

**TESTIMONY FROM MICHAEL D. PEGUES ON BEHALF OF
THE HISTORIC GREENWOOD DISTRICT - BLACK WALL STREET NATIONAL
MONUMENT COALITION**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS**

[S. 1051](#)

SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the testimony of the Historic Greenwood District-Black Wall Street National Monument Coalition in support of Senator Lankford and Senator Booker's bipartisan legislation, S. 1051, a bill to grant national monument status to the historic Greenwood area in Tulsa, Oklahoma, popularly known as Black Wall Street. This national monument seeks to honor the accomplishments of Black Wall Street and the Historic Greenwood District and commemorate the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. We believe it would help spur the resurgence of this economic and cultural hub, which the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre devastated, cutting short one of America's most remarkable success stories.

Establishing the Historic Greenwood District - Black Wall Street National Monument as part of the National Park System is long overdue. In 2005, President Bush issued [a National Park Service Reconnaissance Study](#), which determined that the district impacted by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre is a site of national significance. The survey described it as "an outstanding example of a particular type of resource" and concluded that it "possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our national heritage."

We, the Historic Greenwood District - Black Wall Street National Monument Coalition, could not agree more with NPS' assessment. Our diverse coalition is composed of more than ten Greenwood-based organizations and an advisory council of proud Americans many of whom descend from 1921 Massacre survivors. Although we come from different backgrounds and hold different political beliefs, we are united in our conviction that a federal monument honoring the Historic Greenwood District is long overdue.

May 31, 2026, marked the 105th anniversary of the assault on Black Wall Street, a ruthless effort to wipe it off the map, followed by a state-sponsored campaign to erase it from America's memory. With one voice, we stress to this subcommittee that the time is now to help us preserve the rich heritage and lessons that make this community such an indelible part of our nation's story.

On May 31-June 1, 1921, tens of thousands of white people launched a mob attack on Greenwood. The atrocity, known as the Tulsa Race Massacre, resulted in 35 city blocks being burned to the ground; approximately 300 Black citizens murdered; and thousands of others displaced from their homes overnight. The destruction of Greenwood -- an attack where perpetrators dropped bombs from the air, murdered children, and plundered the life savings of hard-working families -- is considered one of the worst incidents of racial violence in United States history.

To know the history of this beloved district is to understand why momentum is growing behind the call for federal protection. Innovators, titans of industry, and Americans of all stripes continue to draw lessons and inspiration from Tulsa, Oklahoma's Greenwood District, where Black families bravely defied the odds in the age of Jim Crow. At a time where virulent racial hostility and structural barriers limited Black citizens' full and fair participation in society, Greenwood stood out. Founded in 1905, Greenwood grew into a thriving Black community whose prosperous businesses and widespread Black property ownership earned it the name "Black Wall Street."

A little more than two generations removed from enslavement, these intrepid Black pioneers built a thriving Oklahoma community where entrepreneurship served the common good and family life flourished. The community's Black-owned hospitals, movie theaters, libraries, shops, and eateries told a new and exciting story about the possibilities of America.

But some white Tulsans refused to accept that descendants of enslaved people could achieve economic independence and equality under the law. In 1921, a white mob, aided by white local authorities, devastated Greenwood in less than 24 hours, killing Black residents and forcing thousands to flee for their lives. Black civilians ran through hails of bullets and thick smoke to escape the violence. Many Black residents fought valiantly to defend their community. More than 1,000 homes and almost every structure in the community were destroyed. Homes that remained were looted. After the violence, Greenwood residents found themselves homeless and their once thriving community in ruins.

Despite the historical magnitude of the Tulsa Race Massacre, far too few Americans know that such an attack on their fellow citizens ever occurred. The silence surrounding this act of domestic terrorism extended into Oklahoman's classrooms as many, now adults, have never heard of this horrific event. For example, during the 2024 Oklahoma Supreme Court oral argument in *Randle et al v. City of Tulsa et al* (April 3, 2024), Justice Yvonne Kauger, a fourth-generation Oklahoman, said "When I went to high school, I knew about the Trail of Tears... Prohibition... but Greenwood was never mentioned."

This systemic concealment was by design and complete. The destruction of Black Wall Street was followed by a massive cover-up orchestrated by Tulsa's elites. Bodies were dumped in unmarked graves, news coverage was suppressed, and a code of silence was imposed on the community, obscuring the truth for generations to come.

The comprehensive campaign to conceal the 1921 Race Massacre also obscured Greenwood's triumphs. Americans should be aware of not only what was lost but how Black Americans rebuilt the community despite continued opposition. The courageous rebuilding of Black Wall Street from the ashes deserves to be celebrated and memorialized, alongside of the ongoing efforts to preserve its legacy and continue to restore its vitality.

We are working hard to do our part in Greenwood. For example, a historical marker has been erected on Standpipe Hill, allowing visitors to understand the devastation and impact on sacred ground once occupied by families of Black Wall Street. It was also around this hill that brave veterans and Greenwood residents took up arms to defend their homes and community while allowing others to escape the violence. Designation of the district as a national monument would provide the community with the national attention and resources needed to preserve Standpipe Hill, and so many of Black Wall Street's other sites of significance.

To deprive generation after generation of the story of Greenwood is to lock away some of the most instructive stories about the importance of self-reliance, the evil of racial hatred, and the beauty of the American Dream. By establishing a monument dedicated to an iconic community built on hard work and shared values, you would help uncover and expand enthusiastic Black participation in the American Project. Thus, this is not simply a bill to establish a national monument, it's a way to reify the tenets that hold our Republic together, while fostering the cross-cultural dialogues and understanding that bring racial reconciliation.

The designation of the Historic Greenwood District Black Wall Street National Monument is an effort that has long standing bipartisan support. President George W. Bush's administration issued the 2005 study that confirmed the area's cultural value, and the Oklahoma State Legislature's 1997 commission found evidence of a campaign to "cover up" the massacre. In the 118th and 119th Congresses, Senators crossed the aisle in unanimous support of this legislation because the history it preserves is universal.

For those of us with roots in Greenwood, the designation cannot wait any longer. More than a century after the Tulsa Race Massacre, gaps in how this history is taught and remembered leave intergenerational wounds and create new ones. Many of us in the coalition regret that we couldn't do more to bring about peace of mind for our great-grandparents and other relatives who survived the massacre. Our ancestors would celebrate this designation, knowing that the community they built and rebuilt will be honored and its legacy preserved for generations to come.

The pioneers who created Black Wall Street, the heroes who survived its destruction, and the people who rebuilt it represent the best of America. Their remarkable work ethic and resilience deserve a permanent place in our nation's memory. Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, 105 years after the destruction of the Historic Greenwood District and Black Wall Street, you can help us finally secure the national recognition that the Historic Greenwood District deserves by voting in favor of this historic Bill.