Executive produced by NBA superstar and philanthropist Russell Westbrook and directed by Peabody and Emmy-Award® winning director Stanley Nelson and Peabody and duPont-Award winner Marco Williams, Tulsa Burning commemorates the 100th anniversary of the horrific Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, one of the worst acts of racial violence in American history, and calls attention to the previously ignored but necessary repair of a town once devastated.

In the 1920s, the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, also known as Black Wall Street, was one of the most prosperous African American communities in the United States. Filled with booming businesses and thriving entrepreneurs, the district served as a mecca of Black ingenuity and promise, until the evening of May 31, 1921, which marked the start of the devastating Tulsa Race Massacre. More than thirty-five city blocks were burned to the ground and hundreds of Black city dwellers were killed. The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 is one of the most tragic moments in our nation's history, yet this harrowing event is largely unknown to many Americans. Suppressed for decades, this story needs to be told.

“Tulsa Burning: The 1921 Race Massacre” takes an in-depth, sobering look at the tragic events of a century ago and focuses on a specific period, from the birth of Black Wall Street, to its catastrophic downfall over the course of two bloody days, and finally the fallout and reconstruction. The documentary also follows the city's current-day grave excavation efforts at Oaklawn Cemetery where numerous unmarked coffins of victims who were killed and buried during the massacre have been recovered. It will also feature rare archival footage and imagery from the time, coupled with commentary and interviews from numerous historians, city leaders, and activists, including the Tulsa Historical Society & Museum, the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission and the Historic Vernon A.M.E. Church, among others.

Join the Conversation:
Contribute to the conversation using #RememberTulsa. The guidelines below can help provide a framework for group discussions of this history and its legacy.
DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RACISM, RACIAL VIOLENCE AND BIAS FACILITATION GUIDELINES

- Parents and educators/facilitators can start conversations by presenting some guidelines formally or informally, and moving the dialogue forward.
- Acknowledgment and understanding are key to beginning conversations and racism, racial violence and bias.
- These conversations can be formal or informal, but the important part is that everyone finds a supportive environment to talk.
- Listen first, speak second. In a thoughtful conversation, everyone has valuable opinions; let’s listen carefully before we speak.
- Remember trauma. These topics are very difficult for many people, especially African Americans and other people of color or marginalized groups. Create space for those who might not be able to engage because of this trauma, or those who engage differently.
- Empathy is key. Racism and violence bias has left a lasting legacy of pain with many individuals and communities. While we may not fully understand it, we should know it exists and extend empathy toward others.
- Don’t expect perfection. None of us have the perfect words to describe how we feel. Encourage everyone in the discussion to be sensitive to multiple perspectives.
- Don’t just call people out; call them in. Try to build bridges for future conversations, relationships and actions. Try to leave the conversation with everyone feeling more connected than when they started.

After watching all or parts of this documentary, viewers may wonder how they can get involved and help make progress on issues of racism and the legacy of racialized violence.

- **Start a conversation.** Talking to one another about history and the legacy of events such as the Tulsa Race massacre is an important first step. Pass this history on.
- **Go deeper.** Explore more history and context. Learn more about where America has been on issues of race and bigotry, and what solutions are being proposed. By learning more about these issues, all of us can be better informed about how to make progress. Share what you have learned.
- **Stay connected.** Connect with people or organizations in your community who are building bridges across lines of race, religion or nationality.

**Setting the Stage: Background information:**

View this article to learn about the history of Black Wall Street and entrepreneurs such as O.W. Gurley, A.J. Smitherman, and Mabel Little: [Entrepreneurs Who Helped Build Tulsa’s Black Wall Street](https://9entrepreneurswhohelpedbuildtulsa). View additional background about Tulsa at the time of the massacre from the Oklahoma Historical Society: [Tulsa Race Massacre | The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture (okhistory.org)](https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/articles/bs/bs-tulmaracemassacro).
By 1921, Tulsa was a growing, prosperous city with a population of more than 100,000 people. The city was highly segregated, with most of the city’s 10,000 Black residents living in a neighborhood called Greenwood. Founded in 1906, Greenwood was developed on Indian Territory, the vast area where Native American tribes had been forced to relocate, which encompasses much of modern-day Eastern Oklahoma. Some formerly enslaved African Americans who were integrated into tribal communities acquired allotted land in Greenwood through the Dawes Act, a U.S. law that gave land to individual Native Americans. And many Black sharecroppers fleeing racial oppression relocated to the region as well, in search of a better life after the Civil War. O.W. Gurley, a wealthy Black landowner, purchased 40 acres of land in Tulsa, naming it Greenwood after the town in Mississippi. Gurley began developing Greenwood. Then word began to spread about opportunities for Blacks in Greenwood and many relocated to the community, seeking opportunity.

Eventually, Greenwood became one of the most affluent Black communities in the country. On Greenwood Avenue, there were shops, restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, jewelry and clothing stores, movie theaters, barbershops and salons, a library, and offices for doctors, lawyers and dentists. Greenwood also had its own school system, post office, a savings and loan bank, hospital, and bus and taxi service.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can prompt group discussions or essays related to the topics covered in the documentary.

- How were African Americans able to acquire land in the former Indian Territory?
- What were the Black towns, and what were some of the reasons they were important to African American families?
- Why did African Americans and Native Americans not want Oklahoma to become a state? How did life change for them after statehood?
- Why do you think Booker T. Washington called Greenwood the Black “Wall Street?”
- Hundreds of Black Owned Businesses thrived in Greenwood. How has the legacy of Greenwood influenced successive generations of entrepreneurs?
- Greenwood is described as a “city within a city” in this documentary. What do you think that phrase means? Why did African Americans have to form a “city within a city”? What were some of the characteristics of Greenwood?
- Why do you think it was important for African American communities to publish newspapers? What role did the Black press play during the time of the Tulsa Massacre? What was the role of the White press in the Tulsa Massacre?
- Why do you think African American WWI veterans were so threatening to Whites in Tulsa?
• What are some of the reasons Black residents of Greenwood weren’t reimbursed for their losses after the massacre?
• Why was it important for Black residents of Greenwood to begin rebuilding immediately after the massacre, and what does this say about the community?
• Reverend Dr. Turner speaks of the fact that survivors of the massacre never found justice. What do you think justice would mean in this case?
• While the story of the Tulsa massacre is a tragedy, it is also described as a story that shows the resilience of the Black community there. How do you think Black Tulsans showed resilience?
• What connections do you see between the events surrounding the Tulsa Race Massacre and the movement for racial justice today?
• Why do you think it is important for people today to learn about the 1921 Tulsa massacre?
• What does it mean for a country to “be honest with itself” as one historian suggests? Why is this important in the case of coming to terms with the legacy of the Tulsa massacre?
• What would “respect, restitution and repair” look like for Tulsa? Should reparations be considered? If so, what would reparation look like here?

ACTIVITIES

1. Additional Background Context. Before or after watching the documentary, students can learn more about the context by reading about Reconstruction, The Black Codes, and World War I and the Red Summer.

2. Exploring Black Wall Street. Research Black Wall Street and write a short biography or create a presentation about one of Greenwood’s entrepreneurs.

3. First-Person Account: Mary Jones Parrish. Mary Jones Parrish was a Black journalist and teacher who witnessed the Tulsa Massacre. Parrish wrote a first-person account of the massacre and recorded the recollections of survivors. Students can read Parrish’s text (located online or for purchase) and discuss in small or large groups.

4. Survivors Stories. The John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation has collected stories of survivors of the massacre. Visit 1921 Race Massacre Survivors | johnhopefranklin (jhfcenter.org) to read one or more of these stories and discuss with your class or group.
REFLECTION: SURVIVOR STORY

“We lost everything. Everything that we owned was burned to the ground! What I miss most were the family photos that we had in our house. My father had lots of photographs of family in our house, and those can never be replaced.” – Tulsa Race Massacre survivor Binkley Wright (Find additional information and survivors stories from the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation at Curriculum Resource | jhfc.com/johnhopefranklin)

• How would you feel if you lost all of your family photographs or other artifacts?
• What do you think would be the long-term impact for families of having all of their belongings destroyed?
• What role do family photographs play in helping us understand history? What is lost when photographs are lost?
TULSA RACE MASSACRE PHOTOS

The Tulsa Historical Society has an extensive collection of photographs related to the Tulsa Race Massacre which can be viewed here: Photos – Tulsa Historical Society & Museum (tulsahistory.org)

QUOTE ANALYSIS

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
-James Baldwin

In the documentary, this quote from American writer and activist James Baldwin (1924–1987) is seen displayed in a rendering of the Greenwood Rising History Center. (Learn more about Greenwood Rising: Greenwood Rising (tulsa2021.org))

• What does this quote mean to you? Try to rephrase it in your own words.
• In what ways does this quote relate to the Tulsa Race Massacre and its aftermath?
• Why do you think the people behind Greenwood Rising might choose to display this quotation on the wall of the history center?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Official Website: Tulsa Burning: The 1921 Race Massacre, History.com

Article: The Tulsa Race Massacre, History.com

Article: Tulsa’s ‘Black Wall Street’ Flourished as a Self-Contained Hub in Early 1900s, History.com

Article: How the Tulsa Race Massacre Was Covered Up, History.com

Curriculum Resources: 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission

Exhibit: 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Tulsa Historical Society and Museum

Educational Resources: Greenwood Cultural Center

Article: The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: What Happened to Black Wall Street, National Endowment for the Humanities

Books
Parrish, Mary E. Jones. The Nation Must Awake: My Witness to the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. (Trinity University Press, 2021)