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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, "Black Wall Street" was a prospering African American neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that went up in flames 98 years ago; incredibly, most Americans have never heard of the shameful events of June 1, 1921, when whites firebombed the neighborhood and an estimated 300 African Americans were murdered; and

8

WHEREAS, During the course of 18 hours on May 31 and June 1, 1921, more than 1,000 homes and businesses in Tulsa, Oklahoma were destroyed, and an estimated number of between 50 to 300 people were killed during the race bombing; and

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WHEREAS, By early 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma was a modern city with a population of more than 100,000; most of the city's 10,000 African American residents lived in the Greenwood District, a vibrant neighborhood that was home to two newspapers, several churches, a library branch, and scores of Black-owned businesses; and

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WHEREAS, On May 30, 1921, an incident involving Dick Rowland, an African American shoe shiner, and Sarah Page, a white elevator operator, in the Drexel Building in Tulsa would rapidly escalate into one of the single worst incidents of racial violence in American history; the most common

1 explanation is that Rowland stepped on Page's foot as he
2 entered the elevator, causing her to scream, and Rowland was
3 arrested by the police; and

4 WHEREAS, On May 30, 1921, the Tulsa Tribune, the city's
5 afternoon daily newspaper, reported that Rowland had attempted
6 to rape Page; by 7:30 P.M., hundreds of whites had gathered
7 outside the Tulsa County Courthouse demanding that the
8 authorities hand over Rowland, but the sheriff refused; at
9 around 9 P.M., after reports of the dire conditions downtown
10 reached Greenwood, a group of approximately 25 armed African
11 American men, many of them World War I veterans, went to the
12 courthouse and offered their services to the authorities to
13 help protect Rowland but were rebuffed by the sheriff; at
14 around 10 P.M., a false rumor circulated through Greenwood
15 that whites were storming the courthouse, prompting a second
16 contingent of African American men to go back to the
17 courthouse and offer their services to the authorities, who
18 were once again turned away; as the group was leaving, a white
19 man tried to disarm a Black veteran, and a shot was fired, an
20 incident that became the start of the race bombing; and

21 WHEREAS, Over the next 6 hours, Tulsa was plunged into
22 chaos as angry whites, frustrated over the failed lynching,
23 began to vent their rage at African Americans in general;
24 furious fighting erupted along the Frisco railroad tracks,

1 where Black defenders were able to hold off members of the
2 white mob; an unarmed African American man was murdered inside
3 a downtown movie theater, while carloads of armed whites began
4 making "drive-by" shootings in Black residential
5 neighborhoods; by midnight, fires had been set along the edge
6 of the African American commercial district; in some of the
7 city's all-night cafes, whites began to organize for a dawn
8 invasion of Greenwood; and

9 WHEREAS, During the early hours of the race bombing, local
10 authorities did little to stem the growing crisis, and Tulsa
11 police officers had deputized former members of the lynch mob;
12 local units of the National Guard were mobilized, but they
13 spent most of the night protecting a white neighborhood from a
14 nonexistent Black counterattack; and

15 WHEREAS, Shortly before dawn on June 1, 1921, thousands of
16 armed whites had gathered along the fringes of Greenwood;
17 after daybreak, they poured into the African American
18 district, looting homes and businesses and setting them on
19 fire; numerous atrocities occurred, including the murder of A.
20 C. Jackson, a renowned Black surgeon, who was shot after he
21 surrendered to a group of whites; at least one machine gun was
22 utilized by the invading whites, and some have claimed that
23 airplanes were used in the attack; Black Tulsans fought hard
24 to protect their homes and businesses, with particularly sharp

1 fighting occurring off of Standpipe Hill, but they were
2 outgunned and outnumbered in the end; and

3 WHEREAS, Following the race bombing, a brief period of
4 martial law was followed by various legal maneuvers; even
5 though Dick Rowland was exonerated, an all-white grand jury
6 blamed Black Tulsans for the events that transpired; despite
7 overwhelming evidence, no whites were ever sent to prison for
8 the murders and arson that had occurred; and

9 WHEREAS, The vast majority of Tulsa's African American
10 population had been made homeless by the race bombing; despite
11 efforts by the white establishment to force the relocation of
12 the Black community, Black Tulsans had already begun the long
13 and arduous process of rebuilding Greenwood within days;
14 thousands were forced to spend the winter of 1921-1922 living
15 in tents; and

16 WHEREAS, The deep scars left by the race bombing remained
17 visible for years, and it became a taboo subject, particularly
18 in Tulsa, for many years; in 1997, a state commission was
19 formed to investigate the race bombing; the commission
20 recommended that reparations be paid to the remaining
21 survivors, while a team of scientists and historians uncovered
22 evidence supporting long-held beliefs that unidentified
23 victims had been buried in unmarked grave sites; and

1 WHEREAS, In support of the Black Wall Street efforts, Soul
2 City Chicago is hosting a trip to Tulsa to tour the site of one
3 of the greatest Black business corridors to ever exist on May
4 26-28, 2023; and

5 WHEREAS, It is important that the people of the State of
6 Illinois and the nation do not forget this terrible tragedy;
7 therefore, be it

8 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
9 HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
10 we mourn the loss of life and the loss of the Black economy of
11 Tulsa, Oklahoma that took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921; and
12 be it further

13 RESOLVED, That we support the efforts in Tulsa to have the
14 Historic Greenwood District Main Street added to the historic
15 registry and are currently working with Executive Director
16 Bill White; and be it further

17 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
18 presented to the people of Tulsa as an expression of our
19 respect and esteem and our desire to support Black businesses
20 and communities throughout the nation.