa’s rapid growth, appeared in the same area at the same time and they, too, may have provided work for African Americans living nearby. The Chastain, Minnetonka and J. B. Wilson lumber yards joined the Rea-Read Mill along the railroad lines. Two brick companies and a wholesale cement warehouse were in operation by 1907. Both lay near the black neighborhoods. Owen Brick Co., north of Seventh Street, and the Tulsa Dry Press Brick Co., were established north of the city in what would become the Greenwood district. These companies may have provided work for the many black families that were moving to Tulsa in the first decades of the 20th century and may account for the concentration of African American citizens in the northeast sector of town, at least in part.

**Growth of Negro Districts in the Early 20th Century**

The 1905 Sanborn maps of the city depicts several black enclaves as “Negro Tenants” and “Negro Districts”. These districts appeared to be as insular and inward looking like the state’s all-black towns, though on a much smaller scale. They generally consisted of a few houses and small, neighborhood stores, restaurants, and “joints” or tavern/pool halls. All lay north of the Frisco Railroad where they were separated from white neighborhoods.

One “Negro” cluster lay behind small stores, restaurants, and taverns on N. Main Street. One of the earliest and largest African American enclaves in Tulsa covered an entire block on the city’s northern edge. Its southern boundary was marked by the Frisco tracks, the northern by N. E. First Street (Archer), the western boundary by N. Boston, and its eastern border by N. Cincinnati (Figure 2). Sanborn maps labeled the whole block as a “Negro District.” At the northernmost edge of Tulsa’s original townsite plat, it included six frame houses, a brick house, two tents, and six shops which housed two restaurants, a lunch shack, a tailor, a barber, and a place that sold “drinks”. In addition, the Tremont Hotel, identified as “Negro Lodgings” on the map, fronted onto N. E. First Street. An African American couple, Henry and Lula Watson, served as on-site proprietors.

Another black district emerged near the intersection of N. E. First (Archer) Street and N. Jackson Avenue in the last years of the 19th century. It formed on the east side of the Midland Valley and Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad tracks in block 50 of the original town plat. The primary attraction was Macedonia Baptist Church, which was erected in 1897. The existence

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32 Sanborn Map Company, 1901-1915. Sanborn fire insurance maps noted “Negro” dwellings or “Negro” tenants on Tulsa maps.
33 Sanborn Map Company, 1905.
34 Sanborn Map Company, 1907.
35 Sanborn Map Company; 1905.
37 Ellsworth, 12.
38 Ellsworth, 12.
of the church in this area indicates that a substantial community lay in the area by the late 19th century. Early 20th century maps show a handful of frame houses near the church by that time. The community eventually grew northward, north of the Frisco tracks and east of the A. T. & S.F line. It would come to encompass Lansing Avenue, one of its main residential streets.

Section 8.4: Greenwood, 1905-1921

Seeds of Greenwood
By 1905, Ottawa W. Gurley planted the seeds of yet another black neighborhood on Tulsa’s north side. Gurley was an African American entrepreneur, merchant, educator, and real estate developer who served as president of the Western Realty and Land Co. A recent transplant from Arkansas, by way of Perry, Oklahoma, he built a brick grocery store and a frame dwelling at the intersection of N. E. First (Archer Street) and N. Greenwood Avenue (Figure 3).39 His presence in the 100-block of N. Greenwood Avenue – within the original Tulsa townsite – attracted more African Americans to the area. At first, the Greenwood Avenue node was just one of several small “Negro” zones. The 1907 Sanborn maps still identified the Tulsa city block No. 58 as the “Negro District.” It contained the Tremont Hotel, six or seven houses, and several small businesses (Figure 4). The same year, the Sanborn maps show a handful of “Negro Shanties” and tents on the north side of E. N. E. Third Street, between Cincinnati and Detroit avenues. This neighborhood had probably been in existence for some years before the Sanborn Company included the outlying area in its maps. These earlier Negro districts would soon be eclipsed by, or subsumed in, the Greenwood District.

Within two years of Gurley’s establishment at Archer and Greenwood, significant growth in the form of several two-story commercial buildings and a number of frame houses in the first two blocks of Greenwood Avenue, north of the Frisco tracks (Figure 5). The commercial buildings were more ambitious than any of the other shops in the scattered “Negro districts.” Each of the substantial brick commercial buildings were divided into two or more sections with shops on the first floors and rooms for rent on upper floors. Gurley’s original house and store were depicted with an attached restaurant, all of which fronted onto N. E. First (Archer) Street at the intersection of Greenwood Avenue. Businesses in the 100-200 blocks in 1907 included two general stores and storage facilities. Two frame restaurants and six frame dwellings filled out the rest of the block.40 Within a few years, most of the small “Negro” zones had dwindled in size. Their residents may have been attracted to the new Greenwood area which appeared more successful with brick commercial buildings and more substantial dwellings. Residents of these small, scattered clusters may have also been forced to relocate to the exclusively black neighborhood due to the passage of city ordinances that codified segregation in Tulsa;

39 Johnson, 13.
40 Sanborn Map Company, 1907.
Greenwood was one of the few areas in the city where African Americans could live. A notable exception was the Macedonia Baptist Church community at E. Archer and Jackson Avenue which remained viable for decades.

**Gurley’s Addition**

Gurley’s dream for Tulsa’s “Negro” community went beyond building a couple of brick commercial buildings and a few frame dwellings. In 1906, just as the commercial buildings were being built on Greenwood Avenue, Gurley bought the adjacent 40-acre tract of land to the north for subdivision as a residential addition strictly for “Colored” people. Gurley’s instincts that conditions were ripe for a planned “Negro” development proved to be right and the Gurley Addition soon became a Mecca for black families who built hundreds of frame houses in the subdivision. Schools and churches followed; by 1908, a frame grammar school stood on Hartford Avenue, a block east of and parallel to N. Greenland Avenue, and by 1910, the two-story brick Dunbar School occupied a large site at the terminal end of Hartford Avenue. The school had eight classrooms for grades one through eight.41 A black newspaper, the *Tulsa Guide*, was founded on Greenwood Avenue as early as 1906.42 Within a couple of years, the neighborhood known as Greenwood, for its main street, had become Tulsa’s largest and most successful African American communities.

Gurley’s vision was a major factor in Greenwood’s successful development as Tulsa’s preeminent African American neighborhood. The 40-acre tract lay north of the St. Louis & San Francisco (Frisco) Railroad tracks where “Negroes” had traditionally lived. A few houses may have pre-existed the addition but by and large it was a blank canvass on which Tulsa’s African Americans could build their own businesses, churches, schools, and homes. Gurley platted his addition on a strict north-south axis, at an approximately 45-degree angle to the original Tulsa town plat. He connected existing city streets to those in his subdivision with a little jog to the east at Cameron Avenue, where they entered the Addition. Gurley divided the land into regularly spaced lots and blocks along the extensions of existing Hartford, Greenwood, and Frankfort avenues. He added Front Street (originally Exeter Place, later Dean) between N. Frankfort and N. Elgin Avenues. Gurley specifically intended his addition “to be sold to Coloreds only”43 and likely promoted his addition to African Americans via newspaper advertisements throughout the south and southwest, as was typical for the time.

Development on Greenwood Avenue and throughout the addition provided many African Americans with construction jobs. The community attracted skilled brick masons, carpenters,

41 Johnson, 11.
42 Ellsworth, 14.
and electricians. Some residents built their own houses from easy-to-follow kits or had other African American craftsmen – usually carpenters - build houses for them. Greenwood would be a community built by and for African Americans.

The district was a beehive of activity from the start. Among the area’s first attractions were the black-owned commercial businesses at the intersection of N. Greenwood Avenue and E. N. First (Archer). Although technically in the Tulsa Original Townsite plat, these businesses stood at the southern tip of the neighborhood and supplied it with a number of goods and services. In 1905, Vernon AME Church was established on Greenwood Avenue, a circumstance that drew more parishioners to the area. By 1907 and statehood, the 100-block of N. Greenwood Avenue featured two restaurants, two two-story brick general stores, and a grocery store. A number of frame dwellings occupied lots in the block, as well. The 1907 maps did not extend north of the 100 block to include black churches and schools, but these resources existed during this early development period.

The 1907 Tulsa City Directory shows that while African American homes, businesses, churches, and schools lay on Tulsa’s north side, they tended to be in small, scattered clusters rather than a well-defined community yet. A number of churches, fraternal organizations and a school served the growing black community. Rev. Augustus Hicks had lived in Tulsa since the late 19th century and his name appeared in the 1900 city townsite census. By 1907, he and his wife, Maggie, lived at 123 N. Detroit, several blocks west of N. Greenwood Avenue. North Detroit served for a while as the western boundary for the emerging Greenwood community at the time; whites lived on the west side of the street and African Americans lived on the east side. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church led by pastor Rev. Burton lay at N. E. First (Archer) Street near the MKT Railway in 1907. A little further east the Macedonia Baptist Church under Rev. C. L. Netherlands stood at the corner of N. E. First and N. Jackson streets. A small African American community grew up around the church about the same time Greenwood started to coalesce. The Tulsa Colored School occupied a site at the intersection of N. Hartf ord Avenue and Easton Street, at the edge of the Gurley Addition that year. S. M. McPherson served as principal.

Masonic orders and unions abounded in the community. Cold Creek Lodge No. 35 met every Friday evening in Barksdale Hall. The Phillis [sic] Wheatley Chapter No. 25 of the Eastern Star met the first and second Thursdays after the full moon. The Ozark Lodge No. 9 of the Knights

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44 Albert Dunn, Interview, June 15, 2011.
45 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900.
46 D.C. and B.C. Hoffhine, Tulsa City Directories, 1907 and 1910.
of Pythias and the Holloway Council No. 64 of the A.S. & D. of J. met in Gurley Hall, while the A.S.& D. of J. Pilot Council No. 97 met once a month in Barksdale Hall.\(^{47}\)

Though lodges, halls, churches, and schools were built somewhat randomly on Tulsa’s northern periphery, Greenwood attracted the businessmen. In 1907, Greenwood’s businessmen included grocers, hotel proprietors, newspaper editors, physicians, attorneys, real estate agents and restauranteurs. James Cooper ran a boarding house at 401 E. First (Archer) Street and Mrs. J. H. Jackson operated a similar one at 7 N. Boston Avenue. Grocers included William H. Baker, whose store lay at the southwest corner of N. First (Archer) Street and Hartford Avenue, and Lewis P. Partee, who operated a store at the southeast corner of N. First (Archer) Street and N. Greenwood Avenue. By 1907, Gurley and his partner John W. Hughes opened “Everybody’s Store” in the Gurley Building at 112 N. Greenwood Avenue. Gurley and his wife Emma lived upstairs, and Hughes occupied rooms in the building. Emma was listed as the landlady for the Gurley Hotel.\(^{48}\)

Professional fields were represented by attorneys, teachers, preachers, and doctors. Most lived on the north side, but Lawyer George W. Hutchins was an exception who owned a business in the downtown section of Tulsa at 102 S. Main Street. Doctor Robert T. Bridgewater lived at the northeast corner of Hartford Avenue and Cameron but operated an office at the southeast corner of Greenwood and N. First (Archer) Street. Physician J. M. Key had his clinic across the street at the northwest corner of N. First and Greenwood, addressed at 116 N. Greenwood Avenue.\(^{49}\) The Reverends Hicks, Netherlands, and Burton, and Principal McPherson, all lived in the northern part of town where most of their flock resided. By 1910, Rev. U.S. Smith served as pastor of Brown’s Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church on N. Frankfort Avenue. Smith was an anomaly among clergymen in Tulsa’s black community; his home was in Perry, Oklahoma, and he commuted to church on Sundays.\(^{50}\) That year, Rev. Andrew G. Washington and his wife, Elnora, lived at the northeast corner of N. Greenwood Avenue and Cameron Street. Washington officiated at the African Methodist Episcopal Church next door. Rev. Sandy Lyons served as pastor of the Macedonia Baptist Church at the corner of Archer Avenue and Kenosha (formerly Jackson). Lyons lived at the southeast corner of Kenosha and Archer.\(^{51}\)

**Commercial Node**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps and Tulsa city directories show that by 1910-11 the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, the neighborhood’s principal thoroughfare, was filled with

\(^{47}\) D.C. and B.C. Hoffhine, Tulsa City Directory, 1907/

\(^{48}\) D. C. and B. C. Hoffhine, Tulsa City Directory, 1907.

\(^{49}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{50}\) D.C. and B.C. Hoffhine, Tulsa City Directory, 1910.

\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*
black-owned one- and two-story commercial buildings (Figure 6). Businesses included several restaurants, a motion picture house, a cobbler, pool hall, several grocery stores, a dry goods store, an office building, several barber shops, a meat market, and a skating rink. By then, a new black newspaper, the Tulsa Weekly Planet, served the community.\textsuperscript{52} In addition, many African Americans rented rooms in the buildings’ upper stories. In fact, one of the first businesses on the block was entirely a rooming house, the one built by O. W. Gurley on Greenwood Avenue just north of the Frisco tracks.\textsuperscript{53} While most of the 100-block was crowded with commercial buildings, a few frame dwellings remained wedged between them in the northernmost part of the block.\textsuperscript{54}

John Williams was responsible for some of the most substantial construction in the first block of N. Greenwood Avenue. In 1912, he built a three-story brick building at the northwest corner of Greenwood and E. Archer. His wife, Loula, ran a confectionary on the first floor. Her store had a 12-foot fountain and seated nearly 50 people. The family lived in an apartment on the second floor and rented the third floor as office space to doctors, lawyers, and dentists.\textsuperscript{55} Two years later, Williams built a two-story brick building further north in the block. On the first floor, Loula and John installed the first black theater in Tulsa, Williams Dreamland Theatre (Figure 6). Silent movies played to the accompaniment of a live pianist. Mrs. Williams, who managed the operation, booked live entertainment there, as well.\textsuperscript{56}

Mabel B. Little described Greenwood as she first saw it, in 1913. The seventeen-year-old girl arrived on the Frisco train from Boley and remembered:

> Black businesses flourished. I remember Huff’s Café on Cincinnati and Archer. It was a thriving meeting place in the black community. You could go there almost anytime, and just about everybody who was anybody would be there or on their way. Down on what went by the name of “Deep Greenwood” was a clique of eateries, a panorama of lively dance halls, barber shops and theaters glittering in the night light, and a number of medical and dental offices.\textsuperscript{57}

**Residential Growth**

Gurley appears to have platted his addition over a number of existing ad hoc frame dwellings occupied by African Americans on N. Frankfort and N. Greenwood Avenues.\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps, this cluster of dwellings may have inspired Gurley to organize the addition in that location. Early

\textsuperscript{52} Ellsworth, 14.
\textsuperscript{53} National Park Service, 15.
\textsuperscript{54} Sanborn Map Company, 1911; D. C. and B. C. Hoffhine, 1910.
\textsuperscript{55} Ellsworth, 2.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid}, 3.
\textsuperscript{57} Johnson, 17.
\textsuperscript{58} Sanborn Map Company, 1907.
construction in the subdivision included the one room wide/two- to three-room deep “shotgun” type dwellings that lined N. Hartford Avenue in the early decades, and small frame shelters identified as “Negro Shanties” on Sanborn maps that fronted onto the MKT railroad line near its intersection with the St. Louis & San Francisco tracks. \(^{59}\) These small one- and two-room frame dwellings stood along N. Frankfort and N. Greenwood Avenues and may have pre-dated the Gurley Addition. A small frame “Negro School” and several churches occupied lots in the otherwise residential addition.

New construction in the Gurley Addition followed regular development patterns practiced elsewhere in the country at the time. This helped set the tone for the neighborhood as a standard, working- and middle-class suburban district. The addition consisted of twelve blocks with eight uniform lots per block. Main streets were N. Greenwood, N. Hartford, N. Frankfort, and N. Front (Exeter) Avenues. These streets were oriented on a north-south axis. Cross streets were E. Cameron on the south and E. Easton (Jessie) on the north. Houses fronted onto the main streets and respected a uniform setback. In general, each lot contained a single house but on Hartford and Frankfort Avenues several lots held two shotgun-type houses. Still, the addition maintained a planned appearance with houses of similar size, scale, design, and setback on each block face.

Most of the houses in the Gurley Addition appear to have been frame bungalows and vernacular dwellings similar to those built-in white neighborhoods at the time. The nationally popular Craftsman and Classical Revival styles were well-represented in the Gurley Addition. The majority of new houses in the district were one-story frame buildings, but a few were one-and-a-half, or even two stories in height. Typically, the houses featured two or three bedrooms and indoor plumbing, though some streets lacked city water. Virtually all new construction completed between 1907 and 1911 possessed full- or half-façade front porches. Some narrow shotgun houses appeared in the addition, but they were new, clean, and followed the building patterns of their streets. Nowhere in the Gurley addition were houses labeled “Negro shanties” as the small, box-like structures in the earliest black neighborhoods were termed. Front Street appeared to be a planned development with nine identical one-story frame houses, each with a centered front porch and a small rear porch. Front Street houses were larger than others in the addition and their deep set back from the street gave their owners generous front yards.

**The Price Addition**

By 1911, the Gurley Addition was nearly built out and another addition exclusively for African Americans was platted on the north end of Hartford and Greenwood Avenues, just north of Jessie (later Easton) Street. The Price Addition extended the reach of the black residential

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\(^{59}\) So-called “shotgun houses” are small, narrow dwellings that are only one-room wide and two or three rooms deep. The name stems from the observation that a shotgun blast at the front of the house would pass through all rooms before exiting the rear.
neighborhood further north. The addition is particularly noteworthy for the location of a substantial brick, two-story “Negro School” building at the north end of N. Hartford Avenue. Another “Negro” school – a small, one-story frame building – lay in the 300 block of N. Hartford Avenue. The success of the Gurley and Price additions, and the continued influx of African Americans to Tulsa, warranted still further development and the Northside Addition was platted beyond the northern limits of Frankfort and Greenwood Avenues, north of E. Easton Street (formerly Jessie). By 1911, these additions represented a contiguous, densely developed black neighborhood that spread out to the north, east, and west from the Gurley Addition. The exclusively black community extended to the east side of Detroit Avenue, on the west, and as far as N. Jackson Avenue at N. E. First Street (Archer), on the east.

Churches
More African American churches sprang up in Greenwood as the community grew. Among them were Brown’s Chapel Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, which lay on a large lot on the east side of N. Frankfort Avenue, and an imposing African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church with a square bell tower, which lay on the east side of N. Greenwood Avenue. Both churches were part of the Gurley Addition. The Macedonia Baptist Church -- labeled in Sanborn maps as a “Colored Baptist Church” – remained in operation at the southeast corner of Jackson Avenue, a few blocks east of Greenwood and west of the Tulsa Fairgrounds. The brick veneered church featured a single, square bell tower. Several frame dwellings lay to the south, on Jackson, and to the east, on E. N. First Street (Archer). They were likely associated with the African Americans who settled nearby as early as 1897.

The development that took place on the city’s north side between 1905 and 1911 was nothing short of phenomenal. Within just a few years, Tulsa’s black citizens built an entirely self-sufficient community whose residential neighborhoods spread across the city’s northern limits from E. Detroit, on the west, to Lansing Avenue, on the east, and from the Frisco tracks on the south, to the section line at Pine Street, on the north. A variety of schools and churches met the community’s religious and educational needs, and more than a dozen commercial enterprises kept its people supplied with goods and services.

New Growth, New Additions: 1910-1915
As the center of a tremendous oil field, Tulsa experienced incredible growth in the 1910s, but between 1910 and 1920, its population increased five times. By 1920, the U.S. Census bureau tallied Tulsa’s population at 72,075 residents, nearly 11,000 of whom were black. In keeping with the massive influx of African Americans to North Tulsa, a number of new additions were platted beyond the city’s northern boundary. By 1915, a second Gurley Addition was platted on

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60 Sanborn Map Company, 1911.
61 Sanborn Map Company, 1911.

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Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Name of Property

the west side of Greenwood Avenue and the Washington Addition was platted on the east side of Greenwood. The Northside Addition picked up at E. Easton Street and included N. Front, N. Frankfort, and N. Greenwood Avenues, and N. Hartford Street. To the west, North Tulsa started at E. Cameron Avenue and ran north to E. Haskell, including E. Davenport and E. Easton streets, the east side of Detroit, both sides of Elgin, and part of Frankfort. This area was identified as “Negro Tenants” on the 1915 Sanborn maps (Figure 8). The Davis-Wilson Addition was bounded by E. Haskell on the south, N. Cincinnati Avenue on the west, N. Front Street on east, and extended north off the map. These new subdivisions were surveyed in a flurry of activity between 1911 and 1915 to accommodate the influx of new arrivals to the black neighborhoods in the early 1910s.62

**Deep Greenwood: The Negro Wall Street 1915**

By the 1910s, Greenwood’s commercial district, at the southern tip of the neighborhood, was known as “Deep Greenwood.” Its success would lead to the appellation given to it by Booker T. Washington in 1913, as “The Negro Wall Street” (Figure 8). Deep Greenwood included the first two blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue, north of the railroad tracks, and adjacent blocks on E. Archer between N. Hartford and N. Elgin avenues. By 1915, the 100-200 blocks of Greenwood and the 400-600 blocks of E. Archer were lined with one- to three-story hotels, including the Alexander Hotel, rooming houses, grocery and general dry goods stores, drug stores, restaurants, lunch counters, barber shops, auto repair shops, chili parlors, and theaters, including Williams Dreamland Theater. Thirty-one other commercial businesses on the street included dry goods and general stores, restaurants, “joints” or clubs, barber shops, tailors, and other service-oriented venues.63 A shooting gallery lay in the 500 block of E. Archer Street. Fraternal organizations and unions met in some of the larger buildings like Gurley Hall. Multi-storied buildings in the district had shops on the first floors and offices or rooms to rent on the second and third floors.64 Not all business in Greenwood were savory. Pool halls and “joints” abounded on the side street off of Greenwood Avenue. There, prostitution, gambling, and bootleg whiskey were all available for a price. Some people gathered in dark dens to smoke opium.65 Overall, however, Deep Greenwood was a legitimate commercial district whose proprietors maintained control over its activities.

**Institutions**

Religious and educational institutions kept abreast of Greenwood’s residential and commercial growth with many new churches and schools built in the new additions by 1915. By 1915, at least three “Negro” schools lay within the community boundaries. The two-story Booker T.

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62 National Park Service, 16; Sanborn Map Company, 1911 and 1915.
63 Sanborn Map Company, 1915.
64 Sanborn Map Company 1915; Polk-Hoffhine, *Tulsa City Directory*, 1913.
65 Ellsworth, 5.
Greenwood Historic District

Washington school built about 1907, lay in the Price Addition, a re-plat of the Gurley Addition (Figure 9). A small frame school built between 1900 and 1910 still stood in the 300 block of N. Hartford Avenue. The newest addition to the community was the Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School complex on E. Haskell Street, in the Davis-Wilson and North Tulsa additions. Mount Zion Baptist Church appeared on the 1915 Sanborn maps at 419 N. Elgin Avenue. It was one of the neighborhood’s largest churches, along with Brown’s Chapel CME at 317 N. Frankfort Avenue and Vernon AME at 305 N. Greenwood Avenue. The Macedonia Baptist Church still held forth in the black community east of the Mid Valley railroad tracks, at 902 E. Archer Street.

Greenwood by 1921

Greenwood continued to attract new residents and businesses to the north side of Tulsa (Figure 11). By 1921, Tulsa’s black population had grown to nearly 11,000, most of whom lived in or near the Greenwood district. Greenwood supported a hospital, two newspapers, two theaters, a public library, a hospital, 13 churches, and two newspapers, the Tulsa Star and the Oklahoma Sun. The community counted three fraternal lodges and two major public schools, Dunbar and Booker T. Washington. An unusually large number of black-owned businesses, including 41 grocers/meat markets, 30 restaurants, 11 boarding and rooming houses, nine billiard halls, and five hotels operated in the black part of town. On the eve of the massacre, Tulsa’s Greenwood district had amenities and resources that rivaled the most sophisticated black communities in the country.

Greenwood’s success engendered a relatively affluent entrepreneurial class that included businessmen, professionals, and skilled craftsmen. They lived in comfortable bungalows with Craftsman-inspired architectural detailing. A few lived in more stately houses along N. Front Street and the east side of Detroit Avenue, across from white residential blocks. Sam and Lucy Mackey built a large, two-story frame house at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue, at the corner of Easton, in 1915. Still, others lived in furnished rooms above businesses and offices in Deep Greenwood. Despite these advances, a study by the American Association of Social Workers found that 95% of blacks in the area lived in “poorly constructed frame houses.” These were likely the many frame shotgun and unadorned box-like houses that sheltered laborers and their families.

67 Sanborn maps show the church address in 1915 as 415 Elgin.
68 Ibid.
69 National Park Service, 40.
70 Ibid, 39.
71 National Park Service, 15.
Greenwood was a bustling community with hundreds of buildings, including homes, businesses, schools, and churches. Even though the City of Tulsa relegated blacks to a single corner of town, the many Greenwood businesses, professional services, schools, churches, and organizations were more than sufficient to meet the needs of its residents. Businesses, in fact, may have succeeded better than elsewhere because segregation precluded outside competition. Deep Greenwood was widely touted in the national black press as the “Negro Wall Street” for its success in the 1910s (Figure 11). Greenwood residents also enjoyed active social lives; nearly a dozen fraternal organizations served the community, school and church events drew crowds of participants, and Deep Greenwood offered movies and live theater, along with music and other entertainments. On the eve of the “Roaring Twenties”, Greenwood took pride in its success as a self-sufficient, African American community to which all things seemed possible.

### Section 8:5: Racial Tensions in America in the 1910s and 1920s

Greenwood’s outward success and stability belied the underlying racial tensions that afflicted all of America in the years surrounding World War I. Certainly, Oklahoma had a one-sided record regarding race-related issues. Indeed, while many black immigrants anticipated greater tolerance in the “new” state of Oklahoma, the white majority enacted laws that further separated the races and disfranchised blacks. One of the first laws passed in the state prohibited miscegenation, a law that made many long existing marriages between Native Americans and African Americans illegal. The state constitution supported segregated schools and public transportation, and city ordinances prohibited neighborhood integration. In keeping with state guidelines, Tulsa’s black residents were subject to the same prejudices and practices prevalent throughout the South and even in parts of the North.

#### Legacy of Reconstruction in the South

In order to study the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, it is necessary to have some understanding of the events that occurred since Emancipation and the conditions that made it possible. Reconstruction, in theory, was an attempt to rehabilitate former Confederate states and ease their way back into the Union. As part of this process, the U.S. government imposed martial law throughout the South and disenfranchised its leading citizens until their loyalty could be assured. At the same time, it assisted freed slaves in finding work and housing, establishing schools, providing protection, and enforcing their rights as citizens. In practice, however, the subjugation of former Confederates merely muffled the anger and resentment they harbored toward the North and to their former slaves. As a result, when Reconstruction was lifted from the last holdout state in 1877, white supremacists rose up to take back control of local and state governments.

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72 National Park Service, 17.
throughout the South. As part of their mission, they stripped blacks of their newly won rights and ensured that they would remain second-class citizens through legislation and intimidation.

By the 1880s, Congress had grown weary of the bitter war and its aftermath and preferred to mollify former enemies in an effort to mend fences and promote business. In 1883, Congress diminished the power of the 1875 Civil Rights Act and turned a blind eye to the systematic subordination of blacks through state laws and constitutions, collectively known as “Jim Crow” laws. Originally aimed at segregating blacks and whites in public places, such laws came to govern all aspects of race in the South. The effect was to subject African Americans to subordinate roles in political, social, and economic matters by force of law. Jim Crow laws persisted in the South, and to a lesser, but significant, extent, in the North, from the late-19th century well into the mid-20 century.

**Plessy v. Ferguson**  
In this atmosphere of political advocacy on the part of Southern whites and a hands-off approach by the U.S. Congress, a case came to the U.S. Supreme Court that would codify blacks as second-class citizens at the national level. The 1896 court upheld a Louisiana statute that mandated “equal but separate” railroad accommodations in its pivotal *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537) decision. The ruling provided the legal basis for racial segregation as long as blacks had equal access to public facilities and services. White Americans interpreted the ruling as an affirmation of their own superiority and a rationale to strip African Americans of their civil rights as American citizens. While protecting and enhancing white rights, these laws helped widened the gap between whites and blacks, further breeding an atmosphere of racial hatred and fear, which in turn led to violence and death. Unwittingly, *Plessy v. Ferguson* ushered in an era of unprecedented racial violence as white Americans attempted to reverse advances made by blacks during Reconstruction and thereby reinstate their own hegemony across the land.

**The Great Migration**  
Many thousands of blacks did not wait for *Plessy v. Ferguson* to leave the South, the land of their enslavement and continued hardship. As early as Reconstruction, black Americans began abandoning the small towns and rural landscapes of the South for greater freedom and opportunities in the cities of the North and the open lands of the frontier West. The pace of migration quickened as black rights won during Reconstruction eroded and living conditions in the South worsened during the latter part of the 19th century. Although most African Americans went north to start new lives with fewer restraints and better educational and economic opportunities, others were drawn to the promise of free land and adventure in the West. An

73 National Park Service.  
estimated 500,000 blacks abandoned the South for overcrowded industrial centers in the North in the decade between 1910 and 1920. This mass exodus of blacks from the South has been called the “Great Migration”, and its impact reverberated throughout the country.\footnote{National Park Service, 9.}

The sudden arrival of blacks in the North forced whites to consider African Americans in a new way while examining their own racial prejudices. As a whole, they did not, typically, rise to the occasion. Alarmed at large numbers of blacks, Northern whites enacted new laws to confine blacks to segregated neighborhoods and prevent their integration into the larger society.\footnote{Ibid., 15.}

Increased black settlement in the industrialized North led to interracial tensions as blacks, who worked for lower wages out of necessity, took some jobs from whites and moved into neighborhoods. White newspapers added to fears by sensationalizing black crime and reporting rumors of black men taking liberties with white women.

**Riot, War, and Red Summer**

Despite mounting tensions between races in the North, the first race massacre to erupt in the country since Reconstruction occurred in the South. Just after the Plessy v. Ferguson decision, racial tensions broke to riot levels in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898. In this case, armed whites resolved to expel black activist leaders from holding office in local government. African Americans formed nearly half of the city’s population and a number of them were successful businessmen and professionals who represented the community in municipal operations. At the same time, black laborers and skilled craftsmen in the city threatened the lower tier of the white labor market with economic competition. Through fraud and coercion, white Democrats threw the city election their way and, on November 9, white mobs bent on running the black newspaper editor out of town flooded the black community, killing at least 30 residents and spurring others to flee for their lives.\footnote{Ibid.} The North Carolina incident was followed by a rash of racially motivated clashes in both Northern and Southern cities including New Orleans (1900), Akron, Ohio (1900), Boston (1903), and Springfield, Ohio (1904), and Atlanta, in the years surrounding the turn of the 20th century.

Southern whites, in particular, organized themselves to intimidate blacks, especially those found to be overstepping their position as second-class citizens. Bands of armed vigilantes formed to “patrol” rural areas, in particular. Some, like the Ku Klux Klan and the White Man’s Party were organized into quasi-military units with branches throughout the South. Others were ad hoc groups fueled by prejudice and fear and propelled to rage by random race-related incidents. These groups promoted race hatred and led to ritualized violence that frequently resulted in mob
torture and murder, often by lynching. At least 3,700 men and women – most of them Southern blacks – were reported lynched between 1889 and 1930. Many such occurrences were never recorded.

Racial violence was not limited to the South or to rural areas, by any means. In northern cities like New York and Chicago, that were receiving vast numbers of African American immigrants in the Great Migration, and in large Southern urban centers like Atlanta and Houston, fears about the growing African American presence provoked whites to assert their dominance and further tighten segregation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bands of white marauders commonly beset black communities during economic recessions and depressions and at times of social unrest. Spurred by anxiety about their own place in society, these mobs were typically comprised of men from the lower socio-economic strata who feared black competition in both the workplace and in social standing. Gangs invaded African American communities, beating and killing residents at will, and stealing or burning their property. Blacks became increasingly distrustful of whites and fearful for their safety as these incidents continued and civil authorities turned a blind eye to their plight.78

The riot that broke out in New York City in 1900 was noteworthy for its viciousness and its goals. White mobs tried to expel popular black entertainers from the city, ostensibly to remove the competition. On August 15 that year, an angry mob chased blacks through the New York streets, surging from one theater to another, beating them when caught. Some members of the city police force actually participated in the beatings while others looked away. Similar scenarios in which white mobs invaded black neighborhoods, beat their inhabitants, burned their businesses, and looted their homes occurred in Springfield, Ohio; Statesboro, Georgia; Lebanon, Kentucky; Greensburg, Indiana; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during this time.79

In response to this seemingly endless chaos, a growing black resistance began to form. In June 1905, W.E.B. Du Bois led a band of young African Americans to fight for full citizenship and demand legislation to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, investigate lynchings, abolish racial discrimination, recognize the basic principle of human rights, and respect the working man. The group, which became incorporated as the Niagara Movement for its formation at Niagara Falls, Canada, was immediately attacked for its radicalism.80 Despite its lofty goals, the Niagara Movement was unable to put an end to sporadic violence against blacks and their communities in the early 20th century.

78 National Park Service.
79 Ibid.
80 National Park Service.
As whites struggled to maintain their dominance, world events conspired to give African Americans a chance to prove themselves equal in defending liberty and democracy abroad. When the United States officially entered World War I in 1917, many black Americans enlisted for service in the military and saw action in Europe. Still others worked in defense industries that supported the war effort. Their experiences led to a heightened awareness of their own contributions to the national fabric and a sense of entitlement as American citizens.

Upon returning home from the war, both white and black soldiers found a changed world; one in which there was wide-scale unemployment, social unrest, dislocation of loved ones, masses of new immigrants – many from Eastern and Mediterranean countries with different cultural traditions – and new political ideologies perceived to be antithetical to American values of capitalism and democracy. Though these changes were most apparent in the cities, thousands of servicemen were drawn to urban areas which appeared to offer greater opportunities than back home.\(^{81}\) There, they joined the multitudes of black and white, immigrant and native born, all struggling to make a living in overcrowded and polluted factory towns.

White working-class men, in particular, were unnerved to find African Americans beginning to assert their rights and play a larger role in their economic, social, and political futures. Rather than welcoming blacks as allies in the recent war, whites feared their growing numbers, their potential competition for jobs, and the possibility of “race-mixing”. They blamed the African Americans and new immigrants for housing and job shortages, and for lower wages. They came to endorse philosophies of isolationism, nationalism, and racism, possibly as a way to protect themselves and their families from the type of ethnic, cultural, and political conflict they had witnessed overseas. If they held new immigrants suspect for their radical ideologies, such as socialism, they found the “New Negro” to be a homegrown threat to the established order of things.

At the same time, black veterans expected to be treated with greater respect for their participation in the recent World War. While they were treated as equals by British and French soldiers, they returned to their homeland to find entrenched racial practices the same as before they left.\(^{82}\) As blacks gained newly won confidence by their actions during the war, and whites became more suspicious of foreigners and blacks in the early postwar period, some of the deadliest race riots broke out with major incidents in East St. Louis, Illinois, and Houston, Texas. These riots were a precursor to widespread racial violence that erupted during “Red Summer” so named for the

\(^{81}\) Ibid, 10.  
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
血shed that occurred in the summer of 1919 when about 25 riots broke out across the United States, the deadliest of which occurred in Chicago and Washington, D.C. 83

While race and politics figured largely in the upheaval experienced elsewhere in the country, lawlessness and violence remained vestiges of Oklahoma’s Wild West heritage. While still a territory, Oklahoma attracted more than its share of outlaws who rustled cattle, robbed banks and trains, sold bootleg whiskey, and terrorized the countryside (Burton, Art. Black, Red, and Deadly). Vigilante law rose as the safest, surest deterrent to crime in that vast and sparsely populated territory. The practice continued after statehood but more often, blacks bore the brunt of the whip or the noose.

Between 1907, when Oklahoma achieved statehood, and 1921, when the Tulsa Race Massacre broke out, 33 men were lynched in the state, 27 of whom were black. Violence was not limited to known criminals or even accused criminals. Whites generalized their hatred to include all members of the black race. In the span of two decades, whites burned black districts in the Oklahoma towns of Okmulgee, Lexington, Sapulpa, Norman, Shawnee, Lawton, Claremore, Perry, Waurika, and Marshall. Law officials were either ineffectual or complicit as prisoners were yanked from local jails, abused, tarred and feathered, or hung with little resistance or retribution by law enforcement. The pervasive atmosphere of fear and hatred convinced blacks that they could not count on the law to protect themselves, their families, or their possessions, and would have to defend themselves if it came to that.84

In the years surrounding World War I, hate groups sprang up in towns throughout the country, including Oklahoma. One of the first, the Knights of Liberty formed in Tulsa at the outset of the war. They instigated a reign of terror against all “others,” meaning anyone different from themselves, including derelicts, Mennonites and other pacifists, and, in the wake of the Bolshevik takeover of Russia, anything that smacked of Socialism or Communism. In particular, the International Workers of the World (IWW) became a target for its Socialist Party leanings and its message of equality among the races. They felt that agitators like union organizers like the IWW and African American organizations like the NAACP worked in concert to fan the flames of discontent and restlessness among their own homegrown blacks. The Knights of Liberty shanghaied a band of IWW organizers enroute to jail, whipped them, tarred and feathered them, and kicked out of town at gunpoint. The hapless men received no assistance from their armed guards.85

83 At the same time, in 1919 and 1920, the U.S. Government sanctioned the forcible deportation of more than 3,000 alleged Communists to Russia. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer led the “Palmer Raids” with help from a young J. Edgar Hoover.
84 National Park Service, 17.
85 Ibid, 16.
Postwar Atmosphere in Tulsa

Tulsa, like many other cities in the postwar period, bristled with racial and economic tensions as black and white returning veterans competed for jobs. Competition was keen as both the oil and agriculture industries were then in decline. At same time, the tenant system of farming and peonage forced poor African Americans and whites alike into virtual servitude to pay off their debts. They lived in a state of perpetual poverty. Many of both races left the farms and crowded into the cities where they sought work at any wage. Under these conditions, issues of race and competition for employment became enmeshed.

Even while racial violence had increased in the Tulsa area, the city’s African American residents enjoyed better lives than many of their brethren elsewhere. Greenwood was a thriving town-within-a-town where blacks had their own housing district, businesses, clubs, theaters, churches, and schools. Its literacy rate soared above that of other black communities. Many of its young men believed that the patriotism they had shown in the recent war would be rewarded with better opportunities to share in the American Dream, as advertised in wartime enlistment campaigns (NPS 17). Greenwood’s young people were taught that hard work would pay off and that they could achieve great things in life, despite the barrier of race. Many had a heightened sense of race consciousness and took pride in their heritage. They were prepared to defend themselves and their families rather than be beaten down for their race (NPS 18).

Race and Corruption on the Eve of the Massacre

In the background, Ku Klux Klan raised its ugly head. Tulsa had had some Klan presence as early as 1870 when the organization became popular across the south and in southern sympathizers who moved west. In the aftermath of World War I and the fear of all things different – foreigners, “Negroes”, unions and Socialists – the Klan made a resurgence in Oklahoma. Some of Tulsa’s founding leaders, city officials and the city’s law enforcement officers were themselves Klansmen or Klan sympathizers. More importantly, perhaps, the city’s white citizens tolerated and even encouraged the Klan and its ilk in their activities against their perceived enemies. The general atmosphere after the war intensified as African Americans brandished a new sense of their political power and purpose and whites felt threatened by their advances.

Tulsa, like the territory in which it was located, had been known as a “wide-open” town before statehood with bootlegging, gambling, illegal drugs, and prostitution—crimes that by their very nature harbored corruption – operating with impunity. That reputation followed Tulsa after statehood and, in fact, grew as the former frontier town struggled to become a city in the 1900s

86 Ibid, 16.
and 1910s. Political graft and corruption ran rampant with city leaders among the worst offenders. In 1915, the mayor, police commissioner, and police chief were forced out of office for their wanton abuse of the public trust, but the law generally cast a blind eye to all but the most flagrant abuses. Ordinary citizens were not immune to the plague of lawlessness; by 1921, 6 out of every 100 Tulsans was under indictment for one or more crimes, a condition that strangled the city’s courts. At the same time, law enforcement was noticeably absent. A police strike in 1919, and the resignation of several officers in 1920, added to the atmosphere of chaos and confusion that pervaded in the city.87

In this climate, race issues came to the fore. White Tulsans seemed particularly contemptuous of blacks “rising above their station” and took umbrage when Jim Crow laws were challenged. They looked upon the success of Greenwood, in particular, as an affront to the “Natural Order” of things and at the same time, they harbored jealousies of their economic and social accomplishments in a white-dominated world. When the price of crude oil dropped precipitously, leading to unemployment in the surrounding oil fields, those attitudes gained momentum. At the same time, white Tulsans knew little about the black community in their midst. Their perceptions were based largely on fear, ingrained hatreds, and what they had seen portrayed in movies, jokes, and in the newspapers that perpetuated stereotypes and white superiority. Given the contempt for law, economic uncertainty, and prejudice that abounded in Tulsa at the time, it is not surprising that racial violence broke out in 1921. Its ferocity and level of destruction, however, was far beyond what anyone could have predicted.

Section 8.6: The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

Introduction
By 1921, most of Tulsa’s African American residents lived in Greenwood, a densely developed, thriving community of some 11,000 people on the city’s north side. Greenwood was sequestered from white Tulsa by several sets of railroad tracks, a vast industrial zone, and the tenuous force of “separate but equal” laws. Due to the fact that Greenwood was so self-sufficient, with its own schools, churches, neighborhoods, and businesses, African Americans did not have to interact with whites on a regular basis unless they worked as domestics or in the service sector. Strict adherence to racial segregation may have been a factor in maintaining the uneasy peace that existed between Tulsa’s white and black citizens prior to 1921.

The surface calm exploded when a white mob gathered at the Tulsa County Courthouse the night of May 31, 1921, to take custody of a black teenager who allegedly attacked a young white woman in an elevator. Whites, already enraged by the allegations, were further incensed by the

87 Ibid., 18.
arrival of a small cadre of armed black men who swore to protect the accused from being lynched. Tensions mounted as the night wore on and the white mob turned from the courthouse scene and marched north, toward the exclusively black Greenwood neighborhood. After several skirmishes and exchanges of gunfire along the way, the mob forcibly evicted residents, looted their belongings, and set fire to their homes, literally consuming the district. Over an 18-hour period from May 31 to June 1, some 35-40 residential, commercial, and civic blocks were burned to the ground, their charred remains left to smolder in the dawn. When it was all over, an estimated 9,000 residents were left homeless.

No one has ever been able to accurately count the number of blacks and whites who lost their lives in the Tulsa massacre, though the figure likely ranges in the hundreds. In some ways, the attack on Greenwood was typical of other racial violence of the period (1898-1921); white vigilantes spurred by fear and race hatred set upon blacks for an alleged or perceived crime or affront against them. But for sheer size, destruction of property, loss of lives, and national outrage, the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 surpasses them all.

**The Incident**

In the late 1910s, America suffered from social inequities, political strife, economic disparity, and racial inequality that engendered uncertainty, fear, and anger among its citizens. Tensions erupted in the form of strikes, protests, riots, mayhem, and, in extreme cases, lynching. In this atmosphere, a small, otherwise inconsequential incident in Tulsa, Oklahoma, incited a melee of epic proportions that would be recorded as one of the worst, if not the worst, incidences of racial violence in U.S. history in terms of lives lost and property destroyed.

Many different versions exist of the incident that ignited the maelstrom; some claimed that Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old African American man, attacked a white teenager, Sarah Page, in an office elevator, while others maintain that Rowland accidentally stumbled into Ms. Page when the elevator came to an abrupt halt. There is no question that the two young people were together in the elevator and that when it came to a halt, Page called out in alarm and Rowland fled from the car. Rowland was subsequently taken into custody. The seemingly innocuous incident occurred on Monday, May 30, 1921. By the next afternoon, May 31, the *Tulsa Tribune* featured a front-page story proclaiming Rowland’s attempt to rape Ms. Page. Furthermore, the inside editorial is said to have suggested that whites should gather at the jail that night and lynch the incarcerated man.

**A Crowd Gathers**

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88 National Park Service.
89 National Park Service, 18.
The newspaper articles gave credence to the rumor and innuendo that spread throughout the city and by that evening, hundreds of whites had gathered at the courthouse where Rowland was jailed. As the crowd grew, three men entered the courthouse and demanded that Rowland be handed to them. Authorities refused to relinquish their prisoner. News of Rowland’s imminent lynching reached Greenwood Avenue about the same time. Residents in the district knew the danger was real because another black man had been lynched the previous fall. About 25 men armed themselves and raced to the courthouse in automobiles to protect Rowland from the lawless crowd. From past experience, they did not expect Tulsa law enforcement to be up to the job. Arriving at the courthouse, the armed band offered their assistance to the police, who turned them down. The authorities assured the men that Rowland had nothing to fear from the milling white crowd. Convinced, the men returned to Greenwood.90

Ironically, the appearance of the black guardians incensed the white crowd, which by that time had grown to more than a thousand. Some went home to find their own guns and a group of whites tried to loot the city’s armory to obtain more weapons. They were turned back by a small but determined detachment of the Oklahoma National Guard who threatened to fire on the angry mob. The whites backed off the armory, but many returned to the courthouse where their numbers soared to about 2,000 by 9:30 p.m. Despite growing disruption at the courthouse, the chief of police did nothing to abate fears that Rowland would be protected by the full force of the city police. About 10:00 p.m. he left the roiling mob and returned to his office at police headquarters, a couple of blocks to the north.91

Vigilance
During this wait-and-see period, African Americans made several reconnaissance missions to keep abreast of the crowd’s activities and demeanor. As the night wore on, people in Greenwood increasingly feared that courthouse mob would either lynch young Rowland or turn on the black neighborhood itself. Everyone was on the alert. A rumor spread that the white crowd had stormed the courthouse and a contingent of African American men once again crowded into automobiles bound for the jail in order to protect Rowland. The united band parked a block from their destination and marched together on the courthouse. Once again, they offered their protective services to the police and once again, they were turned down.

Shots Fired
When the scouting party turned to go home once more, a white man tried to disarm one of their number; the two men struggled for possession of the gun and a shot fired out.92 That shot set off a powder keg as whites and blacks exchanged volleys in the street. Within minutes more than 20

90 National Park Service, 19.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
people, both black and white, lay dead or dying. Seeing that they were greatly outnumbered – some have estimated the ratio by as many as twenty white men to every one black man – the African Americans hastily withdrew north toward the Greenwood section. The heavily armed white mob followed quickly on their heels and the groups exchanged gunfire in a skirmish before the blacks reached the relative safety of Greenwood, their home. Before they could reach the railroad tracks that marked the southern edge of the Greenwood district, shots rang out and a skirmish ensued.

Back at the courthouse, a large crowd of whites swarmed the streets, outraged and doubtless fearful at the show of force displayed by the defiant blacks. The police “deputized” about 500 eager white men and boys, many of whom had participated in the now forgotten “lynch mob”, to bring the city to order and quell what the uprising that erupted at the courthouse. Emboldened by their new status, some of the whites, including uniformed Tulsa police, looted pawnshops and hardware stores to add to their arsenal of guns and ammunition. Throughout the night of May 31 and the early hours of June 1, intermittent fighting broke out in the northern part of the city, particularly along the Frisco tracks that separated central Tulsa from the exclusively black Greenwood district. Blacks formed a skirmish line along the tracks to protect the southern boundary of their neighborhood, while whites poised to invade the neighborhood. Numerous volleys of gunfire broke out between the factions along the railroad tracks throughout the night.

At the same time, carloads of whites broke through the lines and began shooting into black homes at random, terrorizing and sometimes murdering innocent inhabitants. By 1:00 a.m., whites began setting fires in the black neighborhoods, starting with the commercial buildings and homes along Archer Street at the southernmost edge of Greenwood Avenue (Figure 12). When the Tulsa Fire Department responded, white rioters drove the firemen off at gunpoint and the flames went unchecked. Within a few hours, more than two dozen homes and businesses had been burned to destruction (Figures 12-13). Residents of Greenwood were torn between staying and defending their homes and families or fleeing the burning neighborhood. The extent of the fires finally tipped the balance for hundreds of people who fled the city spurred by a hailstorm of bullets. Most ran north along Greenwood Avenue.

The Tulsa Police Department was entirely insufficient to protect the populace and restore order, although about fifty Oklahoma National Guardsmen were called to the armory about 11 p.m. on May 31. Sometime after midnight, the local commander received permission to assist the police and more guardsmen were deployed to restore order to the downtown area. They were assigned specifically to protect civic institutions such as the police headquarters and the city water works. Guardsmen also led small bands of armed whites on patrols through the white-owned business district. Once the downtown was secured, about thirty guardsmen headed for Standpipe Hill, on
in Greenwood, where they set up a skirmish line facing the neighborhood. Armed with a city-owned machine gun mounted on the back of a truck, the guardsmen exchanged some gunfire with defenders from the neighborhood before rounding up local citizens and handing them over to the police as prisoners. About 3:00 a.m., the guardsmen were called to Sunset Hill, further north of Standpipe Hill and west of Greenwood, upon news that a white woman had been killed by black invaders into the neighborhood. Armed with their machine gun, the guardsmen deployed to Sunset Hill where they remained until dawn.93

**Invasion of Greenwood**

Meanwhile, Tulsa’s white populace, panicked by news of a perceived “negro uprising,” mounted their own offensive against the black population to fend off an invasion of their homes and businesses. Thousands – perhaps as many as 10,000 – armed whites identified three points along the northern edge of the city from which to launch an attack against the Greenwood neighborhood at dawn: Standpipe Hill and Sunset Hill, both on the western edge of the Greenwood community, and the Katy Depot on the Frisco Railroad tracks at the southern tip of the neighborhood. One band of whites located yet another machine gun and dragged it to the top floor of the Middle States Milling Company grain elevator along the railroad track and set its sights to fire north onto Greenwood Avenue.94

Just after 5:00 a.m., eyewitnesses reported hearing an unusual whistle or siren that seemed to signal the invasion of Greenwood. At the sound, the machine gun opened fire and scores of white rioters streamed northward along the Frisco tracks. At the Katy Depot, automobiles crammed with dozens of other “enforcers” met the mob and all headed eastward into Greenwood. The invading forces included uniformed police and possibly members of a white para-military force wearing World War I uniforms and known as the “Home Guard”. Whether planned in advance or as an ad hoc event, the systematic invasion of Greenwood commenced. Moving south to north, whites invaded Greenwood house by house, evicting residents at gunpoint, shooting resisters, looting the buildings, and setting them on fire with oil-soaked rags made into torches. One after another, the homes and businesses of Greenwood were abandoned and set ablaze, their inhabitants forced en masse to detention at Convention Hall.95 Those who escaped fled to the north along Greenwood Avenue, before the marauding army.

Although the invasion pattern predominantly pushed south to north, skirmishes also took place on the western edge of Greenwood where National Guard troops were stationed on Standpipe and Sunset hills. About forty soldiers on Standpipe Hill exchanged fire with African American

93 National Park Service, 21.
94 National Park Service, 21.
riflemen. On Sunset Hill, white guardsmen opened fire on black neighborhoods to the east using both their standard issue 30-caliber 1906 Springfield rifles and the machine gun given to them by the Tulsa Police Department.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 21.}

There are many accounts of blacks defending their community, but they were greatly outnumbered by the white police, guardsmen, vigilantes, and “deputies”. In addition, they lacked the weaponry and technology of the police and guardsmen. In one instance, black riflemen took positions in the belfry of the newly completed Mount Zion Baptist Church, which overlooked the neighborhood below Standpipe Hill where some of the fiercest fighting occurred.\footnote{A rumor had spread that Mount Zion Church doubled as an ammunition storehouse for the black community, making it a strategic target for the invading forces (National Park Service, photograph, 22).} From the tower, they were able to slow the advance of white surge, but the invaders riddled the tower with machine gun fire – possibly taken from the mill – forcing the defenders to flee. About the same time, as many as six airplanes carrying white men descended on the southern end of the Greenwood district where they fired on residents from the air and reportedly dropped firebombs and/or explosives that added to the conflagration below.\footnote{National Park Service, 22.} The recently completed Mount Zion Baptist Church was set on fire and burned to the ground (Figure 14).

Far from being fair in handling the mobs, the local police and national guardsmen clearly favored the white rioters over the black residents of Greenwood. They looked the other way and, in some cases, even aided the white looters and arsonists while arresting black homeowners for no lawful reason. In fact, early on June 1, guardsmen at Standpipe Hill left their post, marched into the community, and randomly took black civilians into custody (Figure 15). After being fired upon near Greenwood Avenue, the troops handed their prisoners over to local police on Sunset Hill. Likely earlier detainees, they were marched to Convention Hall for the duration of the massacre. With no clear authority in control, white civilians took the opportunity to take “prisoners” of law-abiding citizens. The most notorious of these instances was that in which Dr. A.C. Jackson, a renowned surgeon and pillar of the Greenwood community, was ordered out of his home by a gang of young white men. Even though he complied with their demand, one of the vigilantes shot him in his own yard.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

As the melee increased into the morning of June 1, National Guard troops left their posts on Sunset Hill and joined the roust of Greenwood. Just after 8:00 a.m., one detachment headed north and the other turned to the northeast, both units scouring the neighborhood for possible combatants. At first, there were few armed incidents, but about halfway through the neighborhood, they encountered a number of blacks defending their homes and a fire fight

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, 21.}  \hfill \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{93} A rumor had spread that Mount Zion Church doubled as an ammunition storehouse for the black community, making it a strategic target for the invading forces (National Park Service, photograph, 22).}  \hfill \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{98} National Park Service, 22.}  \hfill \footnotesize{\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}}
ensued. At another point, guardsmen and white rioters bore down on blacks who had taken refuge in a concrete store building. Meanwhile, carloads of white vigilantes searched the wealthier residences of South Tulsa for African American maids and butlers who were summarily apprehended and deposited in internment centers.  

**National Guard Arrives**

It was not until 9:15 a.m. on June 1, after the worst of the damage was over, that Adj. Gen. Charles F. Barrett and 109 white soldiers of the Oklahoma City-based National Guard unit (state troops) arrived at the bullet-ridden Frisco passenger station in Tulsa to assess the damage and regain order. By that time, much of Greenwood, home to some 11,000 African Americans, had been burned to the ground and scores of people – both black and white – had been injured or killed. The segregated Frissell Memorial Hospital had been burned and the city’s remaining four hospitals were overflowing with wounded. Most of Greenwood’s residents had either fled the city or remained incarcerated at one of the makeshift detention centers. Some blacks maintained armed resistance in the northernmost part of what remained of Greenwood.  

Instead of quelling the ongoing fight at the city’s edge, Barrett determined to meet with local authorities to plan strategies to regain order in the city. He first took a detachment to the county courthouse he attempted to confer with the sheriff, an effort that failed. He then went to City Hall and, upon conferring with officials there, he asked Governor James B.A. Robertson to declare martial law and grant him the authority to proceed as such. At the same time, other state troops relieved white vigilantes of their “prisoners”. At that time, approximately two-thirds of the black neighborhood had been destroyed but while Barrett’s troops were occupied with bureaucracy, four Tulsa police officers took it upon themselves to set the homes of the Greenwood’s most prominent citizens on fire and by the time state troops arrived on the scene, the houses had been burned to the ground.  

At 11:30 a.m. the governor declared martial law in effect in Tulsa but by that time the massacre had nearly run its course; there was little left to burn in the Greenwood district. Nevertheless, bands of white rioters looted and burned all that remained. About 12:30 p.m., a handful of white rioters found a couple of buildings still standing at the northeast corner of the Greenwood neighborhood. Blacks tried to defend the position, but the attackers were soon joined by well-armed reinforcements with high-powered rifles. Ultimately, a two-story building and nearby store were set on fire.  

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100 *Ibid.*  
101 National Park Service, 23.  
After martial law was declared, state troops marched toward the massacre site, disarming whites for the first time since the trouble erupted. As the white rioters returned to their homes and families, thousands of black Tulsans were dispersed across the countryside and nearby communities, many not knowing the fates of their homes and loved ones or, knowing, fearing further violence. As residents trickled back into the neighborhood, they found themselves under arrest, to the delight of whites who gathered to jeer and mock their loss. Thousands of black Tulsans were concentrated into internment centers; once they filled Convention Hall, they were shunted to McNulty Baseball Park and the Tulsa Fairgrounds. Some white churches, like the First Presbyterian Church, opened their doors to the homeless refugees.104

National Guard units from throughout Oklahoma joined Barrett’s command as the day wore on. Their primary goals were to clear the streets, impose order, and establish and enforce a curfew. All businesses were ordered to close by 6 p.m. and only those on official business, such as military and civil authorities, and medical and relief personnel, were allowed out after 7:00 p.m.105 With these orders in place and enforced by a sufficient strength, an uneasy calm descended on the city.

**Casualties**

When dawn broke on June 2, 1921, Tulsa residents awoke to find more than 35 blocks north of Archer and the railroad tracks – virtually the city’s entire black neighborhood – burned to the ground. Houses, businesses, and religious buildings were reduced to smoking, charred piles of rubble in what was once a densely populated, thriving and lively community of African American citizens. The district resembled a war zone, not unlike the towns and villages of Europe that had been so recently annihilated during the recent world war. Virtually every structure in the Greenwood commercial district, collectively known as the Black Wall Street for its successful businesses, was destroyed (Figure 16).

Exact figures of injuries, deaths, property destruction and other measurements of disaster assessment are difficult to know for certain. The many photographs taken during and after the massacre depict the wholesale devastation of the community in terms of buildings lost and landscapes destroyed. The American Red Cross claimed that 9,000 people, virtually of them black citizens, were left homeless by the fires that swept through Greenwood.106 The relief organization counted 1,256 houses burned and 215 houses looted but not burned.107 The Tulsa Real Estate Exchange estimated nearly $1.5 million in property damages, with one-third of that in the black business district at the juncture of E. Archer Street and N. Greenwood Avenue. The

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106 Ibid.
107 Three hundred and fourteen houses were noted as looted and robbed but not burned. National Park Service, 26.
Exchange speculated personal property loss at $750,000. Those who lost their homes were shocked to find that their insurance companies denied their claims for property damage due to “riot” exemptions in their policy coverage. Nevertheless, in the year following the massacre, claimants filed nearly $1.8 million in damages against the city, most of which were denied by the city commission.

More importantly, and harder to measure, are the number of injuries, deaths, displacement and livelihoods lost in the massacre and its aftermath. Contemporaneous reports varied greatly as to the number of dead. In its 1921 report, the Department of Health’s Bureau of Vital Statistics stated that only 26 blacks and 10 whites died as a result of the massacre. The bureau’s conservative findings fell far short of the NAACP’s claim that some 50 whites, and between 150 and 200 blacks, lost their lives in the massacre. Maurice Willows, who had first-hand knowledge of the massacre’s aftermath as director of the Red Cross relief operations in Tulsa, reported that the total number of black and white dead may have been as high as 300.

Reasons for these disparities stem largely from the fact that many bodies were buried hastily with little effort to identify the dead. Some bodies were beaten or burned beyond recognition. Some may have been counted twice or not at all. The summer heat likely contributed to the urgency for quick burial, with concerns about disease trumping positive identification. Still others may have been buried in secret to avoid prosecution for acts committed during the massacre. Between June 1 and June 4, 1921, the Salvation Army hired black gravediggers who buried 120 black bodies without benefit of caskets or service; they were simply placed in holes and covered with dirt. Mortuary and other records later revealed that African American victims were also buried in unmarked graves at Oaklawn Cemetery. Furthermore, oral sources reveal that still other unmarked graves lay in various places throughout the county. These sources clearly count the number of undocumented black dead at well over 120.

The 2001 Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 agreed that the number of confirmed black deaths totaled 26, while the number of whites rose to 13 dead. The operative word is “confirmed.” Historians John Hope Franklin and Scott Ellsworth, in their overview

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109 Typical insurance policies today exclude damages due to flood, earthquake, riot, war, and nuclear disaster.
111 National Park Service, 27.
112 In October of 2020, as part of a city-backed effort to investigate stories of mass graves connected to the massacre, a team of experts including archaeologists, anthropologists and historians searching for victims of Oklahoma’s 1921 Tulsa Race massacre uncovered what they believe is a mass grave. The mass grave is located near the headstones of the only two known massacre victims buried in the segregated “Black” section, aka Potters Field, at Oaklawn Cemetery. The area where the remains were discovered was known as the “Original 18” site.
113 National Park Service, 27.
history for the commission report, held that at least 75 to 100 lives were lost in the massacre; their figure included both black and white victims.\textsuperscript{114} The true figure will probably never be known. African Americans, in particular, were homeless and scattered to the winds, many never to return. It would have been near-impossible to account for everyone who had lived in Greenwood on the eve of the massacre. Those who were well-known and invested in the community, like Dr. Jackson, were quickly identified, but Tulsa also had a large transient population that included both white and black workers in the oil industry and related fields. Some of these workers might not have been reported missing if no one had known they were there in the first place. Casualties among transients were likely consigned to unmarked and undocumented graves.

Injuries, like deaths, also went undocumented or untreated. The American Red Cross is, perhaps, the best source of information on the number of cases and types of treatment received in the massacre’s aftermath though many victims fled from the city and were likely treated elsewhere, if at all. The organization recorded 48 whites treated for massacre-related injuries at local hospitals, but its officials conceded that the actual number of white patients was higher. Some may not have given their names for fear of incriminating themselves.\textsuperscript{115} The Red Cross recorded 183 blacks who received surgical care within a day of the massacre, with more than seventy percent of those patients requiring hospitalization. Many may have gone without critical treatment as the black Frissell Memorial Hospital was burned in the massacre and other local hospitals were overwhelmed with injuries. In all, the Red Cross recorded that it administered first aid to 531 people. In the week following the massacre, 20 doctors – 11 of whom were black – performed 163 operations on massacre victims, 82 of which were considered “major” surgery.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Social and Emotional Impact}

Numbers fail to evoke the horror of the Greenwood devastation as vividly as the first-hand accounts of its survivors. One of the first to record both the physical and emotional devastation in the community was Mary Elizabeth Jones Parrish, a young YMCA typing instructor in the district. Trapped on the second floor of a commercial building in Deep Greenwood, she experienced first-hand the terror of seeing white marauders with lit torches marching toward her. As the building was set ablaze, Parrish managed to escape from “the human fiends” with her little girl, and the two fled northward along Greenwood Avenue, dodging bullets all the way, until they were well out of town. As she ran past the burning neighborhood, she recalled, “Our

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{115} National Park Service, 27.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
hearts felt burdened and heavy, as one feels after returning from the last rites over a loved one…"  

Some black Tulsans who fled the city never returned. Among them were men who feared prosecution for their roles in defending Greenwood. Others simply wanted to forget the night of horror that ran them out of their homes and into the streets. Those who stayed set about rebuilding their physical community, but the psychological and spiritual ruins left by the massacre continued to resonate among Greenwood residents for decades. Virtually everyone who survived that night remembered hate-filled images of cruelty and destruction that remained with them the rest of their lives. Parrish likened the carnage to that of war-torn Europe after the recent Great War:

I can never erase the sights of my first visit to the hospital. There were men wounded in every conceivable way, like soldiers after a big battle. Some with amputated limbs, burned faces, others minus an eye or with heads bandaged. There were women who were nervous wrecks, and some confinement cases. Was I in a hospital in France? No, in Tulsa.

Parrish, in particular, found strength in a renewed sense of racial identity and the hope that African Americans would strive for solidarity as a race. She had concluded that her people had been wrong in thinking they could hope to achieve acceptance and equality in the eyes of whites. Convinced that blacks could only get ahead as a race if they helped one another, Parrish importuned them to strive for good educations and incomes to extend their hands to those less fortunate as “no race can rise higher than its lowest member.” She observed that in the eyes of the whites, it didn’t matter if they were well-educated or wealthy, they were all blacks and all, therefore, inferior. “Every Negro [during the massacre] was accorded the same treatment, regardless of his education or other advantages. A Negro was a Negro on that day and forced to march with his hands up for blocks. What does this teach? It should teach us to “Look Up, Lift Up and Lend a Helping Hand,” and remember that we cannot rise higher than our weakest brother.”

After the Fire Storm
In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the black community faced extraordinary and fundamental problems. Homes, churches, and businesses were gone, looted and burned beyond recognition or repair. Jewelry, money, and other valuables had been stolen from the houses before they were put to the torch, leaving Greenwood’s once-independent citizens homeless,


\[118\] Ibid.

\[119\] Ibid.
penniless and destitute. With only the clothes on their backs, the city’s black residents were forced to rely upon whites for food, first aid, and shelter. African American churches set up soup kitchens on the streets to feed their homeless brethren (Figure 18). Some observers reported seeing dozens of blacks wandering aimlessly around the charred remains of their former neighborhood, dazed, and wondering. Many had lost track of their loved ones and knew nothing of their whereabouts or safety. Some had fled the city as the Greenwood district burned and many of those, not knowing the outcome of the conflagration, were afraid to return. Rumors and innuendo spread among the survivors. Some who were reported dead were later found alive; while others who were heard to be alive were never found again.

While many wandered aimlessly through their former neighborhood, about half of Tulsa’s black survivors were rounded up and taken at a gun point to internment centers throughout the city (Figure 15). Public venues including the Convention Hall, fairgrounds, McNulty Baseball Park, and public buildings downtown became temporary home to those who were unceremoniously rounded up and forced off the streets and into concentration camps. There they waited, bereft of friends, family, home, and income. Years later, Tedra Williams asked her grandfather, who was among the many children incarcerated, “Who carried you to the ball park?” He answered, “Sometimes my mother, sometimes my sister, but God carried us all.”

Only those detainees who could find a white resident to sponsor them were allowed to leave the camps; in most cases, the whites were their employers who promised to vouch for them. Those who were self-employed or lacked such connections remained in the camps. The release process was tedious and on June 2, some 4,000 blacks remained in custody. On that day, detainees from the various camps were herded into the Tulsa Fairgrounds. Five days later, 450 blacks still remained under guard at the site. It took another eight days to process the detainees and clear the fairgrounds; by then, some African American citizens of Tulsa had been incarcerated for two weeks without due process.

To better control and account for Tulsa’s black citizens, the city imposed a number of constraints on their movement and behavior. Among the first regulatory actions taken was a city identification system that required blacks to carry or wear green cards proclaiming that they were under “Police Protection”. The City Commission and Chamber of Commerce issued the cards which listed personal information on the back for easy identification. Anyone found on the street without their green card was subject to arrest and forced to help massacre victims at the fairgrounds. After 30 days, the city relieved “legitimate” black residents of the restriction but required out-of-town blacks to continue carrying their green cards. In addition, the city

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120 Tedra Williams interview with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc., June 16, 2011.
121 National Park Service, 30.
prohibited blacks from buying or possessing firearms after the massacre. The city also issued an edict forbidding blacks from living in servants’ quarters in the white section of town unless they could prove they had been regularly employed on the premises before the massacre. Such strictures were clear violations of black Tulsans’ civil rights intended to control their movements and ability to defend themselves. Furthermore, on June 2, Adj. Gen. Barrett ordered all “able bodied negro men” in detention camps to build and improve sanitary conditions for refugees under the direction of the military and Red Cross. Although the men were paid 25 cents per hour, the detainees were nonetheless forced to labor against their will.¹²²

With these restrictions in place, the governor cancelled martial law in Tulsa at 3:00 p.m. on June 3, 1921. Tulsa units of the National Guard remained on active duty until the next day. To maintain a quasi-military presence in the city, American Legion members were sworn in as police officers. In addition, about 100 members of the Business Men’s Protection League, volunteered to assist the sheriff as “minute men.”¹²³ The installation of these all-white auxiliary forces was, no doubt, intended to restore faith in the city’s ability to protect white citizens and their interests, and to impress their power and determination on black citizens.

**News Accounts of the Massacre**
The Tulsa massacre made the news across the country and even graced *The Times of London*. Tulsa’s white citizens, particularly its businessmen and politicians, could not escape the condemnation heaped upon the city by the nation’s largest and most influential newspapers. On June 2, 1921, the *New York Times* headed its story with the banner, “85 WHITES AND NEGROES DIE IN TULSA RIOTS” and followed by declaring the massacre as “one of the most disastrous race wars ever visited upon an American city.” While nearly all of the papers tallied the number dead and wounded, and the amount of property lost, some went further, lambasting Tulsa as a bastion of hatred and uncivilized behavior unbefitting a modern American city. Nearly all sought to distance their own citizens from the frightful mess in Tulsa, going so far as to call the city unpatriotic and backward. The *Philadelphia Bulletin* declared the “bloody scenes at Tulsa, Oklahoma . . . [as] hardly conceivable as happening in American civilization of the present day.” The *Kansas City Journal* painted the massacre as the “Tulsa Horror” and *The Christian Monitor* denounced the city with the admonition that, “Tulsa has become a name of shame upon America”.¹²⁴

In rebuttal, Tulsa newspapers and spokespersons rushed to their city’s defense and, in doing so, quickly placed the blame on black residents whose community lay in charred ruins and whose hopes for the future seemed like distant and unreachable dreams. Just after the massacre, the

¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ National Park Service, 29.


*Tulsa Tribune* crudely proclaimed that, “Acres of ashes lie smoldering in what but yesterday was ‘Niggertown.’”\(^{125}\) In the days that followed, *Tribune* headlines continued to hurl insults and allegations at the hapless black community, further laying the blame for the massacre at their feet and inciting local whites to prepare for yet more racial violence. The *Tulsa Ministerial Alliance* likewise blamed African Americans for the massacre, likening their actions to “the dastardly deeds of the Germans during the Great War”.\(^{126}\) One Tulsa minister suggested that W.E.B. Du Bois may have provoked the massacre when he made a visit to the city several months previous. Editor of the NAACP’s official magazine, *The Crisis*, Du Bois was one of the most influential African American leaders of his day. He proclaimed that his magazine stood clearly for racial equality and the pursuit of democratic ideals which apparently made him a “dangerous” and “most vicious negro man in the country” whose visit to Tulsa “may have had a bearing” on the outbreak of violence, according to this clergyman.\(^{127}\)

Nationally distributed African American periodicals such as *The Crisis*, *The Crusader*, and others, responded to the massacre with outrage and analysis (Figure 17). Walter F. White, an NAACP official, was one of the first to establish the significance of the Tulsa massacre in American history. Visiting Tulsa one week after the massacre, White wrote in the June 10, 1921 edition of the *New York Call*, that “I am able to state that the Tulsa riot, in sheer brutality and willful destruction of life and property, stands without parallel in America.”\(^{128}\) At the same time, White saw similar prejudice result in racial violence throughout the country. Tulsa’s fault, to his mind, was its failure to recognize the magnitude of the situation and take measures to avert disaster.

The black press tended to view the massacre in cautionary terms. In *The Nation*, Walter White likened the massacre to the brutality and anarchy that accompanied the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia. He warned white America that it was wrong to think that “Negroes will always be the meek and submissive creatures “ they had been for most of the country’s history, and pointed out that Tulsa’s black citizens rose up as one to defend the life of Dick Rowland, “an ordinary bootblack”. He seemed to say that race was a greater unifying agent than social or economic status. White went so far as to suggest that America might need a nationwide cataclysm on the order of the Tulsa massacre to make the country realize its errors and rectify its treatment of blacks.\(^{129}\)

\(^{125}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{126}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{127}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{129}\) National Park Service, 33.
Many writers attributed the cause of the conflict on the economic disparity between blacks and whites in America, as well as on white jealousy when blacks did achieve a modicum of economic gain. W.E.B. Du Bois himself reflected that black Tulsa’s relative prosperity may have played a role in provoking jealous whites to violence. During his visit to the city, he observed that “the colored people of Tulsa have accumulated property, have established stores and business organizations and have also made money in oil,” factors that led to self-confidence and independent thinking among the people of the African American community. Du Bois opined that such well-being and independence threatened white men who felt themselves superior to blacks in every way and who sought to assert their entitlement, by violence, if necessary. *The Crusader*, an African American periodical with a Socialist agenda, expanded on economic issues further, reporting that such a massacre “to be expected under the vicious capitalist system which thrives by setting the workers of one race against the workers of another race….“

**Responsible Parties: Blaming the Victims**

Some Greenwood residents feared retribution from whites who blamed the massacre on the black community. Private opinions were bolstered by court decisions that charged blacks with responsibility for the massacre. A grand jury was impaneled to determine the cause and place blame for the massacre. In its June 25, 1921, findings, the jury chastised the local press for eliciting base passions with false and misleading reports, but found the city’s African Americans to be at fault for inciting the massacre:

> We find that the recent race riot was the direct result of an effort on the part of a certain group of colored men who appeared at the courthouse on the night of May 31, 1921, for the purpose of protecting one Dick Rowland then and now in the custody of the Sheriff of Tulsa County for an alleged assault upon a young white woman.

In its deliberations, the jury found no evidence of an attempt by whites to forcibly abduct Rowland from the sheriff’s custody to do him harm. Instead, they determined that the assembly of whites at the courthouse merely assembled at the courthouse out of curiosity owing to the rumors circulating throughout the city. Furthermore, the jury declared:

> There was no mob spirit among the whites, no talk of lynching and no arms. The assembly was quiet until the arrival of the armed negroes, which precipitated and was the direct cause of the entire affair.\(^{132}\)

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\(^{130}\) *Ibid*, 29.


\(^{132}\) National Park Service, 31.
In addition, the jury found numerous incidental causes of the massacre, most of which stemmed from rising black dissatisfaction with their station in life. In particular, the jury pointed to outside agitators who inspired local blacks to demand greater social equality between the races. The juror’s linked W.E.B. Du Bois’ recent trip to Tulsa as a factor in fomenting animosity among Greenwood residents toward whites in the city. They also concluded that some blacks had been conspiring to violent action for considerable time, stockpiling weapons and ammunition for just such an event. Possession of a sufficient arsenal, the jury deduced, “led them [negroes] as a people to believe in equal rights, social equality and their ability to demand the same.” The jury recognized, however, that this activity had affected only a portion of the city’s black populace as “the great majority of colored people . . . neither had knowledge of nor part in . . . the accumulation of arms and ammunition.”

The impaneled jury met for 12 days and initiated 27 massacre-related cases, most of which were never concluded. A total of 85 people, most of them black, were indicted for various offenses associated with the massacre. Most of these charges came to naught; one black man may have been sentenced to 30 days in the county jail for possession of a concealed weapon. Although a few white Tulsans were indicted on massacre-related charges, none served time for their roles in the looting, burning, killing, and overall terrorism that consumed the Greenwood district on the night of May 31 and the morning of June 1, 1921. Perhaps hundreds of lives, thousands of buildings, and countless possessions were lost during the two-day massacre. None of them have been rightfully accounted for.

One of the few causes of the massacre not attributed to the black community was the poor quality of law enforcement evidenced during the massacre. The grand jury condemned city and county officials for their lack of leadership and lax law enforcement procedures. Little effect came of their accusations, although Tulsa Police Chief John A. Gustafson was suspended from his post and later found guilty in district court for two counts of “failure to take proper precautions for the protection of life and property during the massacre and conspiracy to free automobile thieves and collect rewards.”

The two young people whose chance encounter in a downtown elevator sparked the rampage passed quietly from the scene. Sarah Page declined to press charges against Dick Rowland, and he was exonerated of assault in late September 1921. Both are thought to have left Tulsa shortly thereafter.

133 Ibid, 32.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
Section 8.7: Rebuilding Greenwood

Tulsa’s Relief Plan: Move African Americans out of Greenwood

Greenwood’s residents faced almost insurmountable obstacles, not the least of which were those erected by Tulsa’s white power elite. At first, it seemed that the city would come to their aid. In response to blistering attacks leveled at the city for its ineffectual efforts to forestall and quell the violence, Tulsa’s leaders assured the world that they would rebuild the African American community. In what some touted as a “can-do” attitude, the city rejected outside aid and formed the Executive Welfare Committee – later known as the Reconstruction Committee – comprised of prominent white business and political leaders. As the name suggests, the committee’s stated purpose was to oversee relief efforts and create a plan to rehabilitate the Greenwood area. But instead of helping African Americans rebuild and move back into their homes and businesses, the committee embarked on a course to actually prevent blacks from reclaiming and reinhabiting Greenwood.

Their reasoning was two-fold, but related: racial prejudice and money. Many influential white citizens of Tulsa remained unconvinced that the city had erred in its handling of the Rowland situation and the subsequent massacre. They placed most of the blame for the carnage on the black community itself and were, therefore, unsympathetic to their plight. Insurance companies reinforced their belief that the community did not deserve aid by their refusal to pay out for damages incurred in what was deemed a “riot.” At the same time, city government and business leaders viewed the eradication of Greenwood in the massacre as an opportunity for city growth and personal profit. When Greenwood was founded at the turn of the 20th century, the area lay at the city’s north-easternmost corner, across the Frisco tracks and well beyond Tulsa’s downtown business district and white neighborhoods to the south. By 1921, however, the city was in the midst of an oil-related building boom and had grown out to encompass Greenwood, which, by then, was considered prime real estate for industrial development along several major railroad lines. By enlarging the industrial district, the committee reasoned, African Americans would be pushed further from the city center, creating a greater “buffer zone” to separate white and black communities.

So, on June 7, while many black Tulsans still languished in detention centers, the Executive Welfare Committee announced its intention to appraise ruined properties for the purpose of buying the land and converting it to industrial use, thus precluding Greenwood’s reconstruction as a black enclave. On the same day, the Tulsa City Commission extended the city’s official fire

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137 Insurance policies typically do not pay for damages due to flood, earthquake, riot, acts of war, or, in recent years, nuclear disaster.
limits to include portions of Greenwood near the railroad tracks, for the express purpose of building a new depot and enlarging the industrial zone. As part of the proposal, any new construction in the expanded fire zone would need to be built of fireproof materials such as brick, concrete, or steel and be at least two stories in height. Only a handful of brick buildings existed in the neighborhood before the massacre, most of them large commercial mercantile or dry goods stores, movie theaters, hotels, churches, and schools, but they were the exceptions. The new fire codes would have prevented hundreds of families from rebuilding their relatively inexpensive, single story frame bungalows and vernacular houses that made up the bulk of Greenwood’s building fabric before the fire. The great majority of black property owners could not afford the added cost of erecting two-story brick houses. To many, the law was a thinly veiled mechanism to prevent black reoccupation under the guise of safety standards.

Black Tulsans fought the ordinance on the grounds that it would deprive Greenwood landowners of their property rights if they were prohibited from rebuilding in the district. Working out of a tent, Greenwood attorneys including B. C. Franklin fought the hastily written law and ultimately took the case to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, which declared the Tulsa city fire ordinance unconstitutional on September 1, 1921 (Figure 19).139 Property owners immediately began to rebuild on the burned over lots, as seen in the 1922 and 1923 dates stamped on the commercial buildings in the 100 block of North Greenwood Avenue.

**Massive Reconstruction Effort**

Even with the favorable ruling, Greenwood’s residents struggled to rebuild their homes and businesses. Most had invested their personal wealth in their properties, so they had no collateral on which to borrow money. Their businesses were in shambles, and most had little or no income. Their insurance claims were denied due to a riot exclusion clause. They simply lacked the capital needed to rebuild. In addition, local lumber, cement, and brick companies reportedly refused to sell materials to rebuild Greenwood.140

Some assistance came from national sources such as the NAACP and other advocate organizations. The American Red Cross provided immediate help in the form of food, first aid, and temporary shelters, mostly tents. According to long time Tulsa resident Albert Dunn, “Native Negroes” who had land and cattle and were wealthier than “State Negroes,” provided a good deal of money for the rebuilding.141 In the end, it was Greenwood’s African American residents themselves who found the courage and resources to rebuild their community. They turned to one another and organized a network of self-help associations, including the “Colored Citizens Relief Committee and East End Welfare Board,” to form a reconstruction strategy. They

139 National Park Service, 33.
140 Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.
141 Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.
reached out to their families and friends, their churches, work associates, and fraternal organizations for money to rebuild. Still, more than a thousand of Greenwood’s African American residents spent the winter of 1921-1922 living in tents, many on their former home sites.

Reconstruction efforts were massive in scale. Just before the massacre, the Tulsa city directories identified 1,149 residences in Greenwood. Many of these units housed more than one family and sometimes unrelated adult boarders. It has been estimated that the devastation of Greenwood left some 9,000 people in 1,765 families virtually homeless, with another 563 families crowded into close quarters with those whose houses somehow escaped the carnage. 142 Those living in tents set about building permanent structures to re-establish their community. The Latimer brothers – William Shakespeare and Jayphee Clinton Latimer—who had just finished building Mount Zion Baptist Church a few months before the massacre, found themselves in great demand. 143 Carpenters, brick layers, electricians, and skilled laborers of all kinds flocked to the area for work. 144 Many homes and businesses were rebuilt on their original foundations. 145 By December 30, 1921, only seven months after the fires, the American Red Cross reported that Greenwood residents completed the following construction projects:

180 – one-room frame shacks  
272 – two-room frame shacks  
312 – three rooms or more, frame  
  1 – large brick church  
  2 – basement brick churches  
  4 – frame churches, one room  
24 – one-story brick or cement buildings  
24 – two story brick or cement buildings  
  3 – three story brick or cement buildings  
  1 – large theater  
  1 – corrugated iron garage  
  2 – filling stations

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People contributed funds administered by the Red Cross to build 13 individual houses and the Red Cross used its own funds to “transform” 152 tent homes into “more or less” permanent wooden houses. By the end of December 1921, 49 tent houses had yet to be replaced by wooden ones and many people, including the family of Wesley Young, spent the winter of 1921-22 living in tents on their former house lots. Eight churches were bereft of sanctuaries and parishioners continued to meet

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142 National Park Service, 44.  
143 The newly built Mount Zion was destroyed in the riot.  
144 Julius Pegues interview with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, June 16, 2011.  
145 Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.
in Red Cross tents. Nevertheless, sufficient construction had been completed to see the goal in sight. Construction kept pace throughout the spring, and within a year of the massacre, a number of brick business buildings lined “Deep Greenwood” and most of the ash-filled lots in the neighborhoods had been transformed by houses, churches, and stores. The district must have been a flurry of construction activity in 1921 and 1922 as it was reported that all African Americans in Greenwood occupied “wooden buildings” instead of tents by the one-year anniversary of the massacre.

New buildings generally maintained the footprints of earlier ones, and many were near replicas of the ones they replaced; indeed, the earlier buildings were not so old at the time of the fire that they had “gone out of fashion.” As a result, the new district closely resembled the former. Two brick commercial buildings at 100 and 101 Greenwood Avenue, nearest Archer Street, appear to have walls that survived the massacre. Several early residents have confirmed this observation. Differences from the pre-massacre construction include the exclusive use of brick in commercial “Deep Greenwood,” and the loss of some inferior housing stock identified as “Negro shanties” or “tenements” in early 20th century Sanborn maps.

As Greenwood emerged from the ashes, its streets filled with homes. Most families rebuilt within the first two years following the massacre. The Mackey’s were an exception. It took Sam and Lucy Mackey nearly five years to rebuild because they were unable to obtain a bank loan in the devastated district. However, by 1926, they were able to mortgage their property and begin rebuilding on the site of their former home at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue (Figure 20). The Mackey’s original home, built in 1915, was a two-story frame house with two-story wraparound porches. Perhaps they saw some benefit in the city’s failed fire code; their new Prairie School house was constructed of red brick and had a clay tile roof. The new house stood on their original lot at the corner of N. Greenwood Avenue and Easton Street. Other stately homes were rebuilt by prominent professionals and businessmen on fashionable streets like Detroit Avenue. They represented the commitment of Greenwood’s leaders to reinvest in their community.

But more common than the Mackey’s large and fashionable brick house were hundreds of more modest, one-story frame bungalows to replace similar small-scale dwellings destroyed in the fires of 1921. The nationally popular Craftsman style spread across the neighborhood in the 1920s and continued to be built through the 1930s. They typically featured simple hallmarks of the Craftsman style such as exposed rafter tails, tapered wood posts on stout piers, and triangle knee braces. By the early 1930s, a number of modest Tudor Revival style bungalows joined their Craftsman counterparts in the district. Most were frame houses, some with a modicum of

\[146 \text{ National Park Service, 44.} \]
\[147 \text{ Ibid, 31.} \]
\[148 \text{ Lorenzo Vann, interview with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc., June 16, 2011; Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.} \]
faux half-timbering and stucco cladding. They typically offered two or three bedrooms and a bath. 149

Even as hundreds of new houses cropped up in Greenwood, the City of Tulsa denied them basic amenities. As late as the 1930s, Greenwood had no indoor plumbing. Even the public schools had outhouses. Every two or three houses had double outhouses on the alleys. “Honey Wagons” came around two or three times a year to clean them out. A few blocks of Greenwood Avenue were paved but elsewhere in the neighborhood the streets were just hard-packed dirt. If it rained, cars would get stuck in the mud. The first water lines were laid by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the late 1930s. 150 Modern plumbing notwithstanding, a year after Greenwood was destroyed, the Tulsa City Directory listed 1,134 residences in the area, only fifteen less than the pre-massacre figure. The reconstruction was virtually complete.

“Even more Impressive than Before the Riot”
In fact, Greenwood was more than just rebuilt; it was reinvigorated and revitalized in the truest sense of the words. Journalist Carlos Moreno has written several articles and has given presentations on what may be the biggest misconception about the events of 1921, possibly due to Greenwood’s almost barren appearance as seen from freeways overhead, is that the fire led to Greenwood’s ultimate demise and abandonment. Nothing could be further from the truth. In his words, “the common narrative—that the neighborhood never recovered after the massacre—is incorrect. In fact, Greenwood’s resilient residents rebuilt their community almost immediately after the events—in defiance of hastily-enacted racist zoning codes.” 151

Moreno’s assertion has been borne out in dozens of interviews with survivors and residents who recalled that Greenwood’s heyday was after the massacre, not before it. Longtime residents interviewed in 2011 expressed concerns that coming generations won’t know how prosperous the exclusively African American neighborhood once was at its height in the 1930s and 1940s. 152 While the massacre itself was truly devastating, the reconstruction of Greenwood ultimately became a source of pride for the community. W.D. Williams, a survivor who was just sixteen years old when the massacre broke out, exhorted young black Tulsans to remember the reconstruction as well as the devastation. He said that it was pride that started the massacre, but it was also pride that rebuilt Greenwood after the massacre. 153 Like many who have analyzed the

149 Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.
150 Lorenzo Vann, June 16, 2011.
152 Lorenzo Vann, June 16, 2011.
massacre and its aftermath, Williams lauded the efforts of Greenwood’s early residents to fight back, not with bullets and firebombs, but with courage, determination, and community pride. Another survivor, Juanita Alexander Lewis Hopkins, recalled in an interview with Eddie Faye Gates:

After the riot, Tulsa rebuilt from the ashes. In fact, [the Greenwood District] after the riot was even more impressive than before the riot . . . There are so many stories to be told about [Greenwood] and its determined people – about its struggles with racism, about its creativity, adaptation, and survival.154

Tulsa’s reconstruction was noticed on a national level, as well. In 1926, W.E.B. DuBois wrote, “Black Tulsa is a happy city…”

Five little years ago, fire and blood and robbery leveled it to the ground. Scars are there, but the city is impudent and noisy. It believes in itself. Thank God for the grit of Black Tulsa.

Greenwood resumed its place in Tulsa’s urban landscape. Though it remained a racially segregated segment of town, it had thriving businesses, entertainment venues, schools, and churches. Greenwood Avenue and Archer Street remained the main business streets of the community. There were grocery stores, funeral homes, night clubs, five prescription shops, dry goods stores, and seven pharmacies. Albert Dunn recalled walking up and down Greenwood with scores of other people doing the same thing just for entertainment in the 1930s and 1940s.155

The community continued to grow through the 1930s, and by 1941, nearly 20,000 African Americans called Greenwood home. The main commercial district at the intersection of Archer Street and Greenwood Avenue boasted 242 black-owned and operated businesses, including 38 grocers, 34 cafes, 28 beauty salons, 16 hotels, 15 tailors and cleaning shops, 12 chili parlors, and 11 barber shops. Professional occupations were represented by 98 teachers, 38 ministers, 12 nurses, 9 physicians, 8 pharmacists, and 8 social workers.156

The community was even large enough to warrant its own *Negro City Directory* (1941-42), which touted the “Tulsa Spirit” behind the reconstruction and revitalization of the Greenwood district. The directory promoted Greenwood as having “no parallel anywhere else in America” and alluded to the fire that destroyed the district by commending the community’s spirit and “determination to carry on in the face of staggering odds.” Furthermore, the directory’s authors

154 Johnson, 96.
156 National Park Service, 44.
attributed heroic qualities to Greenwood Avenue as a symbol “of racial prominence and progress” to “Negroes” throughout Tulsa, not only as an avenue but as an institution.\textsuperscript{157} The directory defined the district limits as they were in 1941-42 when the book was published:

\begin{quote}
Beginning at East Archer and the M-K-T tracks, this famous thoroughfare runs north to Pine Street, flanked on either side by two miles of teeming business structures. Massed along both sides of Greenwood from Archer to Pine is unquestionably the greatest assembly of Negro shops and stores to be found anywhere in America.
\end{quote}

Furthermore, the directory lauded its business leaders – “the banker, the baker, and the candle stick maker” – who, it claimed, were all “intent upon a single purpose – to make things better for himself and his community.”\textsuperscript{158}

The directory painted a picture of Greenwood Avenue as a bustling business district by day and a robust entertainment zone with theaters, night clubs with jazz and blues music, taverns, and bars, festooned with neon lights, at night. In addition, it claimed that Greenwood offered businessmen more possibilities than those traditionally held by blacks such as grocers, restaurant owners, barbers, cleaners, and undertakers. Far from it. In Tulsa, blacks worked as oil and real estate brokers, furniture salesmen, jewelers and goldsmiths, appliance sales and service men, building contractors, and tire and auto suppliers.\textsuperscript{159} According to one longtime resident, there were about 29-30 black police officers who patrolled the area.\textsuperscript{160}

Greenwood was also a focal point for African Americans who lived in the surrounding countryside. Farmers would come into Greenwood to shop, see a movie, and sell produce on the weekends. Some farm families sent their children to Greenwood for the schools. Lorenzo Vann’s parents lived in the country but sent him and his brothers to Greenwood for an education. The boys lived in a rooming house where they helped the landlady to pay their rent. By third grade, they attended St. Monica’s Catholic School, which was on Haskell Street at the time (Figure 22). By the time he was eleven, Vann was living on his own but continued his education at St. Monica’s School where he graduated in 1948.\textsuperscript{161}

\textbf{Legacy of the Massacre}

Some lessons lingered long after the massacre and Greenwood’s reconstruction. Most had to do with religious and moral values: of self-reliance, a good education, family and community

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Lorenzo Vann, June 16, 2011.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
solidarity, work, and, tragically, the abiding nature of racial intolerance. Resident Julius Pegues recalled his upbringing in Greenwood after the massacre, “We were all poor, but we were all Middle-Class,” perhaps meaning that everyone lived frugally but had sufficient homes and good values.\(^\text{162}\) Most lived in two-parent families with both husband and wife working outside the home. Children were taught to respect their elders, to be honest, and “rise above the fray.”\(^\text{163}\) Education was highly valued. Mr. Pegues said that of about 20 children on his street, 16 received college diplomas. In his own family of eight children, five had college degrees, and three had graduate degrees. Church was also important, and every member of the congregation supported its youth. Pegues attributed the community’s resurgence after the massacre to the neighborhood churches.\(^\text{164}\)

Most children who grew up in Greenwood after the massacre agree that their parents and other elders did not readily talk about the event. They felt the Ku Klux Klan still held sway in the region and many feared reprisals for even mentioning the massacre. Albert Dunn recalled the general feeling that if anyone was caught talking about what had transpired, they would be dealt with immediately by being run out of town or fired from their jobs [by whites].\(^\text{165}\) Julius Pegues recalled that his uncle J. C. Latimer talked about the massacre occasionally but didn’t dwell on it. His uncle told him that “bitterness and anger will kill you.”\(^\text{166}\) Pegues said that was generally the norm, that parents didn’t want to raise “hate mongers.”\(^\text{167}\) Teachers at Booker T. Washington generally passed over the topic in their lessons or only briefly mentioned the event as if it were long past history. Some merely thought it best not to dwell on the tragedy. Albert Dunn, whose uncle lost his building in the massacre, urged him to, “Just let that go.”\(^\text{168}\)

Dunn remembered Tulsa under legal segregation as two cities – the South side and the North side, white and black – and they were taught to navigate between them:

> When we were kids, we were taught how to survive in two cities. When you crossed Archer Street, you were in downtown Tulsa. Second and First streets was kind of Skid Row. Different nationalities met and people dated and everything . . mixed races. Now, when you got to Third Street there were more Europeans. So our parents taught us how to survive in both neighborhoods. South of Archer you acted a certain way. In Greenwood, you acted another way.\(^\text{169}\)

\(^{162}\) Julius Pegues, June 16, 2011.  
\(^{163}\) Ibid.  
\(^{164}\) Ibid.  
\(^{165}\) Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.  
\(^{166}\) Julius Pegues, June 16, 2011.  
\(^{167}\) Ibid.  
\(^{168}\) Albert Dunn, June 15, 2011.  
\(^{169}\) Ibid.
Section 8.8: The Second Destruction

Integration, Urban Renewal, and Highway Construction

The reconstructed Greenwood flourished through the 1940s and into the 1950s, but by the late 1950s, several related factors contributed to its decline as a vibrant, healthy, and forward-looking – albeit segregated - black community. Among the greatest forces working against Greenwood’s continued success were national in scope: integration, urban renewal, and interstate highway construction.

A large part of Greenwood’s success in the first half of the twentieth century derived from the very force that restricted its inhabitants and property owners: legal segregation. Because African Americans were barred from living in white neighborhoods, attending white schools, and opening or operating businesses in white commercial districts, black-owned businesses benefitted from a captive market (Figure 23). As integration took hold throughout the country, including Tulsa, African Americans were no longer limited to a single area for goods and services. Black businessmen could not compete with their white counterparts who typically had greater access to money and could buy in bulk, thus passing lower prices on to their customers, both white and black. And, as America grew more mobile in the postwar era, much of Greenwood’s business was siphoned off to the suburbs. Greenwood’s commercial district fell into decline as one-by-one businesses shut their doors in the 1960s until only one business remained by 1967.

Integration had a similar effect on housing and education. As institutions and neighborhoods shed their segregationist codes with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, African Americans in Tulsa were no longer confined to work and trade in designated black communities. At the same time, many black families left Greenwood for neighborhoods further north that had been vacated by whites in response to school desegregation. Their exodus deprived Greenwood of its lifeblood and future as a working- and middle-class residential neighborhood. Among those left were the elderly and infirm founding generations of Greenwood and its reconstruction; with their passing went the collective memory of the once densely populated, vibrant black community. At the same time, an aging infrastructure and building stock hastened Greenwood’s deterioration and became fodder for urban renewal, or, as many black residents termed it, urban “removal,” for the hundreds of people who were displaced for redevelopment that did little to benefit them. Dorothy M. DeWitty, in her book, Tulsa: A Tale of Two Cities, laid the blame for Greenwood’s decline on urban renewal and, by association, the expressway. The demise of Greenwood was firmly established by one major decision. The city commission, by resolution in July 1959, created the Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority (TURA). It was called a program of “spot-clearance, redevelopment and rehabilitation” through the acquisition and disposition of property, i.e., the control of real estate by contract. The revitalization, including the expressway, was to ensure
preferred outcomes for the city – the priorities of the majority. The removal of blacks, which city planners had failed to accomplish with 1921 fire codes and building restrictions, was easily accomplished by urban renewal, the building of the expressway, and plans for Tulsa’s rejuvenation (Figure 24).\textsuperscript{170}

In August 1959, Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission Director Glen R. Burner proposed three areas – Westbank, Seminole Hills, and Greenwood – for redevelopment to the newly-formed Urban Renewal Authority.\textsuperscript{171} Coming on the heels of Oklahoma’s recent enabling legislation, Burner recommended a residential project for the first program in Westbank where 230 of a total 291 dwelling units had been declared substandard. He believed that the removal and replacement of such dwellings would hold up well in court.\textsuperscript{172} He noted that a court test of the new law was expected and he believed that a residential project to remove and replace 230 sub-standard units of a total 291 dwellings would stand up better in court.\textsuperscript{173} Explained simply by local newspapers over the following few years, the intention of local and federal urban renewal projects was threefold: the elimination of slums and blight; the removal of the causes of slums and blight; and the addition and improvement of housing, commercial buildings, and other facilities in the community.\textsuperscript{174}

Journalist Carlos Moreno addressed how urban renewal and highway construction intersected in Greenwood in his article “Decades After the Tulsa Race Massacre, Urban ‘Renewal’ Sparked Black Wall Street’s Second Destruction,” which was first published in Next City, and reprinted in the Smithsonian magazine June 2, 2021:

> Redlining, beginning in the mid-1930s, made it difficult for Black Tulsans to own property in the only area of town they could live. These policies all led to Greenwood’s land being under-valued, which then led to the area being targeted for demolition as a “blighted” area of town when it came time to decide where to build highways explicitly designed for white Tulsans’ convenient commute to and from its newly built suburbs.\textsuperscript{175}

In Greenwood, entire blocks fell to the bulldozers under the banner of urban renewal - not to replace them with new or better buildings for residents – but to leave a clean slate for highway

\textsuperscript{170} Dorothy M. DeWitty, Tulsa, A Tale of Two Cities: One Black and One White, 1989, reprinted by Langston University, 1997: 59.
\textsuperscript{171} “Area in West Tulsa One of Three Studied As Renewal Project,” The Tulsa County News, September 3, 1959, 8.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Ibid}.
and other redevelopment benefitting investors. Some Greenwood residents viewed urban renewal as nothing more than a means to control the once-vibrant African American neighborhood by taking their businesses and land. Former resident Julius Pegues recalled that they even knocked down Greenwood Hill to level the land. Educator Jobie Holderness claims that the program cut even deeper, saying, “Urban renewal not only took away our property, but something else more important—our black unity, our pride, our sense of achievement and history. We need to regain that. Our youth missed that and that is why they are lost today, that is why they are in ‘limbo’ now.” Once the jewel of America’s black commercial centers, the Greenwood district was described in a report by the National Park Service as having “generally abandoned and underutilized buildings, sitting in a sparse population of poor and elderly blacks[s] awaiting the relocation counselors of the Urban Renewal program” by 1978.

But the death knell for the lower (southern) part of Greenwood came with the construction of highways through the community, a plan sourly described by Carlos Moreno as theft, “What the city could not steal in 1921, it systematically paved over 50 years later.” Moreno found that as early as 1957, Tulsa’s Comprehensive Plan called for building a ring of highways around the city’s downtown core. This “a tangle of four highways” was meant to get suburban commuters to and from their destinations quickly with no regard for the residents who lived in Greenwood and other communities slated for highway development. As intended, the north (I-244/Crosstown Expressway) and east (U.S. 75/Cherokee Expressway) sections of the so-called Inner-Dispersal Loop, or IDL, replaced “the dense, diverse, mixed-use, mixed-income, pedestrian, and transit-oriented Greenwood and Kendall-Whittier neighborhoods.” The interstate cut off Greenwood’s remaining commercial district from its residential neighborhoods to the north. Resident Julius Pegues recalled that the freeway, “Took out the Dreamland.”

But some did take notice, both in print and public protests. The May 4, 1967, issue of the Tulsa Tribune lambasted the highway plan under the banner, “The Crosstown Expressway slices across the 100 block of North Greenwood Avenue,” the once-thriving commercial district. The article quoted Edwin Lawrence Goodwin, Sr., publisher of the Oklahoma Eagle, as saying, “There still will be a Greenwood Avenue, but it will be a lonely, forgotten lane ducking under the shadows of a big overpass.” Carlos Moreno regarded the freeway construction as Greenwood’s second destruction, an appraisal confirmed by former residents who lost their homes to eminent domain.

176 Lorenzo Vann, June 16, 2011.
177 Julius Pegues, June 16, 2011.
178 Quoted in Moreno, “Decades After the Tulsa Race Massacre”.
179 National Park Service, 45.
180 Carlos Moreno.
181 Ibid.
182 Julius Pegues, June 16, 2011.
183 Carlos Moreno
for the project. When the IDL was completed in 1971, Mabel B. Little, a community activist for whom the Sam and Lucy Mackey House is now named [Mabel B. Little Heritage House], recalled that her family had lost their home and their business in 1921 but rebuilt after the massacre only to lose both again to the expressway in 1970. Her comparison of the two “destructions” was printed in the *Tulsa Tribune* that year, “You destroyed everything we had. I was here in it [the massacre], and the people are suffering more now than they did then.”\footnote{Ibid.}

**An Altered Landscape**

In more recent decades new construction has further altered the historic appearance of the larger Greenwood community. The Tulsa Redevelopment Authority changed the neighborhood with the construction of new public and private housing, churches, businesses, parks, and water catchment basins resulted in demolition of extensive sections of the historic Greenwood commercial and residential areas. In 1982, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, began construction and development of the college over the historic street grid in the heart of the historic residential community further separating the historic commercial zone from the historic residential community. Today, some areas cleared with urban renewal have new houses, however, many lots and blocks remain vacant. It has been estimated that only one-third of the street grid in the southern portion of historic Greenwood retains its historic integrity, while perhaps two-thirds of the street grid in the northern part of the area is intact.\footnote{National Park Service, 46.}

**Section 8.9: Integrity**

Despite the loss of historic building fabric and introduction of modern buildings and landscape elements, the larger Greenwood area and the nominated Greenwood Historic District remain exceptionally significant for their representation of the once-vibrant, self-sufficient Black community that was entirely reconstructed after the original Greenwood neighborhood was burned to the ground during the Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921. The land itself is considered by many as sacred ground.

Overall, the larger Greenwood neighborhood possesses only fair integrity due to the removal of a large percentage of historic buildings throughout the community and the addition of large-scale new construction including university buildings, surface parking, and landscaped areas, and alterations to the natural landforms and historic street grid across the lower-central part of the community. Nevertheless, some distinctive landmarks yet survive, including the railroad tracks along the eastern and southern boundaries that historically divided black Tulsa from white Tulsa; they are vivid reminders of the city’s history of segregation. The Frisco tracks are particularly
significant as they mark the location of the first bloodshed in the massacre of 1921. Some streetscape patterns remain relatively intact; among them are the 100-200 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, which is set a definite angle according to the Frisco tracks instead of the cardinal directions, the lower and upper stretches of N. Greenwood Avenue itself, which serves as the neighborhood’s central spine, and the regular north-south/east-west street grid in the upper (northern) part of Greenwood. Standpipe Hill near the southwestern corner of the neighborhood remains a natural landmark.

The nine brick commercial buildings in the 100-block of Greenwood are particularly relevant to both the early history and post-massacre reconstruction of Greenwood; they are near-replicas of the type of commercial buildings that were lost in the massacre. These one- to three-story brick buildings occupy the footprints of the earlier business property and offer a variety of services to the community just as their predecessors did. Aligned in two parallel, continuous rows along the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, this commercial cluster recalls the density and vitality of the earlier commercial zone dubbed by Booker T. Washington as the “Negro Wall Street.” These buildings served as the focal point of the subsequent reconstructed commercial zone in Greenwood in much the same way as before the massacre, only livelier and more vibrant in the later history, 1922-1955.

African American churches, most dating to the early reconstruction period, also remain in the larger Greenwood neighborhood. Among them are Mount Zion Baptist Church, which replaced both the original and the reconstructed church between 1948-1952 and Vernon Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, completed in 1926; both are individually listed in the National Register. Other historic black churches in the larger community include St. Monica’s Catholic Church, built in 1936, First Baptist Church North Tulsa, built in 1953, First Church of God in Christ, c. 1930, and Paradise Baptist Church, built in 1960. These churches provided the social and financial support for much of the neighborhood’s restoration. A ca. 1940 health clinic for the black community now serves as the Unitarian Church of the Restoration. Although segregated schools have long since disappeared from the residential landscape, Carver Middle School dates to the period of segregation and remains an active public school. Together these historically African American institutions convey a strong sense of Greenwood’s historic character and architectural fabric.

In addition to its commercial buildings and institutions, Greenwood still contains a number of historic houses and churches. Scattered throughout the district are a number of frame bungalows, some of which may pre-date the massacre. It is difficult to know their ages as most of the houses built in the aftermath of the massacre were near replicas of the original houses on those lots. Bungalows, in particular, span the period before and after the massacre and appear throughout
the district; those remaining in the district provide a strong visual link to the residential architectural fabric of both the early settlement period and the post-massacre era of the 1920s and 1930s.

In this current phase, the nominated Greenwood Historic District retains a high level of historic and architectural integrity. Nine of the ten brick commercial buildings in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue are historic, contributing resources with little alterations since the end of the period of significance except the replacement of wood sash with vinyl windows and the addition of non-historic fabric awnings. Both Mount Zion Baptist Church and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church possess exceptional integrity to the period of significance and are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Threatened with demolition on its original (reconstruction era) site at 356 N. Greenwood Avenue, the Sam and Lucy Mackey House was moved half a block to the south to its present address at 322 N. Greenwood Avenue. The move and restoration were carefully planned and executed; the frame structure was moved intact and then re-bricked exactly as it appeared when completed after the massacre in 1926. The house retains exceptional integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, though integrity of setting has been diminished by the loss of surrounding buildings. Integrity of location is only somewhat reduced because the house was moved less than a block from its original site; Criteria Consideration B is therefore applied to the property.

The district possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association to a good degree. Though setting has been compromised by the wholesale demolition of surrounding buildings and subsequent redevelopment, the district manages to convey a strong sense of its history as a segregated African American community through the integrity of its individual components and its cohesiveness along or in close proximity to N. Greenwood Avenue, the neighborhood’s central and enduring spine.

Section 8.10: Significance

Historical Summary
Left out of history books for one hundred years, most Americans now recognize the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 as the worst single instance of racial violence and destruction ever perpetrated against an African American community in our country. But Greenwood had a history both before and after the massacre that is well worth remembering and celebrating. The early settlement period is noteworthy for its enormous growth and robust development with a commercial district brimming with life and vitality, in a very brief span of time (1905-1921). On the eve of the massacre, Greenwood was one of the most prosperous black communities in the United States. All of that was swept away with the ashes of burned-out houses, businesses,
churches, and schools consumed in the fires set by an angry white mob in the early morning hours of June 1, 1921.

But what may be even more remarkable than Greenwood’s early settlement was its phenomenal reconstruction in the wake of almost complete destruction. A few property owners, including one of the neighborhood’s founders, O. W. Gurley, moved away from Tulsa, never to return. The great majority, however, stayed to rebuild the community they had lost. They faced enormous obstacles, the most immediate of which was a lack of housing. An estimated 1,000 black families spent the winter of 1921-22 living in tents erected on their former home sites. Most had lost all of their possessions including clothes, jewelry, furniture, food staples, and money; looters stole the most valuable items and let fire take the rest. A greater obstacle to Greenwood’s permanent reconstruction, though, was the city of Tulsa, whose leaders passed restrictive fire and zoning codes to prevent residential uses and any but brick or concrete construction which would be cost-prohibitive to most residents.

Against the odds, Greenwood’s residents prevailed in court and by the spring of 1922, one- and two-story brick commercial buildings were under construction along the main business streets and dozens of frame and brick houses were already built and occupied in residential blocks; planning for churches and schools was underway with most finished and in use by 1926. Among the reconstructed churches were Mount Zion Baptist Church and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church, all on their original sites. The rebuilt neighborhood regained its former vitality by the mid-1920s and continued to grow, attracting new residents through the 1930s and 1940s, and into the early 1950s. By 1941, Greenwood had nearly 20,000 residents, almost twice as many as before the massacre.

Though little original building stock survived the massacre, new construction followed the streetscape and building patterns established in the first decades of the 20th century. As a result, the reconstructed Greenwood closely resembled the original neighborhood, as shown on the 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. The merging of angled streets with a regular north-south/east-west grid remained intact, and N. Greenwood Avenue remained the main commercial street and north-south arterial through the neighborhood. Mostly residential secondary streets still diverged from N. Greenwood Avenue to the east and west, filling with more frame houses, many of them Craftsman-influenced bungalows, than ever. A symbol of the community’s resilience and capacity for rebirth, Deep Greenwood regained its status as a bustling, prosperous commercial zone with one- to two-story brick retail and service businesses fronting onto the main streets. Within a few short years, Greenwood had literally risen from the ashes to surpass its former glory (Figure 21).

186 Gurley moved to Los Angeles where he lived in relative obscurity until his death in 1935.
More destructive to the neighborhood’s historic character was the loss of the post-massacre construction in urban renewal and freeway building campaigns through the district in the 1960s and 1970s, and the redevelopment of a large section of Greenwood as a university. Whole blocks were obliterated by these projects and today modern infill housing is found on residential streets once dominated by frame bungalows and vernacular dwellings. The loss of these properties makes the remaining buildings of the post-massacre reconstruction of Greenwood even more significant.

**Eligibility Criteria, Period, Level and Areas of Significance**

The Greenwood Historic District is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places because of its clear association with the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 – the largest and most devastating example of race-related carnage in America’s history – and because it represents the valiant efforts of the African American residents to rebuild the community after fires consumed some 70 percent of the building stock. The massacre represented the catastrophic end to an era in which the country’s white majority acted on deeply held prejudices against African Americans and foreigners during the years immediately preceding, during, and just after World War I. Many scholars have concluded that the Tulsa Race Massacre directly resulted from these national fears and that its devastating consequences reported across the country helped end this troubling chapter in our national history.

The nominated Greenwood Historic District in this phase contains nine red brick commercial buildings aligned along the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, two historic churches, and a single-family dwelling now used as a house museum, all of which were built in the massive reconstruction effort that took place in the community after the 1921 massacre. These historic resources then survived urban renewal and highway construction which took out most of the reconstruction-era properties in the lower (southern) part of the larger Greenwood neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s. This “second destruction” was at least as devastating and certainly more permanent as the fires set during the massacre. The red brick commercial properties in the 100 and 300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue, and the church building at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, are rare surviving remnants of the reconstructed Greenwood where some 20,000 residents lived and worked at its peak in the 1940s.

Today, Greenwood’s cultural resources convey a sense of both tragedy and triumph; its buildings, streets, and infrastructure reflect the fabric of the original African American community and represent the resurgence of community after the massacre. In one sense, the district represents the failure of one of America’s seminal ideals, that of the equality of men. At the same time, it reflects the spirit of the American people – regardless of race – in the face of overwhelming odds. Though much of the original and post-massacre fabric has been lost in...
Greenwood since the 1960s, its remaining resources are vitally important to our understanding of African American history and race relations in America.

Because the Greenwood Historic District possesses exceptional value in illustrating and interpreting the most disturbing aspects of our national heritage – racial prejudice and the violence associated with it – the district is nominated to the National Register in the area of Social History at the national level of significance. The district is also eligible under Criterion A: Ethnic History: Black at the national level of significance for its representation of the variety of resources built in a separate African American community under legal segregation and for its reflection of how racial prejudice continued to negatively affect communities of color after integration through urban renewal and highway construction. Finally, the Greenwood Historic District represents early planning and development strategies by its developers and builders to create a separate African American community with commercial, residential, and institutional properties, within the larger city of Tulsa. Therefore, it is eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A: Community Planning and Development.
9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Books


Government Reports


Internet, Newspaper and Magazine Articles


https://www.newspapers.com/image/665407636/?terms=Tulsa%20Star%20segregation%20ordinance&match=

“Tulsa’s Segregation Zoning” in *This Land Press*, May 05, 2011,
https://thislandpress.com/2011/05/24/tulsas-segregation-zoning-2/

newspapers.com
https://www.newspapers.com/image/743437697/?terms=urban%20renewal&match=1

*Oral Histories*

Dunn, Albert with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc. June 15, 2011.

Pegues, Julius with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc. June 16, 2011.

Vann, Lorenzo C. with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc. June 16, 2011.

Williams, Tedra Lee with Maria Franklin, Preservation Central, Inc. June 16, 2011.

*Other Primary Sources*

Tulsa City Directories

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Tulsa, Creek Nation, Indian Territory.* New York: 1903, 1905, and 1907

Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
__X previously listed in the National Register
__X previously determined eligible by the National Register
____ designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

__X State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____X Other

Name of repository: __John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property __5 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: __________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.159799  Longitude: -95.986133
2. Latitude: 36.159997  Longitude: -95.985627
3. Latitude: 36.160296  Longitude: -95.985698
4. Latitude: 36.160351  Longitude: -95.985914
5. Latitude: 36.160226  Longitude: -95.986278
6. Latitude: 36.16087335 Longitude: -95.9865079
7. Latitude: 36.16123052 Longitude: -95.98651019
8. Latitude: 36.16122591 Longitude: -95.985908
9. Latitude: 36.16214877 Longitude: -95.98594284
10. Latitude: 36.16215209 Longitude: -95.96872434
11. Latitude: 36.16212975 Longitude: -95.98672491
Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Contiguous section: Beginning at the southeast corner of the property line for 101-105 N. Greenwood Avenue; thence northerly along the rear property lines of all buildings on the east side of the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue to the northwest corner of the property line for 111 N. Greenwood Avenue at its intersection with N. Greenwood Avenue; thence north/northwesterly under the IH-244 overpass along the eastside right-of-way of N. Greenwood Avenue to the southwest corner of the property line of Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church; thence east along the south property line of the church to the southeast corner of the church property; thence north along the east property line to the northeast corner of the church property; thence west along the north property line crossing N. Greenwood Avenue to the west side of the street; thence south approximately six (6) feet, to a point at the intersection of N. Greenwood Avenue on the property associated with the Greenwood Cultural Center, which is fifteen (15) feet north of the north wall of the Sam and Lucy Mackey House (Mabel B. Little Heritage House); thence west to a point fifteen (15) feet west of the west wall of the Sam and Lucy Mackey House; thence south to a point fifteen (15) feet south of the south wall of the Mackey House; thence east along the fifteen (15) foot boundary for the Mackey House to its intersection with the west side of N. Greenwood Avenue; thence southerly along the west side of the right-of-way for N. Greenwood Avenue to the northeast corner of 144-146 N. Greenwood Avenue property line; thence west/southwest along the north property line of 144-146 N. Greenwood Avenue to the northwest corner of the property; thence southwest along the rear property lines of all buildings on the west side of the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue to the southwest corner of the property line for 100 N. Greenwood Avenue; thence along the south property line of 100 N. Greenwood Avenue, across N. Greenwood Avenue, to the place of beginning. These boundaries include all properties in the 100 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, all property historically
Greenwood Historic District  
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

associated with Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church, a fifteen (15) foot border on the north, west, and south sides and the land on the east side of the Mackey House east to Greenwood Avenue.

Discontiguous Section: The boundaries also include the property owned and occupied by Mount Zion Baptist Church at 419 N. Elgin Avenue, containing Lots 1 & 2 & Partial Lots 6 & 7, Block 17, and Partial Vacated Alley Beg Sect Lot 7 THNW207/73 NE 100 NW 140 Ne 161.2 S326.r POB Block17, W.50 LT 3 Block 17, E.50 LT 3 BLK 17, and LT 4 BLK 17, North Tulsa Addition to the City of Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Greenwood Historic District is a discontiguous district consisting of contiguous properties in the 100-300 blocks of N. Greenwood Avenue and the discontiguous Mt. Zion Baptist Church property, which lies approximately one block west at 419 N. Elgin Avenue. These properties are the most significant historic resources that survive from the reconstruction of the lower (southern) part of the community known as “Deep Greenwood,” aka the “Negro/Black Wall Street,” after its almost complete destruction in the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The commercial buildings in the 100 block represent the prosperous and vibrant African American business district that emerged in the restoration era after the riot through the 1950s, until the 1960s, when the neighborhood declined and suffered wholesale demolition associated with Urban Renewal redevelopment, including the construction of Interstate 244, which was completed through the neighborhood in 1968. In addition to the commercial strip, the Sam and Lucy Mackey House (Mabel B. Little Heritage House) and Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church are also included in the district. These properties are linked to the commercial zone by N. Greenwood Avenue, the neighborhood’s main north-south transit corridor through the historic period. They are outstanding examples of the domestic and religious properties that reappeared in the neighborhood during the early restoration period. The discontiguous Mt. Zion Baptist Church to the west of the Mackey House is also included in the district as an excellent example of a religious property rebuilt by the congregation in lower Greenwood during the later reconstruction era. Completed in 1952, Mt. Zion Baptist Church was one of the last churches built in Deep Greenwood before the neighborhood began to decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Together, these commercial, religious, and domestic properties represent the once-vibrant “Deep Greenwood” community of the post-massacre reconstruction era. Excluded from the boundaries are the Greenwood Cultural Center and the 1921 Black Wall Street Memorial monument, which are modern construction that commemorate the historic Greenwood community but do not reflect or represent the property types, building traditions, or architectural styles associated with that community as do those buildings included in the district. The Mackey House boundaries are its setback from the street (N. Greenwood Avenue) on the east and a
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property

Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State

fifteen (15) foot border on the north, west, and south sides to differentiate the historic building from the Greenwood Cultural Center.

11. Form Prepared By
name/title: Terri Myers, Maria Franklin, Kristen Brown; Vanessa Adams-Harris
organization: Preservation Central; John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation
street & number: Preservation Central, 823 Harris Avenue
city or town: Austin state: Texas zip code: 78705
e-mail: terrimyers@preservationcentral.com
telephone: (512) 478-0898
date: March 14, 2022

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps**: A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items**: (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Greenwood Historic District

City or Vicinity: Tulsa

County: Tulsa State: Oklahoma
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Name of Property

Photographer: Vanessa Adams-Harris

Date Photographed: January 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

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<th>Photo #</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Direction</th>
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<td>0001</td>
<td>100 Block N. Greenwood Avenue: Commercial Strip from south, at E. Archer Street, to north, at IH-244 Overpass</td>
<td>north</td>
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<tr>
<td>0002</td>
<td>West side 100 block N. Greenwood Avenue (Resources 1, 3, 6, &amp; 7)</td>
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<td>0003</td>
<td>East Side 100 block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources 2, 4, &amp; 5)</td>
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<td>Williams Building (Site 1), 100 N. Greenwood Ave., South Elevation (corner) and West (rear) Elevations 100 Block N. Greenwood Avenue (west side)</td>
<td>north/northwest</td>
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<tr>
<td>0005</td>
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<td>East Side 100 block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources 5, 4, &amp; 2) From North to South</td>
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<td>Storefronts West Side 100 block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources 1, 3, 6, &amp; 7) Front (East) Elevations, and Rear (West) Elevations</td>
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<td>0009</td>
<td>East and West sides 100 block N. Greenwood Ave., from north to south, toward downtown Tulsa</td>
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<td>0010</td>
<td>Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (Resource 11), 311 N. Greenwood Ave., South and West Elevations, looking north from commercial strip</td>
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<td>0011</td>
<td>Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (Resource 11), Primary (West) Elevation</td>
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<td>Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (left) and Mackey House/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Resource 12, right), looking south toward commercial strip</td>
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<td>0013</td>
<td>Sam and Lucy Mackey House/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Resource 12), 322 N. Greenwood Ave., Primary (East) Elevation</td>
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<td>Sam and Lucy Mackey/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Site 12), Oblique View, East and North Elevations</td>
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<td>Sam and Lucy Mackey/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Site 12), North Elevation</td>
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<td>Sam and Lucy Mackey/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Site 12), South Elevation with Porte Cochere</td>
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<td>0017</td>
<td>Mt. Zion Baptist Church (Site 13), 419 N. Elgin Ave. E Primary (North and West Elevations)</td>
<td>southeast</td>
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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.
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Map 1: Vicinity Map
Greenwood Historic District
2021 Aerial Photography
Greenwood Historic District

Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

County and State
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 10  Page 2

Map 2: Location Map

Aerial flown in 2020/2021
Map created: 3/14/2022 4:49 PM
Greenwood Historic District

Name of Property: Tulsa County, Oklahoma

County and State: N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable):

Map 3: District Map with Photo key
Greenwood Historic District
2021 Aerial Photography
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Map 6: Greenwood Historic District & Interstate Highway 244
1977 - Aerial Photography
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 1: Tulsa, Oklahoma – A Frontier Town, 1896
Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/43271741a
(09/12/2018).
Figure 2: Sanborn Map Company, 1907
Small houses on the railroad lines on Tulsa’s north side labeled “Negro District”
Figure 3: Sanborn Map Company, 1905
Greenwood’s Origins: Gurley’s Grocery Store and a Dwelling
E. First (Archer) and N. Greenwood Ave.
Figure 4: Sanborn Map Company, 1907
Commercial buildings built and owned by African Americans
100 block Greenwood Ave. “Deep Greenwood”
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
N/A
Figure 5: Sanborn Map Company, 1911
Commercial development intensifies along N. Greenwood Ave.
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Figure 6: The Dreamland Theatre, 100 block N. Greenwood Avenue. Built in 1914 by John Williams.  
Scott Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land, page 4
Figure 7: Sanborn Map Company 1915
“Black Wall Street,” 100 block of N. Greenwood Ave.
Figure 8: Snow-covered Deep Greenwood (Black Wall Street) in 1919.
Scott Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land, page 15.
Figure 9: Sanborn Map Company, 1911
Residential section with CME and AME churches and two “Negro” schools
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

GROWTH OF BLACK TULSA
(For reference, depicted on a modern map showing highways and other present-day streets)

Figure 11: Growth of Black Tulsa
From origins in 1905 to eve of Race Massacre in 1921
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 12: First looting, then fire. Greenwood, 1921.
Scott Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land, page 56.
Figure 13: Residents flee as their homes are engulfed in flames.
   Greenwood, 1921.


Figure 14: Recently completed Mt. Zion Baptist Church goes up in flames.
   Greenwood, 1921.

Figure 15: Blacks being taken into custody.
Greenwood, 1921.
Alfred L. Brophy, Reconstructing the Dreamland, page 66.
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 16: Deep Greenwood in ruins.
June 1, 1921.
Figure 17: How could this happen here?

Figure 18: Black churches offer relief.
Greenwood, 1921.
Mary E. Jones Parrish, Events of the Tulsa Disaster, page 31.
Figure 19: Lawyers work from a tent to oppose city ordinance prohibiting reconstruction.

Scott Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land, page 87.
Figure 20: Sam and Lucy Mackey completed a new two-story Prairie School house to replace the frame house on their original lot in 1926; it had brick walls and a clay tile roof. Greenwood Cultural Center, A Century of African-American Experience, Greenwood: Ruins, Resilience and Renaissance, page 33.
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 21: Reconstructed “Deep Greenwood,” 1930s-1940s
Figure 22: St. Monica’s School Drum and Bugle Corps Parade on Greenwood Avenue, 1950s. Greenwood Cultural Center, A Century of African-American Experience, Greenwood: Ruins, Resilience and Renaissance, page 24 (courtesy St. Monica’s Catholic Church).
Figure 23: Meharry’s Drugstore; Owner, Reed Rollerson, c. 1950s. *Greenwood Cultural Center, A Century of African-American Experience, Greenwood: Ruins, Resilience and Renaissance,* page 25 (courtesy Tulsa Historical Society).
**Greenwood Historic District**

**Name of Property**
Tulsa County, Oklahoma

**County and State**
N/A

**Name of multiple listing (if applicable)**

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**Photos of Deep Greenwood (Figures 26-30)** along the interurban (streetcar) tracks along N. Greenwood Avenue to Sand Springs in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From website created by Michael Bates, December 18, 2008. Bates found the photographs in the Tulsa Library’s online archive of the Beryl Ford collection of historic Tulsa photographs (late 1940s-early 1950s). The photographs show commercial, religious, and domestic properties dating to Greenwood’s reconstruction after the 1921 race massacre.

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**Figure 24**: Sand Springs interurban tracks, looking north from 100 block of Greenwood Avenue toward Vernon Chapel AME Church on right, c. late 1940s/early 1950s. Brick building on left demolished for I-244. [http://www.batesline.com/archives/2008/12/greenwoods-streetcar-the-sand-sp.html](http://www.batesline.com/archives/2008/12/greenwoods-streetcar-the-sand-sp.html)
Figure 25: North Greenwood Avenue and Sand Springs interurban tracks lined with houses and businesses, looking south toward Vernon Chapel (background left) and “Black Wall Street,” c. 1955.

[Link to image](http://www.batesline.com/archives/2008/12/greenwoods-streetcar-the-sand-sp.html)
Figure 2: 300 block of Greenwood Avenue south of Easton St. flanked by single family houses, groceries, and other neighborhood stores, c. 1955, looking north along Sand Springs interurban line. Sam and Lucy Mackey House (Mabel B. Little Heritage House) visible on left with clay tile roof and porch roof.

Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Figure 27: 400 block of N. Greenwood Avenue, north of Easton Street, mixed residential and commercial uses, looking north along San Springs interurban tracks toward Del Rio Hotel (center back), c. 1953. http://www.batesline.com/archives/2008/12/greenwoods-streetcar-the-sand-sp.html
Figure 28: Tulsa city bus on Easton St. west of Greenwood Avenue c. 1955, looking northwest. Rows of Craftsman bungalows built in the 1920s and 1930s shortly after the massacre of 1921.  
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 29: “Urban Renewal bulldozers demolish Black Wall Street businesses and the street’s history”
Caterpillar takes down the Del Rio Hotel, c. 1968
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0001
100 Block N. Greenwood Avenue: Commercial Strip from south at E. Archer Street, to north at IH-244, camera facing north
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0002
West Side 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources left to right, 1, 3, 6 & 7), camera facing northwest
OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0003
East Side 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources right to left, 2, 4, & 5), camera facing northeast
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0004
South Elevation Williams Building (Resource 1), 100 N. Greenwood Ave., and rear elevations of west side 100 block, camera facing north/northwest
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number  Photographs  Page  5

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0005
South Elevation Botkin Building (Resource 2), 101 N. Greenwood Ave., camera facing north/northeast
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs Page 6

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0006
West Side 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources left to right 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 3, & 1), camera facing south/southwest
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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<td>East Side 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources left to right 5, 4, &amp; 2), camera facing south/southeast</td>
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Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Photographs Page 8

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0008
Storefronts West Side 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave. (Resources 1, and visible east-facing 3, 6, & 7), camera facing north/northwest
Greenwood Historic District
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number
Photographs
Page 9

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0009
East and West sides 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave., camera facing south
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OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0011
Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (Resource 11), Primary (West) Elevation, camera facing east
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

United States Department of the Interior
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Section number Photographs Page 12

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0012
Vernon Chapel A.M.E. Church (left), (Site 11), and Sam and Lucy Mackey House (right) (Resource 12), 322 N. Greenwood Avenue, (looking south to commercial strip in 100 Block N. Greenwood Ave.), camera facing south/southwest
Greenwood Historic District

Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0013
Sam and Lucy Mackey House/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Resource 12), Primary (East) Elevation, camera facing west
OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0014
Sam and Lucy Mackey House/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Site 12), Oblique East and North Elevations, camera facing southwest
Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0015
Sam and Lucy Mackey House/Mabel B. Little House (Resource 12), North Elevation, camera facing south
Greenwood Historic District

Name of Property: Sam and Lucy Mackey House/Mabel B. Little Heritage House (Resource 12), South Elevation (Porte Cochere), camera facing north/northeast

OK_Tulsa County_Greenwood Historic District_0016

Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Greenwood Historic District

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number: Photographs Page 16

Greenwood Historic District
Name of Property
Tulsa County, Oklahoma
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)
Greenwood Historic District  
Mount Zion Baptist Church (Resource 13), Primary (North and West) Elevations, camera facing southeast