

## **Mayor Nichols' A Road to Repair**

**June 1, 2025 at 3:30 p.m.**

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### **Recognition, Reconciliation, Repair, Renewal, Righteousness**

To Mother Fletcher, Mother Randle, descendants of Greenwood, Deputy Mayor Reyes, members of the City Council, other elected officials, special guests, clergy, my fellow Tulsans, and visitors from across the country, welcome and thank you for being here.

In the 61st Chapter of the Book of Isaiah, we find the words, "Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, And instead of confusion, they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore, in their land, they shall possess double. Everlasting Joy shall be theirs."

For 104 years, the Tulsa Race Massacre has been a stain on our city's history. While hidden from history books for decades, the darkness of the events of May 31 and June 1, 1921, has now been well documented.

A 2001 State Commission, numerous books and personal accounts, and more recently, a United States Department of Justice investigation documenting the horror of that less than 24-hour period that changed everything.

### **Greenwood and the Massacre**

Suppose we were to rewind history 104 years and 2 days. In that case, we are standing in a nationally renowned entrepreneurial center—a city within a city where places like the Dreamland Theater, the Stradford Hotel, grocery stores, and doctor's offices flourished. At the same time, churches provided the foundation of faith needed to thrive in a segregated society.

But at this hour, on June 1, 1921, smoke darkened the Tulsa sky, rising from 35 blocks of Greenwood that were burned to the ground. In less than 24 hours, 1,100 Black homes and businesses were lost. Thousands of people were left destitute, homeless, or forced into camps.

The Massacre still stands as the only documented domestic aerial assault on an American city - yet no arrests were made—no proper accounting of the dead. A death toll believed to be more than 300 but was only reported as 36 killed by local officials at the time.

Mother Fletcher and Mother Randle were witnesses to those dark moments. They, with their families, had to flee the home they had built and a community that had within it every possibility of a bright and prosperous future. Before their 10th birthdays, they saw the face of evil, hate, and domestic terrorism.

Since then, they have boldly pursued justice, and although at times met with indifference, they have inspired all of us as the keepers of the Dream of Greenwood, reminding us never to give up and not grow weary.

Mother Fletcher, Mother Randle - for what you have endured, the mantle you continue to carry, for your grace - as mayor, I say thank you.

### **Time to Act**

The Massacre was indeed fueled by hate and robbed not only Black Tulsans of their future but our entire city.

Imagine a city without the Massacre.

- Imagine if Greenwood would have continued to thrive uninterrupted;
- Imagine what that would have meant for our economy;
- Imagine what it would have meant for outcomes for our children;
- Imagine what it would have meant for public safety and;
- Most importantly, imagine the Trust and faith we would have built in each other over these last 104 years.

There is not one Tulsan, regardless of their skin color, who wouldn't be better off today had the Massacre not happened or if generations before had done the work to restore what was lost.

Instead, the Massacre was hidden from history books only to be followed by the intentional actions of redlining, a highway built to suffocate the economic vitality and perpetual underinvestment from local, state, and federal governments.

### **The Road to Repair & The Greenwood Trust**

Given all of this, our city remains resilient. Our community has been working to bind the wounds left open for ten decades. We have worked to recognize and remember, but now it's time to restore.

The Department of Justice's report, while laying out the undeniable facts of the Massacre, does seem to suggest that justice - in the context of the Massacre - will always be acquainted with an asterisk. No perpetrator of the Massacre is still living, and the statute of limitations for crimes has long ago lapsed - providing no obvious legal avenue to hold the guilty fully accountable. Additionally, 104 years later, there has been no recourse for

businesses whose claims were denied by insurance companies. Every promise made by elected officials to help rebuild Greenwood at the time was broken.

So, decades later, we are left with the hard facts, some deep frustration, and an awareness of the limitations we have.

Given everything we know, we must, as President Biden said on his visit to Tulsa four years ago on this very day in this same place, "find the courage to change the things we know we can change."

For years, residents have come together to consider ways to move our city forward. Descendants and other community members have laid the groundwork, and I am deeply appreciative of the work of the:

- City of Tulsa's Greater Tulsa Area African American Affairs Commission;
- The City's Beyond Apology Commission;
- The 1921 Graves Public Oversight Committee;
- The leadership of the Greenwood Cultural Center and Greenwood Rising; and
  - Community Advocates like Justice for Greenwood and the Deep Greenwood Foundation

These commissions, organizations, and advocates have all been pushing toward unity and justice, resulting in several recommended actions that arrived at my desk just weeks after I took office.

And as the calls for repair continue to mount, **we** can no longer ignore the voices of unity and progress.

I thank Senator James Lankford for his efforts to keep the story of Greenwood alive in the halls of Congress as he works to make the Greenwood District a national monument. I look forward to working with Congressman Hern on making this a reality as the bill heads to the United States House of Representatives.

With all the work to date as a backdrop and on my 104th day in office, I signed an Executive Order recognizing June 1 as Tulsa Race Massacre Observance Day in the city of Tulsa.

On this first Tulsa Race Massacre Day of Observance, I am pleased to announce that my office has been collaborating with our legal department on the establishment of the **Greenwood Trust. This private, charitable Trust** will raise and facilitate the investment of \$105 million in private funds along our Road to Repair for restoration and righteousness.

With the descendants of Greenwood victims at the center, the Trust will invest in:

- **Affordable Housing and Homeownership:** Raise a \$24 million fund to invest in alignment with the Beyond the Apology Commission Recommendations.
- **Cultural and Historic Preservation:** Invest \$60 million to preserve Greenwood's history through place-based projects, surviving entities, and cultural landmarks.
- **Economic Development and Education:** Establishing a \$21 million endowment for educational scholarships, small business grants, no-interest business loans, and continuing the work of bringing closure to families through our commitment to finding victims buried in mass graves.

For the next 12 months, the Trust will be in a planning year focused on raising **private** capital, setting up its programs to be overseen by a Board of Trustees and a Board of Advisors to be appointed over this year **and** on or before June 1, 2026, the Trust will be fully operational and making investments to restore the Greenwood District and Tulsa to the community we **should** have been.

We will find the courage to change the things we know we can change, and that work starts here today.

In addition to this historic announcement today, I've also committed to standing alongside our community advocates, who have been fighting for justice for years.

Today, at the recommendation of Justice for Greenwood, I will be releasing more than **45,000 historical and relevant records** directly related to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre that have not been shared publicly up to this point.

It is time this part of our history is no longer shrouded in the shadows but fully understood and brought to light. These documents can now be found at [www.cityoftulsa.org/roadtorepair](http://www.cityoftulsa.org/roadtorepair)

As mayor, I also recognize the need to continue our 1921 Graves Investigation. In my budget proposal to the Council in April, I presented a budget to continue the excavation work in Oaklawn Cemetery, which experts say is necessary to uncover the truth. At this point in our investigation, nearly 200 graves not previously known to us have been found, and more than 40 sets of remains are in different stages of the DNA and genealogy process. One individual has been identified from those excavations - a veteran, Mr. C.L. Daniel, and we're confident we're very close to identifying more victims. Our effort is not to assign blame or to simply "dig up the past" but to bring closure to families of the victims - why? Because that's what decent people and great societies do.

## **What the Means in the Broader American Story**

On March 7 of this year, I stood on the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on the 60th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. On that bridge, I met with Freedom Riders, many of them in wheelchairs. I shook each of their hands to thank them for their courage—the courage to act—and introduced myself as the Mayor of Tulsa. It was the tears in their eyes and the firmness with which they hugged me that I understood our story is not just a Tulsa story but an American story. Today marks the beginning of a new chapter for our city and, indeed, a new opportunity for our entire country.

The Greenwood story is one of a people defying the odds and achieving the American Dream. They made a way out of no way. The Massacre is a reminder that, in the words of Winston Churchill, *"To build may have to be a slow and laborious task of years. To destroy can be the act of a single day"*. We now begin that laborious task of building once again.

This effort is not an example of a quest to inflict harm on those who had no culpability in the events of the Massacre, but we gather together to speak with one voice that hate - even aged 104 years will never win. This is not the age-old battle of black versus white or the more contemporary battle of red versus blue. This *is* about putting those petty divisions and outdated thinking behind us and pressing on together.

This effort is about reconciliation, repair, renewal, and righteousness. Make no mistake - this is not a question about your politics. This is a question of faith and us finding our way back to each other.

### **Today marks the beginning of a new chapter for our city.**

Some will say why, after 104 years, others will say that 104 years later is not enough. I see the argument from both sides while also offering a counterargument. Greatness is not defined by perfection. The pursuit for better defines greatness - a people that will look back 104 years and dare to be better - dare to come together to face a complicated past and commit to each other for a better future. On this day, in this place, greatness is defined by us - the story of us.

The Greenwood Trust is the next big step on our Road to Repair - a road **we**, as Tulsans, as Oklahomans, and as Americans, boldly travel together. Not compelled by law, but resolved in our commitment to ensure that our tomorrows are far better than our yesterdays.

*"If the House is to be set in order, one cannot begin with the present; he must begin with the past"* - those are the words of Tulsan John Hope Franklin. It's time we set this house of ours in order.

*"Instead of your shame, you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion, they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore, in their land, they shall possess double. Everlasting joy shall be theirs".*

*It has been said that "great difficulties accompany all great and honorable actions, and both must be overcome with answerable courage."*

We are a great city with a proud and complicated past. I pray God instills in all of us the courage to change the things we know we can change.

God Bless the souls lost in the Massacre. God Bless those survivors who remain. God Bless the descendants who still fight for justice. God Bless our great city of Tulsa, the state we call home, and this great country whose ideals continue to inspire in us the pursuit of a more perfect union.

Thank you.