

Karlos K. Hill. 2021. *The Tulsa Race Massacre: A Photographic History*. University of Oklahoma Press, 274 pages.

Dr. Karlos Hill's powerful but stark pictorial history is dedicated to the victims and survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. It deserves a place on the shelf of every person in Oklahoma and everyone who is interested in racial justice. Never again will the people of Oklahoma be able to turn away from the gruesome history of the Tulsa Race Massacre and its aftermath.

The forward to the book is written by Oklahoma State Senator Kevin Matthews who is the Founder and Chair of the 1921 Race Massacre Centennial Commission. He notes that Oklahoma is the only state in which the first Black president – Barack Obama – did not win even one county in the 2008 Presidential Election, suggesting that the political climate of the State of Oklahoma may not have changed so much in the last 100 years. He also notes that Oklahoma is eager to commemorate the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing of the Murrah Federal Building yet the Tulsa Race Massacre which killed and affected many more people went unknown and unrecognized for many decades within the state.

The introduction to the book is important for people not familiar with the events of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Many details of the events are retold. Important is the debate about the change of label from "Race Riot," as it was known until the last few years, to "Race Massacre" which more properly describes the events. The book itself is a spare presentation of the photos and information but it is fully footnoted for readers who want to dig deeper into the information. Maps of the Greenwood area of Tulsa are also provided.

The corpus of the book is photographs. They are arranged chronologically and put into six chapters: "The Massacre,"

“Internment,” “Angels of Mercy,” “Refugees,” “Rebuilding and Renaissance,” and “Remembering the Survivors.”

The photos of Greenwood before the Massacre are haunting because it is known to the reader that these solid brick buildings and smiling faces are fleeting. They cannot last in an America that seek their annihilation. For example, the Williams Dreamland Theater opened in 1914 as the first Black movie theater in Tulsa and one of the only Black entertainment spaces in the state. Its sign will be familiar to those who watched the HBO drama “Watchman” which set scenes during the Tulsa Race Massacre. Even the name of the theater evokes a nostalgia for a time where Black spaces were allowed to exist unmenaced. The “dream” was not to last. Other photos show smiling Black people in dress clothes in shiny cars, solid wood-sided houses, and brick school buildings. In other words, an affluent or at least solidly middle-class Black oasis once existed in the Greenwood District of Tulsa. This Black oasis was an affront to racist whites. As Walter White wrote in *The Nation* in 1921, “This fact has caused a bitter resentment on the part of the lower order of whites, who feel that these colored men, members of an ‘inferior race,’ are exceedingly presumptuous in achieving greater economic prosperity than they who are members of a divinely ordered superior race.”

In “The Massacre” section, the photos are disturbing. The quotes from survivors are disturbing. Survivor Rosa Davis Skinner’s husband told her, “I don’t know what it’s going to be, but it’s going to be some kind of destruction” (p. 32). During that summer, racially motivated violence hung in the air. By 1921, 31 people had been lynched in Oklahoma and 26 of these people were Black. The 2001 novel *Fire in Beulah* by Rilla Askew captures in fiction the anxiety that was felt. In 1920, white taxi driver Roy Belton was lynched in Tulsa. The next day, a Black man named Claude Chandler was taken from the Oklahoma County jail and lynched seemingly in retaliation. Fear hung over both communities. When the young Black man Dick Rowland bumped into a white woman

in an elevator in Tulsa, that was all the provocation that was needed for the tinderbox of hatred to explode into destructive violence. The photos in this book show elderly Black people shot dead and their bodies burned. The photos also show white people standing idly by or guarding their piles of new possessions looted from Black homes with their shotguns.

If the Race Massacre and burning of Greenwood wasn't bad enough, after the massacre, Black people were rounded up and interred at locations like the Convention Hall (now the Tulsa Theater) and the Tulsa Fair Grounds. As many as 500 white men were deputized during the Race Massacre to kill and round up about 4000 Black people in trucks and wagons. The Oklahoma National Guard marched Black people to McNulty Ball Park for "protection" (p. 114). Black people were detained until a white person such as an employer could sign for them. Once vouched for, Black workers were tagged with a large oaktag sign that said "WORKMAN." Many Black Tulsans who owned their own businesses or never worked for white people had to identify a white friend or someone else to come and vouch. The Red Cross passed out Identification Cards for Black people that they were forced to carry and show to white people and the police.

As the 100th Anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre recedes into our memories, we must seek to refresh and renew our horror at the events. This volume of photographs and memories is the perfect tool to remember with frankness and clarity what happened in Tulsa on June 1, 1921.

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