

Black Wall Street: Triumph in Tragedy

Ellie Clark & Nina Crean

NHD Group Documentary

Ms. Zelenka

January 12, 2023

Process Paper: 402 Words

Process Paper

We heard about Black Wall Street in history class last year during Black History Month and wanted to research the topic further. We chose our topic because we believed it fit the theme well. The story of how Black Tulsans created their own successful economy in a white-dominated society stood out to us as a frontier in history. Greenwood residents thrived despite facing racism and strict segregation laws in the early 1900s. Collectively, they managed to build one of the wealthiest African-American communities in the United States. The district thrived with over 70 businesses owned by Black entrepreneurs, many of whom were ancestors of slaves. Some buildings on the avenue were grocery stores while others were restaurants, hotels, barbers, newspapers, libraries, lawyers, dentists, or doctors' offices. Turned away by other white-owned businesses in Tulsa, these pioneers had to start from scratch and develop their own economy. As the community rebuilt Black Wall Street after the Tulsa Race Massacre, we recognized Greenwood's ability to overcome white supremacy and hatred, and saw it as an inspiration to future generations.

To conduct our research, we began by referring back to a New York Times interactive article that our history teacher had previously shared with us. It was the source that inspired us to choose Black Wall Street as our topic. Furthermore, we explored The Library of Congress's collection of primary sources. After compiling our sources, we grouped our notes into common themes in order to create sub-claims and formulate a thesis statement. Once we drafted an outline, we transformed our ideas into a written script and made edits based on our teacher's feedback. Lastly, we recorded a voiceover and added in our images, video footage, and text using iMovie.

Our historical argument was that although segregation laws prevented the Black community from participating in the white-dominated economy, Black Wall Street challenged social norms as the Black entrepreneurs pioneered economic independence and the community came together to overcome white jealousy.

Our topic is significant in history because the Black Tulsans in Greenwood served as an example that Black Americans could overcome racially motivated hatred and violence. Additionally, the success of the community's economy encouraged future Black entrepreneurs. The Black Wall Street Festival, held in the Greenwood district today, raises awareness and carries on the legacy of Black Wall Street's citizens by remembering the Tulsa Massacre. This festival shares the stories of Black Tulsans to inspire hope.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

American Red Cross. "Photo Album of the Tulsa Massacre and Aftermath." National Archives Catalog. Last modified 1881-1982. Digital Public Library of America.

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/157688056>.

This photo album was part of the Condensed Report from the Tulsa Chapter, American Red Cross Disaster Relief. It shows a collection of photos which depict the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Massacre and its relief programs. We used this source as a visual in our documentary to expose the damage of the massacre and to convey the perseverance of Black Tulsans as they began to rebuild Greenwood.

"Burning Building and Bystanders." Oklahoma State University-Tulsa. Special Collections and Archives. Last modified 1921. Digital Public Library of America.

<https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/TulsaRR/id/339/rec/16>.

This photograph was published by Oklahoma State University-Tulsa and is included in a collection called the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The image displays white males dressed in suits with their backs faced away from a cloud of smoke that was a result of the massacre. We used this photo to show the injustice of the Tulsa Race Massacre through the white bystanders.

Gates, Eddie F. "Pinback Button Promoting Reparations for the Tulsa Race Massacre ." Smithsonian Institution. Last modified 2001. Digital Public Library of America.

https://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID=nmaahc_2014.117.2&repo=DP&LA.

This photograph was included in the Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and is owned by Eddie Faye Gates. The image is of a pin which says "Reparations now!" on it in reference to the Tulsa Race Massacre. We used this image in our documentary to show how people continue to fight for justice.

Jones Parrish, Mary E. "Events of the Tulsa Disaster." New York Public Library. Last modified 1922. Digital Public Library of America.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6725ea00-cad9-0139-23b5-0242ac110002#/?uuid=98261810-208d-013a-5279-0242ac110003>.

This book, titled "Events of the Tulsa Disaster," by Mary E. Jones Parrish includes text and images of Black Wall Street. Parrish described her impressions of Greenwood and the lessons it taught her. We used her words to demonstrate the success and legacy of Black Wall Street as a community in our documentary.

"Photograph of Destruction in Greenwood After the Tulsa Race Massacre." Smithsonian

Institution. Last modified 1921. Digital Public Library of America.

https://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID=nmaahc_2019.95.7&repo=DP_LA.

This photograph was included in a Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture which was gifted by Cassandra P. Johnson Smith. Although the creator is unidentified, the image shows the destruction of a building, which was left as only a foundation of a building, after the Tulsa Race Massacre. This photo was further proof of the injustice of the massacre, which explains the perseverance it took to rebuild Greenwood.

"Ruins of the Tulsa Race Massacre, 1921." Oklahoma State University-Tulsa. Special Collections and Archives. Last modified June 6, 1921. Digital Public Library of America. <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/TulsaRR/id/366/rec/1>.

This photograph was published by the Oklahoma State University-Tulsa and is a part of The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 Collection. The image reveals the destruction of the Greenwood community in Tulsa, and shows the remains of homes and buildings that were burned to the ground by white mobs. We included this photo in our documentary because we believed that it would resonate with viewers and speak to the tragedy of this race riot.

"Signing of the 'Jim Crow' Law in the First Legislature." Oklahoma Historical Society. Last modified December 18, 1907. <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc231947/>. This photograph is part of the Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph collection, and its creator has yet to be identified. The photo depicts the members of the first legislature as they sign the "Jim Crow" bill for the state of Oklahoma. We included this image as a visual in our documentary because it illustrates the lack of representation that Black Americans had in the U.S. government, and it shows how the government passed racist legislation in order to preserve white supremacy.

Secondary Sources:

"Black Wall Street Legacy Festival." Legacy. Accessed January 7, 2023.

<https://www.blackwallstreetlegacyfest.com>.

This website promotes the Black Wall Street festival, which commemorates the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. It is led by survivors and descendants, which makes it even more special and impactful to learn about. We used this source as an example of Black Wall Street's legacy, as the speakers continued to spread awareness, hope, and inspiration to their audience based on the story of Greenwood.

Fain, Kimberly. "The Devastation of Black Wall Street." JSTOR Daily. Last modified July 5,

2017. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-devastation-of-black-wall-street/>.

This article from JSTOR Daily describes the motives and background of the Tulsa Race Massacre. In our documentary, we used this source to help explain how Black Wall Street was created because Black Tulsans fought back against the treatment they received in their own homeland. If their current society refused to treat them equally, they would create their own community in which all their needs would be met.

Johnson, Hannibal B. "Black Wall Street." History Workshop. Last modified February 15, 2021. <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/black-wall-street/>.

This article was written by Hannibal B. Johnson and was published on History Workshop. The source goes into detail about Black Tulsans' response to the Tulsa Race Massacre, specifically how they rebuilt Greenwood. In our documentary, we used this source to prove the citizens' perseverance, since they rebuilt hundreds of businesses.

Messer, Chris M. "The Destruction of Black Wall Street: Tulsa's 1921 Riot and the Eradication of Accumulated Wealth." Wiley Online Library. Last modified October 29, 2018. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajes.12225>.

This article was written by Chris M. Messer and was published on Wiley Online Library. We focused on the source's description of the wealth and prosperity of Black Wall Street before the massacre. Specifically, we used its examples of the many jobs and specialized workers in Greenwood in order to show the success of Black Wall Street.

"Ottawa W. Gurley." Black Wall Street. Last modified, 2023. <http://blackwallstreet.org/owgurley>.

This source focuses on Ottawa W. Gurley, one of the founders of Black Wall Street. It explains OW's vision for Greenwood and the 40 acres of land he purchased with his partner in order to make Black Wall Street possible. We used this information as background to set the stage for our documentary and our topic.

"Plessy V. Ferguson (1896)." National Archives. Last modified February 8, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/plessy-v-ferguson>.

This document from The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration summarizes the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court Case of 1896 and also provides a transcript of the judgment. We used this source to help us better understand the results of the trial and how the ruling upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation. We included this source as part of our background information.

Halbersma, Amanda. "Remembering 'Black Wall Street.'" Wells Fargo Stories. Last modified May 28, 2021. <https://stories.wf.com/remembering-black-wall-street/>.

This article was written by Amanda Halbersma and published by Wells Fargo which participates in the national recognition and commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre through a grant which aims to rebuild the legacy of Black Wall Street. The article summarizes the events of the Tulsa Race Massacre, and raises awareness to acknowledge Greenwood's resilience. We used this source to discuss the legacy of Black Wall Street and to commemorate the massacre.

Singhvi, Anjali. "What The Tulsa Race Massacre Destroyed." The New York Times. Last modified May 24, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/24/us/tulsa-race-massacre.html>.

This interactive New York Times article shares the story of the Tulsa Race Massacre and includes a 3-D model of Tulsa Oklahoma to show all that the massacre destroyed. This article inspired our project as it was one of the very first sources we came across. We also used interactive visuals from the 3-D model in our documentary to make viewers aware of Black Wall Street's success and prosperity.

Sims, Vince. "Remembering Tulsa's Black Wall Street." NBC Dallas-Fort Worth. Last modified June 18, 2020.

<https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/remembering-tulsas-black-wall-street/2391537/>.

This news special was created by Vince Sims and published by NBCUniversal Media. It includes historical footage from Black Wall Street which shows various Black owned businesses, and also tells the Greenwood community's story. We used video clips from this source as visuals in our documentary, as well as anecdotes from news reporters who covered the story in order to further our understanding of Greenwood.

Smallwood, James M. "The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture: Segregation." Oklahoma Historical Society. Accessed December 7, 2022.

<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SE006>.

This entry in The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture describes the history of segregation in Oklahoma. We used this document to enhance our background information. It helped us to better understand our topic because it exposes the racist ideology that was embedded in Oklahoma culture and fueled the Tulsa Race Massacre.

The Tulsa Race Massacre: 100 Years Later. Human Rights Watch, 2021,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxMu6J9ufms&t=68s>. Video.

This video was posted by the Human Rights Watch on YouTube. It captures parts of Black Wall Street's Legacy Festival, and features descendants of victims of the Tulsa Race Massacre. We used a segment of this video to close our documentary because it spreads hope and indicates the importance of sharing Greenwood's story in order to carry on its legacy.

Wills, Shomari. *Black Fortunes: The Story of the First Six African Americans Who Escaped Slavery and Became Billionaires*. New York, NY: HarperCollins's Amistad Press, 2018, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/origins-black-wall-street/>.

This book was written by Shomari Wills and shares the story of Ottawa W. Gurley who developed the Greenwood district. We used this source to tell the story of Gurley who escaped slavery and became a millionaire. We chose to include this source because it connected our topic to the theme by painting Gurley as a pioneer.