

2021 -- H 6386

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

HOUSE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TULSA RACE MASSACRE

Introduced By: Representatives Cassar, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Filippi, Alzate, Felix,
Williams, Morales, Batista, and Giraldo

Date Introduced: June 03, 2021

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, In the early 1900s, many Black individuals and families settled throughout
2 Oklahoma, setting up vibrant communities and dozens of all-Black towns, the most famous and
3 prosperous of which was in Tulsa's Greenwood District where individuals sought new
4 opportunities, freedom, and a chance for a better life; and

5 WHEREAS, Segregation and the inaccessibility of resources led members of the Black
6 community to open a variety of commercial establishments, including rooming houses, grocery
7 stores, barber shops, beauty salons, restaurants, clothiers, pharmacies, movie theaters, dance halls,
8 pool halls, confectioneries, jitney services, and professional offices (such as for doctors, lawyers,
9 dentists, and accountants); and

10 WHEREAS, The Greenwood District became a thriving community where Black
11 business owners, schools, and churches flourished and, by the late 1910s, it was the wealthiest
12 Black community in the United States; and

13 WHEREAS, Churches such as Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mt. Zion
14 Baptist Church, First Baptist Church North Tulsa, Paradise Baptist Church, Metropolitan Baptist
15 Church, and others became central to the family life and culture of the Greenwood District; and

16 WHEREAS, By 1921, the community was home to thousands of Black residents who
17 lived and worked in the most prosperous Black community in the United States; and

18 WHEREAS, The community earned the name the "Negro Wall Street of America" (later,
19 simply known as the "Black Wall Street") from the famed African-American author and educator,
20 Booker T. Washington; and

1 WHEREAS, As the opportunities for Black families grew, the community began to
2 attract more Black families, business owners, well-educated professionals, and individuals fleeing
3 racial oppression and discrimination in other States; and

4 WHEREAS, An incident occurred on the elevator between Dick Rowland and Sarah
5 Paige an elevator operator, and she had screamed. The next day after a police investigation, Dick
6 Rowland was detained at the Tulsa Police Department for questioning before being moved to the
7 Tulsa Courthouse for additional security; and

8 WHEREAS, On May 31, 1921, the Tulsa Tribune released a sensationalist story claiming
9 that a young Black male had attacked a white girl; and

10 WHEREAS, That story and long-simmering tensions in the City led to a large group of
11 white individuals surrounding the courthouse and demanding that Dick Rowland be released so
12 that he could be lynched; and

13 WHEREAS, A group of Black men traveled to the courthouse to help defend Dick
14 Rowland from the angry mob; and

15 WHEREAS, After a scuffle at the downtown Tulsa courthouse, white rioters pursued
16 Black men to the Greenwood District and the violence escalated; and

17 WHEREAS, Houses and businesses were looted and burned throughout the Greenwood
18 District and attacks lasted well into the next day before being quelled by the Oklahoma City
19 National Guard; and

20 WHEREAS, In less than 24 hours, 35 city blocks were destroyed by fires and 6,000
21 African-American individuals were detained; and

22 WHEREAS, It has been reported that 300 Black people died during these events, but it is
23 impossible to know for certain because, as part of the local cover-up of the massacre, the sheriff
24 banned funerals from taking place; and

25 WHEREAS, Some Black people were charged with rioting-related offenses; however,
26 none of the estimated 1,500 white officials and citizens who participated were prosecuted for
27 violent criminal acts; and

28 WHEREAS, Out of the 23 churches that were located in the Greenwood area prior to the
29 1921 Massacre, only 13 survived and only three churches were able to be rebuilt after being
30 destroyed: Paradise Baptist Church, Mount Zion Baptist Church, and Vernon AME Church; and

31 WHEREAS, Outside of the massacre area, five churches were able to rebuild after being
32 destroyed; and

33 WHEREAS, The Black citizens in Tulsa began rebuilding the Greenwood District
34 immediately, with Church services resuming the following Sunday; and

1 WHEREAS, One hundred years later, the residents and businesses in the Greenwood
2 District carry on the legacy of resilience and determination; and

3 WHEREAS, Greenwood is home to thousands of individuals and families who make
4 important contributions to their city and the United States and there are countless minority-owned
5 businesses in Greenwood that drive the local economy; and

6 WHEREAS, There is still much work to be done to heal the community and ensure all
7 people in Greenwood have the promise of a brighter tomorrow; and

8 WHEREAS, Greenwood is a community still scarred by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre,
9 but not defined by it; now, therefore be it

10 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby
11 commends the important work of groups such as the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial
12 Commission, the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, and others who work tirelessly to
13 ensure the story of the Greenwood District is accurately told and remembered; and be it further

14 RESOLVED, That this House hereby believes that while significant progress has been
15 made in the 100 years since the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, there is still work to be done towards
16 racial reconciliation, which can only be accomplished through open, respectful, and frank
17 dialogue; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That this House hereby encourages families of all races to invite families of
19 different races to their homes to have discussions on race, with parents setting examples for their
20 children on how to engage in a conversation that will build better understanding of, and respect
21 for, people of different races; and be it further

22 RESOLVED, That this House hereby urges all the people of Rhode Island and the United
23 States to continue seeking greater understanding, dialogue, and closer connections to people of
24 different races; and be it further

25 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
26 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial
27 Commission, the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, the Honorable Joseph Biden,
28 President of the United States, and the Honorable Daniel McKee, Governor of the State of Rhode
29 Island.

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