

RESOLUTION

Urging Congress to take action to redress the lasting devastation caused by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

WHEREAS, 2021 marks the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre, which remains one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history killing many people and destroying numerous lives; and

WHEREAS, In 1921 the Greenwood area of Tulsa was a prosperous Black community, commonly known as “the Black Wall Street”. Most of the black residents of Tulsa lived in the neighborhood where they had created their own businesses and services in the enclave to escape the segregated and racially tense atmosphere that existed in Tulsa. Black owned grocers, newspapers, movie theatres, nightclubs and churches, existed and thrived in Greenwood; and

WHEREAS, On May 30th, 1921, a Black teenager named Dick Rowland entered an elevator at the Drexel Building, operated by a white elevator operator, Sarah Paige. It was reported that a scream had occurred, with some assuming some type of assault occurring. The next day police arrested Rowland, although in later investigations such allegations were proven to be false; and

WHEREAS, Rumors spread by white owned newspapers of the occurrence, and as evening fell a violent white mob gathered outside the courthouse in an attempt to lynch Rowland. A group of Black residents also gathered at the courthouse to offer aid in protecting Rowland. As tension grew, members of the white mob attempted to break into a National Guard Armory. At the height of the standoff, shots were fired, and chaos broke out as many retreated to Greenwood; and

WHEREAS, Over the next 18 hours of June 1st, thousands of white Tulsa residents flooded into the Greenwood District, looting and burning homes and businesses over an area of 35 city blocks. These groups of white Tulsans, which included some that were deputized and given weapons by city officials, committed numerous acts of violence against the Black residents of Greenwood; and

WHEREAS, An estimate from the Red Cross found some 1,256 houses were burned; 215 others were looted but not burned. Numerous institutions of the community were destroyed, including the two newspapers, a school, a library, a hospital, churches, hotels, stores and many other Black-owned businesses were among the buildings destroyed or damaged by fire. By the time the Governor J.B.A Robertson had declared martial law and deployed the National Guard on June 2nd, the riot had already dissipated, and the damage was already done; and

WHEREAS, The true level of the devastation caused by the massacre has not been known, but in 2001 a report authored by the Oklahoma Race Massacre Commission, concluded that between 100 and 300 people were killed and more than 8,000 people made homeless over those 18 hours in 1921; and

WHEREAS, The devastation continues to be exposed, with mass unmarked graves of the Black victims being unearthed and victims exhumed as recently as June 7th of this year; and

WHEREAS, Although numerous committees and subcommittees have been formed to study the impact of the Tulsa Race Massacre, none of the survivors or their descendants have never received direct compensation for Massacre-related harms; and

WHEREAS, on May 19th, 2021, the surviving victims of the Massacre testified before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties. Viola Fletcher, Hughes Vann Ellis, and Lessie Benningfield Randle spoke of their traumatic experiences and their continued fight for justice and reparations for their families; and

WHEREAS, As we continue to recognize and condemn the continued legacy of racism in America; there must also be a push for redress for survivors and their descendants who not only live with the Trauma that occurred in 1921, but the continued racial disparities that persist in Tulsa and America today; now, therefore it be

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby urges Congress to take action to redress the lasting devastation caused by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.