

Hughes Van Ellis
Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor

Continuing Injustice: The Centennial of the Tulsa-Greenwood Race Massacre
May 19, 2021

Hughes Van Ellis Written Testimony for the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, May 19, 2021:

My name is Hughes Van Ellis. I am 100 years old. And I am a survivor of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Because of the Massacre, my family was driven from our home. We were left with nothing. We were made refugees in our own country.

My childhood was hard and we didn't have much. We worried what little we had would be stolen from us. Just like it was stolen in Tulsa. You may have been taught that when something is stolen from you, you can go to the courts to be made whole. You can go to the courts to get justice. This wasn't the case for us. The courts in Oklahoma wouldn't hear us. The federal courts said we were too late.

We were made to feel that our struggles were unworthy of justice. That we were less valued than whites, that we weren't fully American. We were shown that in the United States, not all men were equal under law. We were shown that when Black voices called out for justice, no one cared.

But we still had faith things would get better. We still believed in the promise of America and in the cause of freedom.

I did my duty in World War II. I served in combat in the Far East with the 234th AAA Gun Battalion. We were an all-black battalion. I fought for freedom abroad, even though it was ripped away from me at home, even after my home and my community were destroyed. I did it because I believed, in the end, America would get it right.

When I returned home from the war, I didn't find any of the freedom I was fighting for overseas. Unlike white servicemen, I wasn't entitled to GI Bill benefits because of the color of my skin. I came home to segregation. A separate and unequal America. But still I believed in America.

This is why we are still speaking up today, even at the age of 100. The Tulsa Race Massacre isn't a footnote in a history book for us. We live with it every day and the thought of what Greenwood was and what it could have been. We aren't just black and white pictures on a screen, we are flesh and blood. I was there when it happened, I'm still here. My sister was there when it happened, she's still here.

We're not asking for a handout. All we are asking for is for a chance to be treated like a first-class citizen who truly is a beneficiary of the promise that this is a land where there is "liberty and justice for all."

We are asking for justice for a lifetime of ongoing harm. Harm that was caused by the Massacre. You can give us the chance to be heard and give us a chance to be made whole after all these years and after all our struggle.

I still believe in America. I still believe in the ideals that I fought overseas to defend. And I believe if given the chance you will do the right thing and justice will be served. Thank you.