

**Lessie Evelyn Benningfield (“Mother”) Randle
Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor**

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

Mother Randle's Written Testimony for the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, May 19, 2021:

I am blessed and honored to be talking with you today. It means a lot to me to finally be able to look at you all in the eye and ask you to do the right thing. I have waited so long for justice.

My name is Lessie Evelyn Benningfield Randle. People call me Mother Randle. Today, I am 106-years-old. 100 years ago, in 1921, I was a 6-year-old child. I was blessed to live with my grandmother in a beautiful Black community in Tulsa Oklahoma, called Greenwood. I was lucky. I had a home. I had toys. I didn't have any fears as a young child and I felt very safe. My community was beautiful and was filled with happy and successful Black people. Then everything changed.

It was like a war. White men with guns came and destroyed my community. We couldn't understand why. What did we do to them? We didn't understand. We were just living. But they came, and they destroyed everything.

They burned houses and businesses. They just took what they wanted out of the buildings then they burned them. They murdered people. We were told they just dumped the dead bodies into the river. I remember running outside of our house. I ran past dead bodies. It wasn't a pretty sight. I still see it today in my mind – 100 years later.

I was so scared – I didn't think we would make it out alive. I remember people were running everywhere. We waited for the soldiers to come, and when they finally came, they took us to the fairgrounds where we would be safe. It felt like so long before they came.

I survived the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. And I have survived 100 years of painful memories and losses.

By the grace of God, I am still here. I have survived. I have survived to tell this story. I believe that I am still here to share it with you. Hopefully *now*, you all will listen to us. While we are still here.

The white people who did this to us, were filled with so much hate. It is disgusting that they hate us for no reason except that we are Black people.

We know – most of the people who committed these acts are dead now. The three of us here today, are the only ones left – that we know of. But just because these men are probably dead, the City and County of Tulsa, the State of Oklahoma, and the Tulsa Chamber are still responsible for making it right.

The City and County caused this to happen to us –

The State allowed this happen to us—they didn't protect us.

The Chamber helped ensure that we could not rebuild after the Massacre, including holding us in internment camps.

They owe us something. They owe me something. I have lived much of my life poor. My opportunities were taken from me. And my community, North Tulsa – *Black Tulsa* – is still messed up today. They didn't rebuild it. Its empty. It's a ghetto. You can help us get some justice.

America is full of examples where people in positions of power, many just like you, have told us to wait. Others have told us it's too late. It seems like justice in America is always so slow or not possible for Blacks. And we are made to feel crazy just for asking for things to be made right. There are always so many excuses for why justice is so slow or never happens at all.

I am here today, at 106-years-old, *looking at you all in the eye*. We've waited too long, and I am tired. We are tired. I am asking you today to give us some peace. Please give me, my family, and my community some justice.

Thank you.