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Descriptive Summary

Collection Title: African-American Resource Center Tulsa Race Riot Photograph Collection

Collection Number: AA0001

Repository: Tulsa City-County Library Archives

Dates: 1921

Historical Note

Tulsa's Greenwood district is the site of one of the most devastating race disturbances in the history of the United States. Before May 31, 1921, Tulsa's black business district known as Greenwood flourished in spite of segregation. It boasted of several restaurants, theaters, clothing shops and hotels. Dubbed the "Black Wall Street," Greenwood was an economic powerhouse.

After May 31, 1921, Greenwood would never be the same. The tension mounted between the black and white communities over an incident that allegedly occurred in an elevator at Drexel building in downtown Tulsa involving Sarah Page, a 17-year-old white elevator operator, and Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old black man. There are several versions of what supposedly transpired, but the most common being that Dick Rowland accidentally stepped on Page's foot in the elevator, throwing her off balance. When Rowland reached out to keep her from falling, she screamed. Many Tulsans came to believe through media reports that Rowland attacked Page although no sufficient evidence surfaced to substantiate the claim. The incident was further escalated by a local newspaper headline that encouraged the public to "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in Elevator."

The strained relationship between the white and black communities, the heightened jealousy of the success of the Black Wall Street area and the elevator encounter led to the Tulsa Race Riot.

Armed white men looted, burned and destroyed the black community. When the smoke cleared, mere shells of buildings were all that remained of the business district. The Red Cross estimates that more than 300 people were killed and approximately 1,200 homes were destroyed.

Source:

Tulsa City-County Library African-American Resource Center Race Riot Subject Guide

Container List

Photograph Description	Box Number	Item Number
Unidentified victim of Tulsa Race Riot violence	Box 1	AA1
The newly built Mount Zion Baptist Church engulfed in smoke	Box 1	AA2

Ruins of Mount Zion Baptist Church	Box 1	AA3
Onlookers watching the destruction of Mount Zion Baptist Church	Box 1	AA4
Men ordered to detention centers during the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921	Box 1	AA5
National Guard arrives in Greenwood during the Tulsa Race Riot	Box 1	AA6
Destruction in Greenwood during the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921	Box 1	AA7