

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2020		97	United States	Reparations for 1921 Tulsa massacre

Announcement

A petition was launched to support a lawsuit demanding reparations for the so-called **Tulsa Race Massacre of 31 May 1921**, in which, historians estimate, as many as 300 may have died.

Please urgently sign this petition [HERE](#).

Please find below:

- (1) a NCH summary of the case and
- (2) the text of the petition itself.

On 29 May 2020, Human Rights Watch published a report making the case for reparations in Tulsa. The full report can be accessed [here](#).

NCH SUMMARY OF THE 1921 TULSA MASSACRE CASE

Between 31 May and 1 June 1921, a white mob invaded the Black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The trigger of the attack had been a call to lynch a black man for assaulting a white woman based on flimsy evidence. Some historians put the massacre's death toll at 300, but only now, nearly one century later, a search for mass graves has begun. No one has been held accountable for the massacre. For decades, this massacre was absent from Oklahoma history books, but from fall 2020, the massacre will be a part of Oklahoma school curriculum.

In 2001, Oklahoma's "Tulsa Race Riot Commission" had recommended that Oklahoma and Tulsa issue reparations to the survivors of the massacre and their descendants but it was ignored. However, the Tulsa Reparations Coalition, formed in April 2001, began to gain national traction. In 2003, a legal team filed a civil lawsuit (*Alexander v. Oklahoma*) against Tulsa, the Tulsa Police Department, and Oklahoma on behalf of then more than 200 survivors and descendants of victims of the massacre. The federal district and appellate courts in Oklahoma dismissed the claims because the statute of limitations (their window to present their claims) had expired. The United States Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

A June 2020 petition tried to persuade Congress to lift the statute of limitations from any reparations claim. On 1 September 2020, a group of Oklahomans, led by 105-year-old survivor Lessie Benningfield Randle, filed a lawsuit demanding reparations and arguing that racial inequality in Tulsa today can be traced back to the 1921 massacre.

Sources: "[Reparations for 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors and Descendants](#)" (petition to State of Oklahoma, City of Tulsa, and U.S. Congress) ([June] 2020) [see also [NCH Campaign](#)]; Ed Pilkington, "[Trump Rally in Tulsa Spurs Renewed Call for 1921 Racial Massacre Reparations](#)," *The Guardian* (18 June 2020); Adam Gabbatt, "[Woman, 105, Leads Lawsuit Seeking Reparations for 1921 Tulsa Massacre](#)," *The Guardian* (1 September 2020); Human Rights Watch, [The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Human Rights Argument](#) (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020; 73 pages); Maurice Willows, [Disaster Relief Report – Riot June 1921](#) ([Washington: American Red Cross, 30 December 1921; 100 pages); District Court for Tulsa County, State of Oklahoma, [Joe Lockard versus T.D. Evans, Mayor and Others](#) (petition 23 August 1921).

TEXT OF THE PETITION

Reparations for 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors and Descendants

Robert Turner started this petition to State of Oklahoma, **City of Tulsa, and U.S. Congress**

Background

In a span of about 24 hours between May 31 and June 1, 1921, a white mob's merciless invasion of the prosperous Black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma, resulted in one of the worst episodes of racial violence and economic devastation in United States history – the Tulsa Race Massacre. The mob, some of whom had been deputized and armed by city officials, descended on Greenwood, a successful Black economic hub then known as “Black Wall Street,” and burned it to the ground – businesses, homes, churches, a school and a library. Property damage amounts to tens of millions in today's dollars. Some estimates put the death toll at 300, but only now, nearly 100 years later, is a search for mass graves underway. City officials actively blocked Black Tulsans' efforts to rebuild, after promising full restoration and restitution. Neither Greenwood nor Tulsa has ever been the same since. For decades, the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre was absent from Oklahoma history books. Many people in the United States have never heard of it and it was purposely not taught in schools. Beginning in Fall 2020, the massacre will be a part of Oklahoma school curriculum.

In 2001, the State of Oklahoma's “Tulsa Race Riot Commission” recommended that the state of Oklahoma and city of Tulsa issue reparations to the survivors of the massacre and their descendants. A campaign for legal justice formed in April of 2001, the Tulsa Reparations Coalition, began to gain national traction. In 2003, a legal team comprised of prominent civil rights leaders filed a civil lawsuit, *Alexander v. Oklahoma*, against the city of Tulsa, the Tulsa Police Department, and the state of Oklahoma on behalf of more than 200 survivors and descendants of victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Despite expressing “no comfort or satisfaction in the result,” the federal district and appellate courts in Oklahoma dismissed the claims because the statute of limitations (their window to present their claims) had expired. The US Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

Why is this important?

Justice was never delivered at the federal or state level.

There are only two known living survivors of the massacre, one residing in Tulsa (Lessie Benningfield Randle, 105) and the other in Bartlesville (Viola Fletcher, 106). State and city officials should ensure that people affected by the massacre can pursue their claims in court without being time-barred.

Call to Action

We, the undersigned, call on the City of Tulsa and State of Oklahoma to make full reparations to the survivors, descendants, and surviving institutions of the Greenwood Community (churches, businesses, schools, etc.) from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. We also call on the State of Oklahoma to pass legislation to clear legal hurdles, such as the statute of limitations, to civil claims related to the massacre.