

The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot and Its Legacy: Experiencing Place as Text

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Introduction and Rationale

As 16-year old Venice Sims and her friends walked home from Booker T. Washington High School on Tuesday, May 31, 1921, they never imagined how their lives would change within hours. A student at Tulsa's only Black high school, Venice busily planned her wardrobe, hairstyle, and date for the prom, scheduled for Wednesday night at the Stratford Hotel—the finest Black-owned hotel in the entire country.¹ But Venice never got to go to prom, never wore the "peacock blue"² dress she had chosen, and never saw her prom date again after the horrific events of the Tulsa Race Riot that began that evening.³ The violence that followed tore an already segregated Tulsa apart, leaving hundreds dead or injured. Violence soon turned to blame as Black Tulsans tried to put their lives back together without the help of government or insurance resources. Through an amazing story of resilience, Tulsa's Black Community of Greenwood was resurrected, but a "culture of silence"⁴ threatened to erase these historic events from the minds and memories of Tulsans for generations to come.

Fast-forward ninety years to May 31, 2011. Students from diverse backgrounds walk the halls of my Tulsa high school, just five miles south of where the events of the race riot took place, yet they are oblivious to deep, scarred, dark past of their city. Each school year I talk to my high school students about the Tulsa Race Riot in my social studies classes, and I am always saddened when half have never heard of the event. Their eyes grow wide, mouths gape, and they inevitably say, "Not here!" I am always shocked and I wonder why they have never questioned the blatant segregation that still exists in Tulsa or the obvious inequities that plague the different parts of town, its schools, job opportunities, etc. How can they live in a city, or any place,

and be ignorant of its past? Even more frightened I wonder how they can live in this city and not want to better it.

In the seminar we talked about the two maps of a city—the flat map that shows streets, waterways, and named places versus the pop-up mental map of desire and memory. As students read and research the history and the stories of Tulsa's people, analyze photographs and maps, and visit the Greenwood district with its monuments to the past, they will create these maps of desire for Tulsa. I hope the experiences gained will spur them to civic action as they develop plans for the future economic and cultural growth of the city.

Teaching this new, in-depth unit is important to my students because we have ignored the horrific events for so long. I believe the silence further divided the Black and White communities in Tulsa. Suitable for secondary US History, Oklahoma History, Geography, and Current Events courses, this unit illustrates the power of place, the idea of intangible heritage, and cultural history/geography for students all over the country. Like New Orleans, I believe the lessons from Tulsa's past, present, and future extend beyond its borders, and serve as example of America's struggle to rise above our ethnic and cultural divisions in order to create a more united United States.



Content and Objectives

For this unit on the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot, I want my students to know Tulsa's past, experience its present, and develop a vision for its future through reading, interpreting, analyzing, and creating texts. In keeping with 21st century literacies, texts include books, newspaper, internet media, images, maps, symbols, places, and so much more. In our seminar on the literature and intangible heritage of New Orleans, I have been thinking about Tulsa as a character in a long-standing folktale. Each time the narrative is told and re-told, the telling changes slightly, but the heart of the story remains fixed and true. The Tulsa Race Riot is just once section of Tulsa's ongoing story—the climax where a century of building tension exploded into violence on the streets of Greenwood. But the *dénouement* is yet to be written as we work to heal the scars of the past. In this way, it is easy to see place as text—a narrative structured, told, restructured, and retold.

This unit tells Tulsa's story in six parts:

- ◆ Pretext—the the tale of Tulsa before the riot
- ◆ Plaintext—one perspective of the riot
- ◆ Intertextuality—adding other narrative and visual texts to offer multiple perspectives of the riot
- ◆ Subtext—the subtleties and social climate that led the violence in Tulsa and other cities
- ◆ Context—visiting the place in order to connect the stories to place
- ◆ Creating Texts: Maps of Desire and Civic Action—where my students write the *dénouement* to the story as they imagine Tulsa's future

Pretext

To understand what happened in Tulsa in 1921 we must travel back a century and across hundreds of miles into the southeastern United States. President James Monroe changed America's stance towards Native Americans, forcing tribes to sign treaties ceding their lands in the southeast for lands west of the Mississippi. This brought the first Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokee to Oklahoma.⁵ In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, forcing the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole (The Five Civilized Tribes) into Indian Territory (Oklahoma).⁶ As a result of years of assimilation practices in the east, the Creeks and the Cherokee brought over 7,000 African American slaves⁷ and many freedmen⁸ with them to Oklahoma. Slavery continued in Indian Territory, even after the end of the Civil War, until the Five Civilized Tribes signed treaties with the United States' government in 1866. These treaties gave freedmen in Indian Territory the right to ask for tribal citizenship,⁹ up to 100 acres of land, and an annuity.¹⁰ Native Americans and African Americans had also married.¹¹ Today, many Black Oklahomans can easily trace their Native American roots and are registered members of local tribes.

For African Americans, Oklahoma territory represented freedom. Black politicians openly pushed for Oklahoma to enter the United States as an all-Black state. By 1907, the year of statehood, Oklahoma boasted 28 all-Black towns.¹² These came into being as a result of the Native American Black freedmen combining their land allotments and sheltering other freed slaves from violent racism in the South.¹³ The openness of African American townships contrasted with the rest of the territory and the nation where lynchings and violence against Blacks were common.

Tulsa traces its roots to the small Creek Indian settlement of Tallasi.¹⁴ While Blacks and Indians resided in the area, the first Whites did not arrive until the 1880's.¹⁵ Tallasi became Tulsey Town,¹⁶ and in 1898 was incorporated as Tulsa, nine years before Oklahoma's statehood.¹⁷ Spurred on by oil strikes, Tulsa's population grew from around 1,300 people in 1900 to nearly 99,000 in 1921.¹⁸ Tulsa's growth and prosperity continued, soon making it the "Oil Capital of the World."¹⁹

In 1916, Tulsa passed a mandatory segregation law that prohibited African Americans (or any other ethnic group) from living in areas containing 75% or more Whites.²⁰ African Americans who came to Tulsa settled in the northeast corner of the city in a community called Greenwood, an area sold to African American settlers in 1905.²¹ Greenwood grew along North Greenwood Avenue in downtown Tulsa. Segregation carved out Black Tulsa's unmarked borders along railroad tracks to the south and east and hills to the west.²² By 1921, Tulsa's Greenwood district was a strong, prosperous, self-sustaining community with 10,000 residents. African-Americans owned businesses and beautiful homes and the economic boom within the community gave Greenwood Avenue the title of "Black Wall Street."²³

Mary Parish, a New York transplant, came to Tulsa in 1918. She was amazed at the variety of Black businesses and the number of lovely homes.²⁴ Greenwood boasted a confectionary, a movie theater, lawyers, doctors, restaurants, pool halls, beauty shops, grocery stores, and two newspapers, *The Tulsa Star* and *The Oklahoma Eagle*.²⁵ Many Blacks worked in Greenwood's businesses, while others worked as domestic staff for Tulsa's new oil barons. Although forced to do so by segregation, African Americans prospered by keeping their money within their own community. Greenwood became a symbol of pride for Tulsa's Black residents and symbol of envy for Tulsa's Whites, who called the area "Little Africa" or "Niggertown."²⁶ This racial segregation and animosity set the stage for the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot.

Plaintext

As my students come to understand the social and geographic complexities of Tulsa, before the riot, they must also learn about the events of the race riot. This presents a number of challenges. First, I wonder whose version of the story I should tell. I also question whether to call the horrific events a "Riot." The silence surrounding the events of May 31st and June 1st, 1921 erased the public's memory, and survivors tell different stories of what actually happened. Some argue the systematic nature of the attack exposes some pre-planning on the part of the White assailants, and they refer to the 1921 race riot as the "Tulsa Disaster,"² Race War,⁷ or the Tulsa Incident. The term plaintext comes out of cryptography and describes the decrypted, understandable message you want to communicate. So I offer the following description of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot is in my own words—formed from research, narratives, and historic texts—it cannot and does not represent the whole truth:

On Monday, May 30, 1921, "Diamond Dick" Rowland, a nickname earned from his diamond belt buckle, decided to take a break from his shoe shining job in downtown Tulsa. Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old Black man, seemed to negotiate the social structures and racial segregation in Tulsa through his work, earning the respect of his rich White customers in an area of town where Blacks were not allowed. Through his connections he was allowed to use the restroom in the Drexel Building, a privilege normally reserved for Whites. On this day, Dick was returning from the facilities when he entered the elevator. Here, the stories often diverge, but I usually teach that the elevator car and floor were uneven causing Dick to trip as he entered. Breaking his fall, he grabbed the 17-year-old White elevator operator, Sara Page. On being touched by a Black man, Sara screamed, alarming others in the building, mostly White office workers. Frightened, Dick ran from the building and Sara Page reported that she had been assaulted.

That evening an arrest warrant was issued for Dick Rowland and he was taken into custody the following day. Sheriff Willard McCullough took custody of Dick and decided to hold him in the courthouse in order to better protect him. Most Tulsans read about the incident in the Monday evening edition of the *Tulsa Tribune*, and many Whites were outraged. A. J. Smitherman, owner of Tulsa's Black newspaper, the *Tulsa Star*, was afraid the Whites would storm the courthouse and lynch Dick Rowland. He went through Greenwood recruiting men, mostly World War I veterans, and their rifles to go down to the courthouse to protect Rowland. When they arrived at the courthouse, Sheriff McCullough refused their help, knowing armed Black men in the streets would exacerbate the situation. Smitherman and his colleagues complied and returned to Greenwood.

Tuesday evening's edition of the *Tulsa Tribune* openly called for the lynching of Dick Rowland and soon the streets of downtown Tulsa were filled with armed White men. They surrounded the courthouse, but Sheriff McCullough's men prevented them from entering. Upon learning about the armed crowds downtown, Smitherman and the concerned men of Greenwood grabbed their guns and returned to the courthouse. Soon fights and gunfire broke out between Tulsa's Blacks and Whites and the full scale riot began.

Overnight the violence escalated as 10,000 Whites descended on Greenwood, systematically looting and burning hundreds of homes and businesses. Some families were awakened in the middle of the night by their neighbors warning them to get out before the violent mobs arrived. Others were forcibly dragged from their homes with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and marched to detention centers. These people were somewhat lucky because many were struck with bricks or clubs, shot, and killed without warning. Armed Blacks tried to protect their homes, but they were outnumbered. Many people ran north from Greenwood that night and never returned to their homes. Some were never seen or heard from again and were probably killed in the violence.

Tulsa's police force did nothing to curb the violence and the state National Guard was called in from Oklahoma City 90 miles away. They arrived early Wednesday morning and declared martial law at 11:30 am. Thick clouds of smoke rose from Greenwood and over 300 people were dead. Another 10,000 were homeless. In the days following the riot, Tulsa's Blacks were blamed for the violence, some were even arrested. To add insult to injury, Greenwood residents were forced to clean up the damage caused by the riot. The Red Cross came in a set up tents to house the thousands of displaced residents and some families lived in these tents through the following winter. Many Blacks tried to recover quickly, filing their home insurance claims to recoup the damages. Their claims were denied because of riot clauses in their insurance policies. Through amazing stories of persistence and resilience, Tulsa's Greenwood returned to its beauty and strength within less than a decade and remained strong through years of the Great Depression. Black Tulsans supported and relied on each other to reclaim their lives and livelihoods.

Intertextuality

We often tell our students that history is written by the victors, and even recent events need verification. We live in an age where technology allows individuals to hear or see events from many different angles, but students need the skills to identify point of view and bias. When we teach students to point out stereotypes, racism, or bias in historical, informational, or literary texts, we are equipping them to peaceably promote civic action and social change.^{2/8} While I presented one version of the Tulsa Race Riot, post-riot legal documents,^{2/9} the official Race Riot Commission report, survivor's personal narratives, historical photographs, newspaper articles of the day, pieces of poetry and literature, and current reenactments from film documentaries all offer slightly different accounts and points of view on what happened. In our seminar we discussed how narratives, literature, and art make difficult social and political subjects more accessible to students. Intertextuality is a literary term referring to the act of comparing different texts in order to make meaning.^{3/0} Offering students varied written, visual, literary, and narrative versions of the riot develops their interpretive, analytical, and literacy skills.

The Tulsa Race Riot Commission, a body appointed in 1997 by Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating to break the silence surrounding the riot and study the events, compiled a nearly 200 page report detailing what happened. Interestingly, the Commission confirmed the use of airplanes during the riot, although they questioned whether they were used as bombers. The report also supported reparations for the survivors and their families—although the current judicial system disagrees, claiming the statute of limitations is up for the riot crimes.^{3/1} Mary Parish, a survivor, also saw the airplanes and reported of machine gun posts set up along the streets to mow down Blacks as they fled. She wrote down her experiences in her 1923 book *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*, which also contains the stories of dozens of survivors she spoke with in the days following the riot. Written 80 years later, the book *Riot on Greenwood* also contains personal narratives of the riot, but students should take into account that these stories have been tempered with time. In this book, one woman states that it was "common knowledge in the black community" that Dick Rowland and Sarah Page were lovers, even living together in Kansas City after the riot.^{3/2} The book also documents over 40 accounts of the riot as told by White Tulsans, including accounts of Jewish businesses being destroyed. The book *Greenwood Cultural Center: Jewel in the Crown* also contains survivor narratives. These narratives, told by actual eyewitnesses, are considered primary sources, which are necessary in teaching historiography. Personal narratives also add a human dimension to history and allow students to connect actual voices and experiences to texts.

Visual texts offer powerful connections to our students too. The Tulsa City-County library, University of Tulsa, and the Tulsa and Oklahoma Historical Societies each have large archives of race riot photographs (Appendix B). These photos are visual primary source documents of their city and offer an unforgettable

glimpse into Tulsa's history. I want to students to think and question the motives of the photographers in the context of the time period and draw conclusions as to how the photos may have been used. As a historical record they act as primary source documents, texts, writing prompts, ways to reinforce their visual analysis skills, and places along our maps of memory and desire. Videos, such as the History Channel's *The Night Tulsa Burned* and the Emmy Award winning documentary *Terror in Tulsa* contextualize Tulsa's story with realistic visual reenactments that today's students easily connect with.

In the days and years following the riot, survivors and people emotionally moved by the riot wrote poems and novels about the events. One of the most powerful pieces was written by *Tulsa Star* owner A. J. Smitherman. His poem *The Tulsa Riot and Massacre* presents the riot as open warfare and memorializes the men who sacrificed their lives for the community. Celebrated poet Sharon Olds wrote *Race Riot, Tulsa, 1921* after viewing photographs of the violence generations later. Wynonia Murray Bailey, a survivor, penned the poem titled *O Greenwood! Lest You Go Unheralded* that describes the community as a once beautiful woman, but now old and forgotten. Tulsa historian Hannibal Johnson wrote *Black Wall Street*, a beautiful poem that well represent place as text, depicting Greenwood in all its glory before the riot and the emotional scars left by the violence. The novel *Tulsa Burning* by Anna Myers offers a longer alternate for secondary teachers and is written on a 4th or 5th grade reading level so it is accessible to struggling readers. The fictional story of the riot follows a young boy who goes to rescue a friend trapped by the violence of the Tulsa Race Riot. These short pieces of literature offer perspectives of the riot from survivors and members of the public, who experienced vivid emotional responses days and years after the smoke cleared.

Expanding our study to the role of the media in the events and the characteristics of objective versus biased media, Tulsa's newspapers offer additional viewpoints concerning the race riot. The *Tulsa Tribune* was well-known for its racist overtones, frequently calling Greenwood "Little Africa." The day of Rowland's arrest the *Tribune's* story headline read "Negro Nabbed for Attacking Girl in Elevator" and published an editorial calling for a lynching. To this day, many feel that the *Tribune* incited the riot. After the riot, the *Tribune* boasted how the state troops restored peace to the city, and that 9 Whites and 68 Blacks died, in that order. Tulsa's other mainstream newspaper, the *Tulsa World*, was slightly more objective. It accurately reported the decisions of the legal body seated to investigate the causes of the riot with a headline reading, "Negroes to Blame for Inciting Race Rioting; Whites Clearly Exonerated." As a temperate voice for many White Tulsans, the *World* published articles encouraging Whites to support and rebuild Greenwood on the grounds that the entire Black community should not be blamed for the actions of the few who started the riot. As for the African American newspaper the *Tulsa Star*, its offices in Greenwood were destroyed during the riot and owner A.J. Smitherman openly blamed Whites for riot. While all three newspapers echoed the racial sentiments of the time, students need to understand point of view of each, and the idea that the media answer to their both their constituency and their owners. With today's media saturated world, it is more important than ever to teach students 21st century literacy skills.

Subtext

Another literary term, subtext refers to the hidden, underlying meanings within texts. The subtexts within the narrative of the Tulsa Race Riot reveal the historical struggles this nation has faced when it comes to racial tension and socioeconomic inequities. Reading the John Kennedy Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces* and Brenda

Osbey's *All Saints* in the seminar revealed these same unwritten tensions and inequalities that build over time and become inherent within the culture of a place. After learning about the events of the Tulsa Race Riot, I also want my students to understand that what happened in Tulsa was not an isolated event. This helps them see the Tulsa Race Riot's place in the larger scope of American History.

Tulsa was one of several race riots around the country with horrific events occurring in East St. Louis (Illinois) in 1917, Philadelphia in 1918, and Longview (Texas), Chicago, and Omaha in 1919. Students should compare the causes and effects of different racially charged events across the country. Historians blame these race riots on a number of circumstances including: the social effects of segregation, the New Negro Movement stemming from the Harlem Renaissance, the Black World War I veterans returning home with expectations of a different America, the expansion of Jim Crow laws, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and early American anti-communist movements.

Segregation affected the soldiers serving in World War I, and seemed to worsen after the war as Whites reacted to the new levels of pride, affluence, education, and artistic expression many African Americans gained in the late 1910s and early 1920s.⁴ The race riots in East St. Louis, Philadelphia, Longview, and Chicago were the direct result of either Whites or Blacks encroaching on areas appropriated for the opposing group. The riots in Tulsa and Omaha were both caused by groups attempting to prevent lynchings. This method of torturous execution was frequently practiced by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a White Supremacist organization that came into being after the Civil War.⁵ In Oklahoma there were over 100,000 Klan members by 1920⁶ and 1921 rolls show approximately 3,200 KKK members in Tulsa.⁷ The KKK had already been accused to various acts of violence against both Blacks and Whites, including whippings, lynchings, and cross burnings.⁸ This racially charged atmosphere tainted the years surrounding the riots in Tulsa and other American communities.⁹

Context

In our seminar, the literature and stories we read and heard continually reminded us that in places like New Orleans and Tulsa, the past is present. Connecting to the notion of Deep Time, a place's geography, history, and culture is written on the landscape and is accessible to all who visit the place. In literature and in life, context describes the environment and setting surrounding people, places, and events. As we enter the post riot phase of the unit, I would take my students to the Greenwood district where the Tulsa Race Riot took place over 90 years ago. Only a few businesses remain on Black Wall Street, but the area gives students a glimpse into the past. To honor the hundreds of businesses that once stood in Greenwood, the city of Tulsa placed bronze plaques in the downtown sidewalks memorializing the place where each business stood.¹⁰ Students can walk the same streets where a community once prospered, where a race war once raged, where a community showed its resilience, commitment, intangible heritage, and resurrected itself.

Built to break the culture of silence and preserve the tangible and intangible heritages of all Tulsans, the Greenwood Cultural Center houses a wonderful collection of artifacts, articles, and photos. Students can also see how well African American families lived before the riot by touring the Mabel Little Heritage House. The 1920s home is a replica of the Mackey family home was destroyed in the Tulsa Race Riot and then rebuilt with bricks to withstand fears of future violence or fires.¹¹ Complete with original furnishings, the house offers a glimpse into lives of Greenwood residents before and after the riot, illustrating the treasures and resiliency of Greenwood as an intangible heritage for all Tulsans.

Outside the Cultural Center, the riot's Memorial Wall bears the names of businesses destroyed by the event. Standing at the 8 foot tall black marble monument I would breach the topic of reparations. As mentioned earlier, the Tulsa Race Riot Commission recommended reparations, or monetary restitution for the crimes committed during the 1921 riot feeling that it would heal the rift between the Black and White communities. Immediately following the riot, Black Tulsans filed for over \$4 million in property loss claims and all were denied.⁵ The Race Riot Commission specifically recommended monetary payments to riot survivors and their descendents, establishing a scholarship funds for descendents of survivors, more economic development in Greenwood, and the reburial of riot victims found in mass graves.⁵³ Although the commission suggested reparations, they did not have the power to mandate them, and over a decade later no reparations have been paid. Some feel reparations have not been paid because the monetary settlements represent the acceptance of blame for the riot.⁵⁴

Towards the unmarked boundaries of Greenwood lies the newly dedicated John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park.⁵⁵ In the center of the park stands an obelisk that represents all the troubles and triumphs African Americans have experienced from slavery to the race riots. Here in the serene, cyclical park, I want my students to question and write about the culture of silence surrounding the Tulsa Race Riot. Through the 1920s south Tulsa prospered with the help of oil money. Tulsa built skyscrapers, a new airport, and schools, but the money was not spent to improve its Black community. While most families rebuilt their homes, streets, schools, and sewer systems fell into disrepair.⁵⁶ By the 1940s, most of Greenwood's businesses were rebuilt⁵⁷ and some measure of prosperity returned to the area, although not on the level as before because many of Greenwood's pre-riot residents never returned to Tulsa. Many of the survivors' narratives describe the fears of Greenwood residents that violent mobs would return if they spoke too loudly about the riot. Stories of the Tulsa incident became oral folktales passed down from the elders to the young. White Tulsans erased the event from their memory, considering the riot an unexplainable "act of nature."⁵⁸ The combination of forgetfulness, whisperings, and segregation pushed the two Tulsas further apart. In some ways, north Tulsa became a more closed community, and the silence of both Blacks and Whites neglected the lessons of the Tulsa Race Riot. Even after segregation and the civil rights movement, a general distrust existed between the two groups. Now 90 years removed from the violence of the riot, my students still live in two Tulsas, unequal in opportunities and economic development. Hopefully, walking the streets of Greenwood will make both the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar unfamiliar, urging them to take action to change their community.

Creating Texts: Maps of Desire and Civic Action

Today Greenwood is beginning to prosper once again for the benefit of all Tulsans. It holds a satellite college campus, a small strip of business and restaurants, a television station, and ONEOK field, our city's new Minor League baseball park. The small plaques cemented into the sidewalk are a small reminder of where Tulsa's Black business district stood, but even these small memorials tell a story. By walking the streets of Greenwood, I want students to question why the prosperous business district fell into ruin years even after it was resurrected from the ashes of the riot. Seeing Greenwood as it stands today and knowing what it once was, I want my students to envision what Greenwood and all of North Tulsa can be in the future.

The effects of the race riot on Tulsa were political, economic, cultural, and long-lasting. Tulsa remains segregated—Blacks in the north, Whites in the south, Asians and Latinos in the east—with different parts of the city experiencing disproportionate economic growth. My students live in all areas of the city, and many have never questioned the unmarked boundaries delineating race and class. Some of my African-American students from north Tulsa never venture any farther south than our school, which sits in midtown. Much like the divisions of race and class that exist in New Orleans and that came to the nation's attentions by the natural

and manmade disaster of Hurricane Katrina, disenfranchised Tulsans sit by, waiting for something to change—something to improve their lives and livelihoods. I believe my students can affect this change.

Over the last decade, areas of north Tulsa continue to be neglected and lack services like grocery stores, medical offices, hospitals, and city transit. Several projects to develop areas of north Tulsa have failed because residents and politicians from other parts of the city fail to support them. In the final days of this curriculum unit, I want students to collaborate and create realistic plans to re-develop Greenwood and north Tulsa. Using existing maps and internet programs like Google Earth, students can assess the economic, cultural, and social needs of north Tulsa by comparing it to other areas of the city. With this information students can build their own maps of desire by imagining changes to the current landscape that would bring opportunities and greater prosperity to struggling communities. Working together students can present development plans to their teachers, parents, peers, and community leaders. After learning about Tulsa's pasts, connecting to its history by walking its present-day streets, and collaborating to develop plans for its future, students should have the knowledge and confidence to petition local government with their projects. By demonstrating their knowledge to affect real change in the community, hopefully my students will walk away from this unit with the new experiences of their not-so-familiar city, an appreciation of its intangible heritage, a deeper understanding of its complicated history, and promising visions for its future.

Moving Beyond Texts: Towards Speech and Action

Through this unit I want my students to connect with the city of Tulsa in new ways, connecting the real city to its past and to the map of their desires and imagination. Ninety years ago, Veneice Sims—a high school student much like them—had all she owned ripped away from her during the Tulsa Race Riot. She and her siblings were playing in the yard of their house overlooking Greenwood Avenue when they started to hear gunfire. Bullets bounced off their roof and hit the side of the house. In terror they decided to run away from the violent mobs driving north up Greenwood. Running for their lives, they saw a White man racing towards them in his car. As he came closer, they realized it was their father's boss coming to rescue them. He took Veneice and her whole family to his house south of downtown where they could see the fire and smoke rising from Greenwood all night. Returning to Greenwood after the riot, Veneice found the blue dress, blue shoes, and pearl necklace she had chosen for the prom burned, along with her house and her family's belongings. Forced to move in with family in Oklahoma City, Veneice never attended prom and she never saw her prom date again—he moved to Detroit following the riot. Her father stayed in Greenwood, rebuilding the family home and Veneice moved back to Tulsa in 1924. Even with all the anger, sadness, and disappointment, she did not want to leave the city she loved forever.

In 2000, the students of Booker T. Washington invited Veneice Sims, then 95 years old, to their senior prom. Of course, she joyfully accepted since she never attended her high school prom. At the event, Veneice noticed that many things had changed—especially the ethnic makeup of the school, now 40% Black and 40% White. In 1921, the idea of Blacks and Whites at the same school together, let alone dancing together, seemed impossible. These students represent my dreams for Tulsa—a generation of young people connected to the city's past, who honor its intangible heritage, and are committed to social change within their community.



Strategies

Collaborative Learning

This unit uses many collaborative learning activities (Think-Pair-Share, Dinner Party, Jigsaw, and Group Work) that encourage peer interaction and change the role of the teacher from banker of knowledge to learning facilitator. Collaborative learning builds classroom community, which is essential when dealing with emotionally-charged topics such as racism and violence. A classroom community is as a space where teachers and students learn through speaking, listening, and often disagreeing with each other. By creating a classroom community, students learn to respect each other and feel safe sharing their opinions without fear of ridicule or retaliation. Collaborative learning also supports 21st century literacies that equip students with the skills to thrive in a networked society where collaborative work relies on the collective intelligence of a group instead of the knowledge and skills of one individual.

Primary Sources Document & Photo Analysis

Analyzing and interpreting primary source documents is an essential skill for history students. Students should understand the difference between primary (first-hand accounts) and secondary (second-hand accounts or interpretations) sources, and that these sources can come in many forms, such as letters, memoirs, newspapers, photographs, audio recordings, or videos. Using first person narratives and photographs of historical events instead of summative textbook accounts engages students and allows them to actively investigate history. These types of documents also help students learn essential historiography skills, including: cause and effect, compare and contrast, continuity and change over time, bias and point of view. When using text primary sources, I model the analysis procedures for my students so they understand what they should be looking for in the text. I also note the type of document (letters, government reports, newspaper articles, etc.), the creator (occupation, ethnicity, etc.), their point of view, the purpose, the context, and any pertinent geographic information. There are several mnemonic analysis strategies—APPARTS (Author, Place and time, Prior knowledge, Audience, Reason, The main idea, Significance), SPRITE (Social, Political, Religious, Intellectual, Technological, Economic), and SOAPStone (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone) to name a few—that can help students deconstruct written texts. For visual texts, I teach my students to use OPTIC (Overview, Parts, Text, Interrelationships, Conclusion) to break apart photos, posters, and artwork into smaller pieces, making sure not miss tiny details in their analysis. Learning to analyze documents also helps students improve their reading, comprehension, speaking, and writing skills across the curriculum.

Writing

While writing can be a challenge for students, it is an essential skill that naturally fits into many classroom exercises. Writing in all its forms, from tweets to photo stories and essays, can be integrated across the curriculum. This unit deals with tough subjects such as racism and violence, and I feel it is important for students to reflect and write as they deal with the emotions tied to the history. In this unit, students will write responses from the point of view of key players in the Tulsa Race Riot, analytical responses to historical photographs, and poems that connect to artistic texts. Writing is a systematic process that involves planning, translating thoughts into texts, and revision that innately includes higher order thinking and learning.

Field Trips

Within today's educational environment of mandated testing field trips have fallen by the wayside, but they provide "lived learning" experiences that students rarely forget.⁶⁷ Visiting the places students read about in a class brings intangible heritage, history, and geography to life. Field trip learning experiences should begin before students board the school bus; prepare them ahead of time by learning the historical, cultural, and geographic background of the field trip destination. In this unit, the field trip to Greenwood provides context to what students have already learned through studying the history of Tulsa before, during, and after the riot. I always require students bring pencil and paper on trips for writing assignments. Some museums offer scavenger hunts and my high school students love taking part in these seemingly juvenile challenges—so check to see if they are offered or make up your own. After a field trip, extend the learning experiences by assigning written reflections or more in-depth projects, and have students write thank you notes to the organization and its staff of places you visit.



Classroom Activities

The following four activities are just a sample of the work done during this two week unit. I chose to include these four because they show the collaborative learning, analysis, field trip, and writing strategies mentioned above.

Dinner Party

Before I teach the Plaintext version of the Tulsa Race Riot, students participate in a Dinner Party activity. In this collaborative learning activity each student is assigned a person—either an eyewitness to the events or someone closely related to the riot—whose role they assume. After giving each student a short biography to read, they assume that person's role, walking around the classroom explaining their perspective of the riot and listening to others speak about what happened (Appendix C). Students take on the roles of key players: Dick Rowland, the young Black shoe shiner whose arrest sparked the riot; Sherriff Willard McCullough, the officer charged with protecting Rowland for the lynching mob; Mary Parish, a Black Tulsan who witnessed riot; and many others. This activity sparks their curiosity about what really happened because each person has a slightly different take on the causes or events related to the riot. At this point I teach the Plaintext version of the riot, including primary source photos and a timeline of the events. After hearing the straightforward version of events I reinforce the intertextuality of the event by questioning the differences they see in my version of the riot versus the experiences of the person whose role they assumed during the Dinner Party. This inevitably prompts discussions about truth and lies in history and the media's role in the riot. To end the day's activity, students write about the riot and its effects from the perspective of their assigned roles.

Jigsaw Analysis

Jigsaw is a collaborative learning activity that encourages students to learn information and teach it to their peers.⁶⁸ It usually involves breaking down a larger text into smaller pieces that students learn, discuss, and teach each other. In this classroom activity, students will experience the intertextuality of the Tulsa Race Riot by analyzing narratives, photos, newspaper articles, and government documents and sharing their analysis techniques and conclusions with their peers. This activity sparks their curiosity about what really happened because each person has a slightly different take on the causes or events related to the riot.

To begin, students will be broken into four different groups and each group will be assigned several documents of one type. Separate groups will work on riot narratives, photographs, press coverage, and government reports. The narrative group will be given various first person narrative accounts from *Riot on Greenwood* or *Events of the Tulsa Disaster* to read and analyze (choose an appropriate number of documents based on the number of students in the groups—1 or 2 per student). I give students the SOAPSTones⁶ model (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone) to use as they analyze each primary source document. The photo group would be given a selection of photos to analyze using OPTIC or other photo analysis techniques (Appendix B). Students in the newspaper group will use selected riot articles from the Tulsa Library (<http://www.tulsalibrary.org/aarc/riot/articles.php>, accessed July 31, 2011) for their work, while the government document group will analyze selections from the *Final Report of the Grand Jury on the Tulsa Race Riot, June 25, 1921* and the *Final Report of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, February 28, 2001*. Both the newspaper and government document groups will use the National Archives written document analysis form.⁷

In each group, students will work together to analyze their texts and discuss important points of view, contradictions, or bias that help them understand the causes and effects of the riot. After allowing students the appropriate amount of time to work through analysis and discussion (20-45 minutes), students will form new groups where at least one member of each original group is represented. In these new groups, members from the narrative, photo, newspaper, and government document groups report out on what they learned through their analysis and discussion. To end the activity, each new group collaboratively writes a paragraph to summarize the riot using the different perspectives provided by the various documents they analyzed.

Ekphrastic Poetry

Ekphrastic poems are works written in response to artwork. One of the most famous ekphrastic poems is John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. On every field trip to a museum I require my students to write a reflection, and ekphrastic poetry is an easy and creative way to fulfill that goal. On our fieldtrip to Greenwood, students will encounter artwork in many forms—paintings, sculpture, poetry, monuments, and more. For this ekphrastic poetry assignment, each student will choose one piece of art to write a poetic response. Before they begin to write, students sketch the artwork and then use their close viewing skills to note details from the artwork, colors, text, tone, mood, and available information on the artist. Next, it is important that each student reflect on their own feelings towards the piece. With this information students are armed with words and feelings with which to write, but they should also consider whose point of view the speaker of the poem will have—the viewpoint of artist, the viewer (past, present, or future), or an object or person within the artwork. I make it a point to remind students that poems come in many forms and they do not have to rhyme. I also require poems to be written on site and completed before we board the bus back to school. Their poems should include details from the artwork, the mood or tone of the piece, an identifiable speaker, and their own feelings in response to the artwork. For students that find writing poetry a challenge, I encourage them to pen found poems (where they simply choose words from existing text or images and rearrange them to convey thoughts or feelings), haiku, or sticky note poems (short poems that must fit on a post-it note).

Creating Maps of Need & Desire

As we enter the final phase of the Tulsa Race Riot unit, I want my students to evaluate the long term results of the riot on the economic development of north Tulsa. This activity should begin with a group discussion of what services a community needs to support its citizens, such as hospitals, schools, food and retail stores, and transportation. Once students compile a list of services, they will use Google maps, Google Earth, or paper

maps to plot what services are already available in north Tulsa. Once students have labeled the available services on a map, students will work in groups to determine what services are lacking and where they are needed. Students will label neighborhoods, street corners, and other locations that need new or improved services. From these maps students can create their civic action plans to support economic development in north Tulsa. This project can be high tech, using internet mapping sites, or low tech, using a paper maps and a local phone book. It can also delve deeper into more complex lessons on population geography and economic geography.



Resources

Bibliography for Teachers

These resources on the Tulsa Race Riot were the most helpful covering the essentials and putting this unit together.

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Tulsa Race Riot. Greenwood Cultural Center. <http://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com/> (accessed July 18, 2011).

These videos on the riot are great for student viewing and discussion of the events surrounding the riot.

Before they Die Survivors of the Tulsa Race Riot 1921. 1 videodisc (94 min.). Directed by Denise J. Clement, John Rogers, Steven J. Toll, et al. Los Angeles: Mportant Films, 2008.

The Night Tulsa Burned. Directed by Robb Weller, Gary H. Grossman, Weller/Grossman Productions, Arts and Entertainment Network, New Video Group and History Channel (Television network). New York: A & E Television Networks: Distributed in the U.S. by New Video Group, 1999.

Terror in Tulsa. CN8 in association with FullMind Creative. Bordentown, New Jersey: FullMind Creative, 2008.

These are a few resources for teachers who wanting to teach primary source document analysis. These sites include great document and photo analysis student worksheets.

Binns, Stephen. *Every Picture Has a Story*. Smithsonian Education. http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/images/educators/lesson_plan/every_picture/every_picture.pdf (accessed July 31, 2011).

Teaching With Documents. National Archives and Records Administration. <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/> (accessed July 31, 2011).

Here are a few websites about using Ekphrastic poetry in the classroom.

Cox, Anne Kelly. *Perspectives in Writing Ekphrastic Poetry*. ReadWriteThink. http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1093/PerspectivesinWritingEkphrastic.pdf (accessed July 31, 2011).

Ekphrastic Poetry Lesson. Smithsonian American Art Museum. http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Ekphrastic_Poetry_Lesson.pdf (accessed July 31, 2011).

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Ekphrasis: Poetry Confronting Art*. Poets.org. <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5918> (accessed July 31, 2011).

Reading List for Students

This fictional novel book is written on a 4^{sup>} t/sup>sup> h/sup> or 5^{sup>} t/sup>sup> h/sup> grade reading level, so it is accessible to most middle and high school students.

Myers, Anna. *Tulsa burning*. New York: Walker, 2002.



Appendix A: Implementing District Standards

This unit aligns with Oklahoma's Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS objectives) for the following secondary social studies courses:

Oklahoma History- This unit addresses the standards in Oklahoma History concerning the development of the state from Indian Territory to Oklahoma Statehood. The unit also deals with the interactions of various ethnic groups within the state.

1 The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.

1.1 Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, art, music, literature, photographs, documents, newspapers, and contemporary media).

1.2 Identify, evaluate, and explain the relationships between the geography of Oklahoma and its historical development by using different kinds of maps, graphs, charts, diagrams, and other representations such as photographs, satellite-produced images, and computer-based technologies.

1.4 Construct and examine timelines of Oklahoma history (e.g., removal and relocation of Native American groups, economic cycles, immigration patterns, and the results of redistricting and statewide elections).

3.2 Trace the movement of other North American peoples into present-day Oklahoma, including the Five Tribes, Plains Tribes, and Eastern Tribes.

7 The student will examine major cultural and ethnic groups represented in Oklahoma

7.1 Identify cultural and ethnic groups in Oklahoma (e.g., African Americans, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Germans, and Vietnamese) and explore the causes and effects of their immigration and settlement patterns.

7.2 Trace the cultural, political, and economic contributions of these groups.

8 The student will examine factors that contributed to the political, economic, and social history of Oklahoma during the twentieth century.

8.2 Analyze the impact of the Populist Movement, the Temperance Movement, the Dust Bowl, and political corruption (e.g., Ku Klux Klan activities; the prosecutions and convictions of Governor David Hall and the county commissioners) on Oklahoma history.

8.3 Examine the historical evolution of race relations in Oklahoma (e.g., the significance of Jim Crow laws, the Tulsa Race Riot, and

the contributions of Governor Raymond Gary to the peaceful integration of public facilities).

US History-This unit deals with the early 20th century history, especially the conflicts and concerns of different ethnic groups within the nation.

PS 1.2 Recognize and explain how different points of view have been influenced by nationalism, racism, religion, culture and ethnicity.

PS 1.3. Distinguish between fact and opinion in examining documentary sources.

PS 1.4 Construct timelines of United States history (e.g., landmark dates of economic changes, social movements, military conflicts, constitutional amendments, and presidential elections).

PS 1.6 Develop discussion, debate, and persuasive writing and speaking skills, focusing on enduring issues (e.g., individual rights vs. the common good, and problems of intolerance toward cultural, ethnic, and religious groups), and demonstrating how divergent viewpoints have been and continue to be addressed and reconciled.

CS 1.6 Evaluate the continuing impact of Reconstruction policies on the South, including southern reaction (e.g., tenant farming, Freedmen's Bureau, sharecropping, Black Codes, Ku Klux Klan, Carpetbaggers, scalawags, Plessy v. Ferguson, and Jim Crow laws).

CS 4.1.D Describe rising racial tensions and labor unrest common in the era (e.g., the Tulsa Race Riot, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, the "Back to Africa" Movement and Marcus Garvey, the rise of industrial unions, and the labor sit-down strikes).

Geography-This unit addresses standards related to economic, cultural, political, and historical geography.

1.2 Demonstrate the use of mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context.

4.4 Explain how the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of earth's surface.

6 The student will analyze problems and issues from a geographic perspective using the tools and skills of geography.

6.1. Explain the fundamental role that geographical context has played in affecting events in history.



Appendix B: Tulsa Race Riot Photographs

(image 11.04.08.01 is available in print form)

Smoke from Fires. Photo used by permission. Credited to Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.^{7/1}

(image 11.04.08.02 is available in print form)

Captured Men. Photo used by permission. Credited to Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.^{7/2}

(image 11.04.08.03 is available in print form)

Man standing near debris. Photo used by permission. Credited to Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.^{7/3}

(image 11.04.08.04 is available in print form)

Unidentified Individuals. Photo used by permission. Credited to Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.^{7/4}

(image 11.04.08.05 is available in print form)

Tulsa World front page. Photo used by permission. Credited to Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.^{7/5}



Appendix C: Selected Tulsa Race Riot Dinner Party Roles

Dick Rowland: I dropped out of high school to take a job shining shoes in a white-owned and white-patronized shine parlor located downtown on Main Street. Shoe shines usually cost a dime in those days, but we were often tipped a nickel for each shine, and sometimes more. On a busy day, I pocketed a fair amount of money. As a young African American man with few other job prospects, this was a good job. There were no toilet facilities for blacks at the shine parlor where I worked. The owner had arranged for his African American employees to use a "Colored" restroom located, nearby, in the Drexel. To get to the washroom, located on the top floor, I rode in the building's elevator. On the day the riot started, Sarah Page operated the elevator. I went to get on the elevator, and I tripped because the elevator hadn't stopped properly at the floor. As I tried to catch my fall, I grabbed onto the arm of Sarah Page, who then screamed. A clerk from a clothing store heard the scream and saw me running out of the building. He called the police and said I attempted to rape Sarah Page. The next day I was arrested. I feared for my life because in those days, black men were lynched frequently, without trial. I did not attempt to rape Sarah Page. Later, I was acquitted when Page refused to press charges. I was cleared and all charges were dropped, but not before hundreds were killed and Greenwood was burned to the ground.

B.C. Franklin: I was one of the few African American attorneys in Greenwood, that's what the Black section of Tulsa was called back then. I was sitting in the courtroom during a recess in a trial when I overheard some other lawyers discussing the alleged rape attempt. I knew Dick Rowland and I didn't believe the charges against him. But the white newspapers in town stirred up the town folk with a headline that read "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator." After the lynching that had occurred over the past few years, I knew it was a possibility that could happen to Rowland. Certainly, there was a sense that if the law was going to be upheld so that a black man could get a fair trial, then it would be through the actions of black men, not through official means. When black soldiers returned from fighting in World War 1, they had enough of being second-class citizens after fighting for other people's freedom. They were willing to take action. My law offices were burned to the ground during the riot. I re-opened my law offices in a tent.

Sheriff Willard McCullough: I was sheriff at the time that Dick Rowland was brought to jail and charged with attempted rape. Tempers were running high with both blacks and white. I was not going to have a lynch mob do the same thing to Dick Rowland on my watch. I put Rowland in the hands of deputies in a secure part of the building. I told them to take the elevator to the top floor and disable it. I also told the officers to shoot anyone, including me, who came to get Rowland. The crowds gathered. I asked Deputy Barney Cleaver, a black officer, and C.F. Gabe to get the blacks to go home. I tried to get the whites to disperse as well. Before the night was ended, there were about 2000 white men gathered at the courthouse. Then a bunch of them tried to get guns at the National Guard Armory. When they didn't get guns there, they broke into Bardon's Sporting Goods and took guns and ammunition. Once the first shot was fired, all hell broke loose. People ask what happened. Here's what I know: Some white man tried to disarm a black man and the gun went off during that scuffle. Later that night I saw men who Police Commissioner Adkinson deputized burning and looting in Greenwood, the black section of Tulsa. They went all over South Tulsa, taking black servants from their white employees. Everyone had guns and the police seemed to be behind it.

Police Commissioner Jim Adkison:

Things were out of control in Greenwood. It was like a war zone. People were shooting each other. There was looting and burning. We had people storming the National Guard Armory. We were outnumbered. Police Chief Gustafson called in his entire force—around 65 men—and I began commissioning over 400 folks to serve as deputies to help restore order. Remember, there were thousands of people running the streets that night. Of course, in retrospect, I should have been more careful about the selection of men we deputized and armed. But it was a very tense situation. We never told anyone to kill black people or torch their homes. Our instructions were to disarm people and to absolutely prevent looting and burning.

Mary Parrish: I was a teacher in Greenwood before the riots. Shortly after the riots, I published a book of my recollections called *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*. When I looked out the window of my apartment building on the morning of June 1, 1921, I saw armed white men gathering near the granary. I left the building, running north on Greenwood Avenue, away from the machine gunfire. I saw the airplanes coming in and I thought it was WWI all over again. The National Guard might say they came in to protect the citizens of Greenwood, but by disarming the Black men and not disarming the white men, they allowed the destruction—looting and burning—of our community to happen.



Notes

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