Legislation Details (With Text)

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12/19/2019	*	City Council	Introduced by Council	
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Res. No. 1195

Resolution commemorating the Tulsa Race Massacre that occurred May 31 to June 1, 1921.

By Council Member Cabrera

Whereas, The Tulsa Race Massacre (also referred to as the Tulsa Race Riots) that occurred over 14 hours from May 31 to June 1, 1921, represent one of the worst incidents of racial violence in modern United States' history; and

Whereas, Although estimates vary, the report produced by the official state government Tulsa Race Massacre Commission concluded that between 100 and 300 people were killed and more than 8,000 (mostly Black) people were made homeless because of the violence; and

Whereas, The details of what precipitated the violence are unclear; and

Whereas, At the time, various newspapers reported that a young Black man, Dick Rowland, attacked a young, White, female elevator attendant in the Drexel Building; and

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Whereas, The Tulsa Tribune, for example, published the headline "Nab negro for attacking girl in elevator"; and

Whereas, Accepting claims that Mr. Rowland had attacked the elevator attendant, the police arrested Mr. Rowland and placed him in custody; and

Whereas, Despite the inflammatory headline, today the most commonly accepted explanation is that Mr. Rowland merely tripped and accidently stepped on the foot of the attendant, whose scream prompted a call to the police; and

Whereas, While Mr. Rowland was in custody, an anonymous caller announced to the Police Commissioner that they were going to "lynch that negro, that black devil who assaulted that girl"; and

Whereas, Soon after, as many as 2,000 White people descended onto the courthouse, while police continued to receive more threats of lynching Mr. Rowland; and

Whereas, Fearing that these threats would materialize, a group of about 25 Black men came to the courthouse to try and protect Mr. Rowland; and

Whereas, This group was turned away but more groups of Black protectors and White agitators continued to flood toward the courthouse; and

Whereas, Shortly after 10pm, a gun was discharged and chaos ensued; and

Whereas, This kicked off hours of deadly violence; and

Whereas, Evidence and reports indicate that people were murdered in cold blood, their bodies dumped in mass graves or in the river; and

Whereas, Their belongings were then looted and their homes and businesses burned to the ground; and

Whereas, Most of this violence occurred in the predominately Black neighborhood of Greenwood; and

Whereas, Prior to the massacre, Greenwood was considered the 'Black Wall Street' - an affluent and thriving Black neighborhood that was one of the wealthiest Black communities in the Country; and

Whereas, By the end of June 1, 1921, however, Greenwood was decimated and nearly the whole 40

blocks of Black Wall Street had been destroyed; and

Whereas, According to various reports, Black residents were chased out of their homes and attacked in the streets and public spaces; and

Whereas, There were even witnesses who recounted airplanes flying over the neighborhood, piloted by White men, dropping kerosene bombs; and

Whereas, In the report from the official Commission examining the massacre, the authors wrote that "Tulsa was likely the first city [in the United States] to be bombed from the air"; and

Whereas, To add insult to injury, at dawn, when the National Guard arrived, it was the Black residents who were taken into custody and held under armed guard; and

Whereas, With hands up in surrender, Black residents were forced to walk through White neighborhoods to reach the make-shift detention camp; and

Whereas, This gave some White residents an easy opportunity to loot vacant homes, and reports say they stole furniture, jewelry, fur coats and other valuables; and

Whereas, It is estimated that 6,000 people were detained at the detention camp, housed at the fairgrounds, and many were not released until a White person vouched for them; and

Whereas, Those who were released were given cards to wear and, if they failed to attach this card to their clothes while in public, they were subject to re-arrest; and

Whereas, Despite the abhorrent details of this massacre and unjust detention of Black people, very little commemoration or reporting has publicized the incident, with one survivor describing such talk as "taboo"; and

Whereas, For example, it has been discovered by researchers and journalists that the Tulsa newspapers and police archives have deliberately removed or hidden stories related to the massacre; and

Whereas, As such, the massacre is rarely taught in schools or mentioned in history books; and

Whereas, In fact, it was not until 2001 that the state government-appointed Commission released a report examining the details of the incident; and

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Whereas, Furthermore, it was not until last year that the name of the Commission was changed to reflect an understanding of the event as a race massacre, rather than a race riot; and

Whereas, As we know from other atrocities in human history, the harmful effects of these incidents are far-reaching and long-lasting, and continue to affect communities for generations; and

Whereas, Although this massacre occurred in Tulsa, its slowly-recognized title as one of the worst acts of racial violence in our Country's history means that it has a huge impact on people of color across all state lines; and

Whereas, New York City is home to more than two million Black or African American people, according to the 2017 American Community Survey; and

Whereas, Furthermore, since 2011, New York City has been a majority minority city, meaning there are more Black, Hispanic and Asian residents than those recorded as Non-Hispanic White; and

Whereas, As these demographics highlight, commemorating the Tulsa Race Massacre is of vital importance to a significant part of the City's population; and

Whereas, In fact, given that some consider the massacre to be an act of ethnic cleansing, there are important lessons to be learned for all New Yorkers; and

Whereas, Just as the Holocaust is taught in schools and solemnly but publicly commemorated so that we never forget and never repeat such atrocities, the Tulsa Race Massacre holds similar lessons for humanity; now, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorate the Tulsa Race Massacre that occurred May 31 to June 1, 1921.

LS #12857
11/26/19
LMS