

Name: Egunwale Amusan

Title: Chief President

Date: 5/17/21

Hearing: Continuing

Injustice: The Centennial of
the Tulsa-Greenwood Race
Massacre

My name is Chief Egunwale Amusan. I am the grandson of Raymond Beard Sr, and the grandnephew of Matthew and Mary Beard, all of whom were survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Holocaust, massacre, or any other matching descriptor. I was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Today I speak on behalf of those whose remains were dumped carelessly into the Arkansas river by the truckloads, those remains that crack the concrete from beneath the highway built over them, and those remains dumped in mass graves like the one in which I stood in October 2020 during the mass grave investigation at Oaklawn cemetery in Tulsa.

As a member of the Mass Graves Oversight Committee, I stood in that trench with the 12 coffins we uncovered. I couldn't help but to be drawn a smaller box which appeared to be the size of a woman's hat box. It triggered the memory of something I had read in the race riot commission report of 2001. I rushed home to look again at the document. It stated that the remains in this trench were not embalmed and the death certificates were not even signed by a medical examiner. A process undignified in every manner. The document stated that Tulsa County paid Stanley McCune Funeral Home to bury 16 bodies in the city cemetery. The report states that 4 of the 16 bodies placed in the mass grave were badly burned, and one was that of a stillborn baby.

When I returned, I looked again at the box in that trench. I walked away and wept for the soul of this child and the mother who would never know the whereabouts of her child lost both in the womb and in the earth.

Our family's journey to Greenwood actually started one hundred and thirty-nine years ago when my children's 4th great grandfather named King Blue cowrote a letter submitted to Congress and the House of Representatives just as I am doing today. King Blue was the former slave of the Chickasaw tribal leader Benjamin Colbert. He and other tribal representatives presented a document in 1882 called "The Memorial of the Chickasaw Freedmen."

The intent of this appeal was to encourage the enforcement of the 1866 treaty that obliges the tribe to carry out the stipulations of the 3rd clause, which states that monies given by the federal government to the tribe requires the tribe to grant Freed persons of African descent all the rights privileges, and immunities---including the right of suffrage. The Chickasaw Tribe refused to honor the treaty, so my relatives were nationless for 40 years until 1902 when, through an act of congress, thousands of forgotten enslaved Africans were made citizens of the United States of America. Around that time, my Freedman ancestors and those of my spouse began to migrate to Tulsa's Greenwood District. Greenwood brought a new sense of self-determination and restored dignity; that dignity would be short lived, and the dreamland of Tulsa would become a nightmare. In just a few decades, my ancestors would experience enslavement, false freedom,

Jim Crow, and a holocaust that would be hidden from the pages of history for next 100 years.

Fast forward: it wasn't until 1997 that I became deeply aware of the Tulsa Holocaust and its implications. However, I remained unaware of my family's involvement until my grandfather became a plaintiff in the reparation's suit of 2003. I felt a full range of emotions, and so many unanswered questions. Regretfully, I was oblivious to the trauma that I was evoking with all my questioning.

The long-term implications of the Tulsa Holocaust and urban renewal can be physically seen today. This is not a matter of past traumas but concurrent traumatic experiences. The plot to destroy the black township of Greenwood was not a spontaneous act caused by a rumor in an elevator. It was premeditated, as well as racially and politically motivated. Many who discover the story of Greenwood cannot believe such a remarkable place was built, sustained, and financed by Black people, nor can they believe that such an act of mass terrorism against American citizens occurred right here on American soil. The violation of the 14th Amendment was NOT the result of some crazed mob. This was a city-sanctioned violation. The event resulted in the deprivation of life, liberty, and property, without due process of law, as well as the failure to provide equal protection of the laws.

Greenwood was a cultural, social, and economic incubator. An environment that provided apprenticeship and high cultural standards; it offered economic, political, and social stability. Most importantly it provided a safe place to finally heal and detoxify individually and collectively from the effects of "post traumatic slave syndrome," a term coined by the clinical psychologist Dr. Joy Degruy. According to a 2019 story in the *Harvard Gazette*, the property damage in today's numbers were estimated to be as high as 200 million dollars. The highest form of devastation was the mental suffering that resulted in high rates of PTSD and other forms of psychological morbidity such as depression, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Many of those who speak of Greenwood often reference the resilience of Greenwood's inhabitants because they rebuilt much of the district by 1925. As remarkable as it is, only an estimated 40 percent of those original inhabitants returned to Greenwood. My grandfather's elder siblings were his caregivers; both disappeared after the massacre never to return. Their home and laundry business was burned to ashes. We later discovered that my great uncle Matthew Beard fled to Los Angeles where he and his wife changed their first names to conceal their identity. One cannot imagine the trauma of not knowing if a family member is dead or alive. Now I understand why my grandfather often said, "no

news is good news.” My grandfather would return to Greenwood in the 1940’s only to see it destroyed again during urban renewal.

In 2003, my grandfather passed away a few months after becoming a plaintiff in the reparations lawsuit filed by Johnnie Cochran and Charles Ogletree. According to the Supreme Court, this case could not be heard since the statute of limitations had run its course. Today, the same city responsible for the crimes of 1921 is leveraging the suffering of the 3 living survivors and their descendants in the name of tourism. When I look my eldest son in the eyes, I wonder if the charred baton of justice will burn the palms of his hands, or if it will be cleansed and cooled in the river of restitution. I pray that 100 years from now his offspring will not be appealing to congress for justice denied, but instead applauding congress as we commemorate the 200th Centennial of the Tulsa Holocaust of 1921.

Tulsa, Oklahoma is H.R. 40

Bio: Chief Egunwale Amusan

Consultant and History Recovery Specialist Chief Egunwale Amusan is a highly sought-after expert regarding the history of Greenwood. As a key influencer in the Black Wall Street movement, Amusan serves as Adviser to the Black Wall Street Chamber of Commerce and is the founder of the Black Wall Street Memorial March which has been active for the past 24 years in its mission is to preserve the history of Greenwood. He is the co-founder and Owner of The Real Black Wall Street Tour.

Chief Amusan is a board member at the Center of Public Secrets and a member of the Tulsa Remembrance Coalition, working in Partnership with Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative Soil Collection Project. He is a consultant for writer producer film maker Tricia Woodgett and writer/director Darnell Martin.

Chief Amusan is also a certified Traditional Ancestral Chief (title bestowed in Abeokuta, Nigeria). He is the President of the African Ancestral Society with members in Oklahoma, Dallas, Houston, Louisiana, and Kentucky. The Society has a social justice arm that works closely with the Terence Crutcher Foundation, HRW (Human Rights Watch), ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), and LDF (Legal Defense and Educational Fund).