

A Personal Reflection on 'Roots' and

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It was only last week that the message came through once again – loud and clear. And it came through at both the personal level and in terms of an understanding of the 'culture' we share here in Tulsa.

It was while I was glancing through an attractively blue brochure from the Tulsa City-County Library that I was pleased to discover that "Roots – The Saga of an American Family" would be among books reviewed as part of the continuing Books Sandwiched In program. I was excited that Tulsans would be further exposed to the masterpiece called by its author, Alex Haley, "the simple story of all black people."

My excitement, however, began to disintegrate as I read further, noting that the review would be offered at two locations, one downtown and the other at a regional library at 71st Street and South Memorial. And I found myself growing more angered that the person chosen to review the book was Tulsa State Rep. William Wiseman Jr., a white Republican who represents a conservative legislative district in the heart of Southeast Tulsa.

Of course the Library had a point. A lot more people would probably turn out to hear Wiseman than to hear somebody like Henry Whitlow or W.D. Williams or Berneze Taylor or Augusta Mann. But I kept wondering how much those attending the review would learn

about our own situation here in Tulsa.

Would they hear anything about the lobby groups that went to Washington from Oklahoma and Indian Territories prior to the Great Land Run, urging that the area be admitted to the Union as a black and Indian state? Would they find out that Tulsa's own Greenwood had been a thriving community by the time of Statehood and that before 1920 the bustling community even boasted The Dreamland, billed as "the finest colored theatre in the Southwest"?

Would they find out that Dick Rowland, the man whose arrest on May 31, 1921, triggered one of the bloodiest race riots in this century, is alive and well and retired somewhere near Chicago? Or that the Ku Klux Klan once had the final say on who became judges in Tulsa?

Would the audience come away knowing that the Greenwood of the 1920s and '30s was known throughout this part of the country as "The Negro Wall Street of America" and that annual directories listed more than 400 black businesses? Would they hear about the trunk that a distant relative of Katie Duckery brought from "the Madagascar Island" and has been passed down through generations as a family stuck together through the centuries of slaving?

Would they hear about the separate black school system in Tulsa, maintained by a State-mandated separate County tax levy until 1955, or what happened to black merchants after

integration began to occur in the late 1950s? The opening of white stores created a whole new poverty class, black merchants who had never been poor before.

Would they remember the closing of Carver Junior High School or know why it had become such an issue? Would they know about the tears that came to Tulsan's eyes when they recalled that rainy Sunday afternoon back in 1928 when George Washington Carver came to Tulsa for the dedication of the school which would bear his name?

Tulsa's black community in 1977, I feel, is finding itself just a bit off balance. The past few years have been times of hope as program after program has been put in place to bring the city back into some equilibrium. But the inflationary cycle has offset programmatic advances, leaving more than 40 percent of Tulsa's black families at or below the poverty level. And unemployment figures fail to reflect the 25-30 percent of the black workforce which is without jobs since statistics only count those who are still actively seeking work.

What integration there is appears to be occurring in the apartment complexes around Tulsa University and along the Skelly Bypass – largely young persons looking for an "apartment lifestyle" that cannot be found in North Tulsa. And new slums are growing in Far North Tulsa, fed by racial transition and record-breaking construction of 'surplus' middle-

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and was succeeded by James McHenry.

The Creeks had one chief, one second chief, 47 Kings, 28 Warriors. Tulsa was in the Coweta district. Each Indian allowed one square mile of pasture only, but could lease extra land from the Nation for 5 cents an acre. George Perryman had at one time 100,000 acres of pasture. Leasing to U S citizens was prohibited. U S citizens had to pay \$1 a month permit for labor; licenced traders paid 1/2 of one per cent per annum on their annual invoice and their report of all goods bought and offered for sale. A doctor paid \$25 a year and a mechanic \$24 a year. Drivers paid \$1 a head to pass their cattle through the Creek Nation, and \$5 a head if coming directly from Texas, the latter fee being the cause of much corruption among Creek and Cherokee citizens. When the Creeks sold Old Oklahoma for ~~the~~ \$400,000, they drew down \$29 per capita. Legus Perryman principal chief in 1887, and again for a brief time in 1891.
