

THE TULSA RACE RIOT OF 1921: DETERMINING  
ITS CAUSES AND FRAMING

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THE TULSA RACE RIOT OF 1921: DETERMINING  
ITS CAUSES AND FRAMING

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# 1

## Introduction

The study of race has been subjected to a countless number of sociological inquiries. Often embedded within these pursuits are issues related to racial conflict. Perhaps the most vivid manifestation of this involves race riots. Recently, in an extended episode of civil unrest near the end of 2005, France was host to a disorder that consisted of numerous reports of shootings, arson, and looting, resulting in over 4,500 arrests (Bernard 2005). Reportedly, the violence was initiated in Clichy-sous-Bois after two youths, believed to be of African descent, were electrocuted while fleeing from police (Smith 2005). However, as in most cases of rioting, there were arguably many more deeply rooted causes that contributed to the horrendous actions than were initially reported. While one editorial perceived the riots to be related to pervasive unemployment in a community largely comprised of an immigrant population from North Africa and the sub-Saharan region (Smith 2005), others argued its causes could be linked to racial discrimination (Cowell 2005; Roy 2005). These same factors, discrimination and unemployment, were also associated with many of the race-related riots which have occurred throughout U.S. history. The recent riots in France and a rash of riots in the U.S., particularly during the 1960s, have strikingly similar features. There are similarities in reported causes as well as individual and organizational responses.

Much less has been documented in regard to how episodes of racial conflict are interpreted by stakeholders and the public at large. How riots are interpreted, or framed,

is a key process involved in the development of immediate responses at both individual and organizational levels. However, riots may much later involve demands for reconciliation and restitution, which may involve reframing, or rearticulating historical happenings.

The global existence of race riots deems them necessary for further research. Race riots are often thought to be social phenomena isolated in time and place. Certainly patterns have emerged in which a diffusion of riots characterizes a particular historical juncture, such as those prior to the 1920s and during the 1960s, but they have also occurred during what appear to be relatively peaceful times and places, at least on a macro-level. In addition, race riots have also been considered events that began one day and ended hours, possibly days, later. Instead, elements fueling their outbreaks were there long before and the ashes remain long after. A riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma provides a vivid example.

The purpose of this research is to examine the phenomenon of race riots, particularly the Tulsa riot of 1921. Therefore, this is a case study. The research focuses on associated causes or precursors to the riot, organizational and governmental responses to the riot, and the issue of framing associated with the same. It should be noted that although the term “race riot” is utilized throughout this research, race is certainly not the only factor involved in the formation of riots. Rather, racial issues play a role in conjunction with a host of additional factors. This research calls for two levels of analysis (before and after the riot) and these levels are examined within different theoretical schemes using different methodological approaches. The objective is to identify important factors associated with the Tulsa riot which can be used to consider

alternative race riots; factors that have not been previously identified or sufficiently considered in coming to conclusions about riots from a broader perspective. Thus, this research is largely theoretical through its use of the Tulsa riot to build on existing insight as to various forces associated with rioting.

The Tulsa riot was selected for two reasons. First, it represents a similar type of conflict which occurred throughout many other cities during the early twentieth century and one in which a legacy is still for the taking today. A recent commission formed to study the riot allows researchers to examine present-day impacts of the riot (Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 2001). Thus, the riot can be studied as an historical event that has long passed, but also as a process that continues to have sociopolitical ramifications today. Second, there is much historical data on the riot that allows it to be more fully understood within its proper context. Too often riots are not considered contextually and they are treated as mere occurrences with key actors and events left ignored.

### **Preview of Remaining Chapters**

This research includes seven additional chapters. Chapter two consists of a brief overview of the literature on the Tulsa riot. Specific attention is given to events and processes which took place during the riot, as this information is not entirely addressed throughout the analysis of this study. In addition, I offer any insight previously available in research regarding causative factors associated with the Tulsa riot. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the current move for reparations among riot survivors.

Chapter three provides an overview of scholarship and theoretical insights concerning the causes of riots from a general perspective. I begin by looking at certain

contextual factors (i.e., migration, lynching, war, etc.) argued to have contributed to certain riots in the past. Next, attention is lent to theoretical frameworks associated with racial disorders. Finally, an integrative approach to studying the causes of riots is presented. Specifically, I provide an integrative model that is used for the analysis of the Tulsa riot, which encompasses not only particular structural factors, but cultural and contextual issues as well. In addition, I integrate these macro-level aspects with micro-level contributing factors in the form of triggering, or precipitating events.

The fourth chapter involves the examination of immediate and long-term responses to the Tulsa riot, with an emphasis on framing. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of disaster research and community formations, which is later used to identify a plethora of responses following the Tulsa riot. However, a much larger discussion is borrowed from social movement literature regarding the process of framing. Ultimately, it is argued that the Tulsa riot has experienced a frame transformation from its original frame as a “Negro uprising” to a new frame of “injustice.”

Chapter five presents an overview of the methodology used in this research, which involves a bridging of quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, a discussion is presented concerning the use of census records and numerous alternative historical archives. In addition, a framework for conducting case studies is presented in conjunction with a brief overview of various methodological techniques incorporated within this study.

Chapter six consists of the analyses, particularly concerning the integrative results associated with the causes of the Tulsa riot. Ultimately, it is argued that the causes of the Tulsa riot cannot be captured without grasping its complexity. This study concludes that

the Tulsa Race Riot was caused by a host of factors including, a racist and discriminatory historical context; various structural characteristics, including factors related to politics, race, and law enforcement; a culture of racism and vigilantism; and a triggering event involving the arrest of an African American accused of assaulting a White woman. This section concludes with an application of an integrative approach concerning these factors.

Chapter seven includes an analysis of framing strategies and techniques. I proceed with a discussion of various organizational responses to the riot and how the riot was initially assessed both diagnostically and prognostically among media and governmental representatives within the city of Tulsa as well as black victims of the riot. Later, I transition into a discussion of the more current framing techniques and strategies used by Tulsa riot survivors and representatives in their fight for reparations.

Finally, chapter eight concludes this research. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the important findings from this research. In addition, implications of this research are presented. The chapter also discusses areas to build upon in future studies of race riots. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of limitations.

## 2

### **The Tulsa Riot**

Most of the present literature on the Tulsa race riot emphasizes particularities in regard to specific events which took place. Authors such as Wilson & Wallace (1992), Carr (2002), and Myers (2002) have provided fictional accounts with significant characters renamed, while others have provided more journalistic accounts (for example Wheeler 1971; Madigan 2001; Hirsch 2002). Other accounts focus on personal experiences during the riot (for example Gates 1997, 2003; Parrish 1998). Bob Hower (1993) provides numerous historical documents concerning the riot and gives a descriptive background on the work of the Red Cross in Tulsa following the riot. Still others best describe the riot in a historical context as well as how it unfolded (for example Halliburton 1972, 1975; Williams & Williams 1972; Ellsworth 1982; Johnson 1998; also see various authors in *Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (2001)). Finally, Brophy (2002) offers not only a historical study of the riot, but also legal arguments concerning both the legitimacy and appropriateness of reparations.

#### **Precipitating Event**

The precipitating event that is widely accepted today to have caused the Tulsa riot on May 31 and June 1 was the arrest of a black man, Dick Rowland, and the circulation of rumors regarding the details surrounding his arrest. On May 31, the *Tulsa Tribune* contained at least one report of an alleged assault by Rowland against a white female, Sara Page. This edition no longer exists in public records as a whole because it is

missing part of the front page (where the article was printed) as well as an editorial, which may have included something in regard to the arrest. Nevertheless, the article referring to the arrest was reprinted by Loren Gill in a thesis for the University of Tulsa regarding the riot (Gill 1946). Though the allegations against Rowland were never substantiated, the account was enough to evoke curiosity among many and disgust in others. Shortly after the newspaper was distributed, white citizens throughout the city began to gather at the courthouse where Rowland was being held on charges. Rumors and threats of lynching Rowland permeated Tulsa.

### **During the Riot**

Later that afternoon, a group of about 25 black citizens, possibly members of the African Blood Brotherhood (Commander, Tulsa Post, African Blood Brotherhood 1921), arrived at the courthouse armed to protect Rowland. They were initially convinced by the local sheriff that he was safe and retreated back to the Greenwood district. Later, a larger group of about 75 arrived armed after the white mob had swelled in size. Upon their arrival, an altercation broke out and a shot was fired. The black citizens who were present quickly retreated to their district once again, but this time large groups of whites followed. In fact, they obtained guns and ammunition along the way through a couple of different methods. First, they break into stores. Law enforcement officers were a second way in which guns were obtained by the white mob.

As groups of whites entered Greenwood, gun battles ensued between members of each race, but the number of whites far surpassed that of African-Americans.

Throughout the remainder of May 31 and the early morning of June 1, the largely successful Black community that had been rather quickly erected was even more rapidly



destroyed. The rioting not only consisted of gun battles, but looting and arson as well. Virtually all 35 city blocks that made up Greenwood were torched to the ground, but not before valuables were taken out of homes and businesses for private use. Officially, thirty-six citizens died during the riot, including twenty-six blacks and ten whites. However, this number has been contested with other estimates ranging from 150 to as high as 300. The reason for a discrepancy in the death-toll is a belief among many that victims were buried unsystematically. Historical evidence suggests many bodies were placed in unmarked graves or dumped into the Arkansas River. These allegations are not recent developments, though, as they were addressed very shortly after rioting ceased. Property loss during the riot rose to at least \$1.8 million (for references to the events during the riot, see Halliburton 1972, 1975; Ellsworth 1982; Johnson 1998; Parrish 1998; Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 2001).

### **Underlying Causes**

Many accounts of the Tulsa riot have included insights as to why the riot may have occurred. Primarily, one deeply-rooted cause has been offered. This relates to the interconnection of wealth within the Black community and race relations in both Tulsa, and more generally, the entire South during the era (for example Ellsworth 1982; Butler 1991; Johnson 1998). Previous research contends the community had reached economic heights that were unprecedented among other similar communities throughout the era of segregation. These authors (for example Halliburton 1972, 1975; Ellsworth 1982) also note that blacks were expected to “know their place” and that racial, political, and economic advancement were not among the designated areas. According to these

accounts, many blacks in Tulsa refused to accept the hypocrisy of an American system that preached equality worldwide but did not offer the same at home.

### **Immediate Responses**

Similarly, the events which occurred immediately after the riot have been documented extensively. Black survivors who had not fled the city were immediately placed under arrest and put into internment camps located at various sites across the city. Days, weeks, and months in some cases, would pass before individuals were able to leave. Those who left shortly after their arrival were forced to obtain permission from the city, which was accomplished through an acknowledgement among whites that the particular survivor under consideration would go directly to work. Those who weren't able to leave were put into forced labor, which in most cases consisted of sanitation duties.

Many responses to the riot consisted of actions representative of the underlying racism and discrimination that existed throughout the era. These responses were both individually- and organizationally-based. Individually, the blame was largely placed on the shoulders of blacks, particularly those who arrived armed at the courthouse. These actors considered the riot to be an uprising, including the mayor and other city officials and leaders.

Organizationally, responses were similar. A grand jury was called forth to investigate the riot and to establish guilt. The jury, which was composed entirely of white males, placed the direct blame on the same group of blacks. However, they also blamed lax law enforcement. Weeks later, the Chief of Police would be fired for his role during the riot in addition to a few unrelated events (Madigan 2001).

A Reconstruction Committee was quickly established by the mayor to investigate the extent of damage and determine the course of action the city would take. It was quickly determined the torched district would be better suited for industrial purposes rather than permitting survivors to rebuild in the same location. In order to accomplish this, the city planned to extend fire zones, which would require all future building in the district to be at least two stories high, leaving the cost of rebuilding exorbitant for black survivors. Through the efforts of local black lawyers, however, the plan was eventually deemed unconstitutional (Ellsworth 1982). After the riot, several different cities across the United States attempted to donate money to help victims rebuild their homes. However, the city refused these funds, stating that Tulsa was going to rebuild what it had destroyed. But Tulsa did not fulfill its promise; it provided less than \$100,000 in total financial assistance to Greenwood citizens toward relief and no help toward rebuilding.

These responses have to be understood within a broader context. The specific events are certainly important to understand, but one of the goals of sociology is to understand how these experiences fit into the larger social structure and to understand the historical forces that shaped them (Mills 1959).

### **Reparations Movement**

The riot and its legacy are still up for debate today. Nearly eighty years had passed before a commission was finally formed in 1997 to study the riot. By 2001, a report provided a much more detailed picture of the riot. Prior to the completion of the report, very little had been mentioned and virtually nothing had been done for the survivors, many of whom had long passed. The report by the commission made recommendations for the riot's acknowledgement and suggested reparations for survivors

and their descendants. These recommendations led to a memorial placed near the affected area, but reparations were not granted, including those to direct survivors.

Previous research by Alfred Brophy (2002) provides four compelling reasons as to why reparations are a legitimate and necessary answer to these injustices: 1) the city was culpable; 2) there were survivors; 3) the harm was concentrated in one time and place; and 4) even at the time, some city leaders acknowledged moral responsibility by promising that they would rebuild what had been destroyed. The battle for reparations continued, making its way to the United States Supreme Court in 2004, which decided not to consider the case, basing their decision on a statute of limitations (Boczkiewicz 2004). Today, the fight for reparations has centered not only on the violation of rights by the city of Tulsa, but by the U.S. government as well. Charles Ogletree (2005), a lawyer representing the survivors of the riot, has filed suit against the United States by presenting the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The Tulsa race riot thus provides evidence that historical forces can shape the experiences of contemporary life. Race riots should not be viewed as isolated historical events that affect groups of people in a situated time and place. They produce lifelong effects and are embedded in economic, political, and social situations that persist today, albeit through different shapes and forms.

Race still plays a central role in American society. This is seen in stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, scapegoating, and producing the sociological other. Blacks still overwhelmingly hold lower-paying jobs and make up much of the poor across the United States (Massey 2007). They continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Alexander 2005). Inferior educational opportunities linger (Thernstrom &

Thernstrom 2003). And Hurricane Katrina suggests that local and national governments are slow to respond when a Black community is shredded to pieces (Hart 2007).

In summary, there remains a challenge for scholarship on the riot. The riot should be understood at a local level, but it must also be understood through the historical context in which it took place. This chapter has shown that the story is available. There are certainly gaps in these stories that need to be filled, of which some may be in this research, but the primary challenge is to understand it in relation to race riots in general, and doing so without omitting the stories left by survivors, as much scholarship has a tendency to do.

### 3 Race Riot Causes

In this chapter, previous research concerned with the causative factors associated with race riots is considered. The determination of the forces that shape a race riot has been made difficult because riots are a social construction (Hunt 1997). One event is described as a riot while a similar event at a different time and/or place may be presented as a rebellion or a protest. Mitchell (1970) also identifies three typologies of race riots: white riots, black riots, and white-black riots. However, the exclusion of other races leaves this categorization incomplete. Therefore, a distinct conceptualization of what constitutes race rioting for the present research is necessary. In fact, I implement the definition of race-related civil disorders previously offered by Myers and Caniglia (2004). They note that a civil disorder is “an event involving crowd behavior that resulted in either property damage or personal injury, defiance of civil authority, or ‘aggressive disruptions which violate civil law’” (Myers and Caniglia 2004: 523). Moreover, to be race-related, a race riot includes themes of aggressiveness or violence between members of one race against members of another race. This conceptualization is provided in order to exempt from consideration other forms of rioting, such as celebrations after athletic events that do not have race-related issues at center stage.

## **Contributing Factors**

Race riots are global phenomena and have what appear to be some universal underlying patterns; however, it must also be considered that they take place in distinct historical contexts, and there remain both particular micro- and macro-level processes at bay within these junctures. Several contextual issues believed to have contributed to the development of race riots are presented. These are not exhaustive nor are they related to each and every race riot throughout history, though it is argued that some are interconnected and are historically situated, or at least made manifest in a unique way throughout particular historical junctures. Briefly, these include Jim Crow laws, racist ideologies, lynching, migration and social change, war, and police brutality.

### ***Jim Crow Laws***

In the early part of the twentieth century, the U.S. became increasingly characterized by Jim Crow laws that began to gain foothold throughout much of the nation, particularly in the South (Franklin 1966). Segregation laws served to maintain a dominant/subordinate relationship between whites and blacks. These laws affected voting, public transportation, schools, hospitals, waiting rooms in railway stations, restaurants, bathrooms, residential areas, and phone booths (Woodward 1966). Referring to the status of blacks, Woodward (1966:7) states, “The public symbols and constant reminders of his inferior position were the segregation statutes, or ‘Jim Crow’ laws. They constituted the most elaborate and formal expression of sovereign white opinion upon the subject.” Williamson (1986:171) adds that segregation was part of a larger scheme involving “the depoliticalization of the Negro.” He contends that although 1889 marked the beginning of legal segregation, the physical and mental separation of the

racism took root during the origins of British America. Despite living in a country that preached equality to all and one that engaged in warfare with those who were opposed to it, blacks were paradoxically forced into an unequal status, despite valiant efforts by both men and women to terminate this coercion (Gilmore 1996).

The violation of these laws at times served as a precipitating factor in race riots. For instance, the Chicago riot of 1919 erupted after a black youth was stoned to death by whites while swimming in the part of a lake designated for whites (Tuttle 1978). The Chicago riot, which took place in the midst of the “Red Scare,” was one of a cluster of riots throughout the early part of the twentieth century. Though the direct influence of segregation was not always an immediate cause of the riot, segregation served as one of many underlying factors to the plethora of racial disorders throughout this era.

### ***Racist Ideologies***

Second, coinciding with the creation of Jim Crow laws, blacks were interpreted as a sociopolitically and biologically inferior race. These ideas were prominent amongst much of the scientific community. For instance, in *Yale Review*, Vernon Kellogg (1920:732) described white superiority by stating, “We prefer the characteristics of the white race, taken as a whole, to those of any other primary race.” Furthermore, the separation of race was biologically legitimated. In his discussion of interracial mixing, Kellogg (1920: 734) added, “Some of the results of such biological consideration of racial crossing are already known...The white and black cross seems usually superior to the original black parent type, although inferior to the white parent type.”

Another belief was that whiteness was a privilege and though blacks had made strides since the abolishment of slavery, they should feel content with their lot. This



attitude was clearly demonstrated by President Theodore Roosevelt in one of his memoirs in 1906. He stated that “the race cannot expect to get everything at once. It must learn to wait and bide its time; to prove itself worthy by showing its possession of perseverance, of thrift, of self-control” (Roosevelt 1968: 5).

The perpetuation of the ideology regarding the inferiority of blackness permeated the country and has played at least an indirect role in nearly all race riots (Mitchell 1970). For instance, the Houston riot of 1917 was largely influenced by racism after black soldiers responded to the mistreatment of a black woman and brutality against soldiers by a white police officer (Haynes 1976). The riot in Elaine, Arkansas of 1919 was attributed by whites to black insurrection. Here local black sharecroppers had formed a certain “Progressive Union” after becoming “dissatisfied with the prices they were receiving for cotton sold through the plantation owners and with the prices charged them for supplies bought from the owners” (Waskow 1966: 121). Similarly, the Tulsa riot itself was originally attributed to a “negro uprising.” The common theme within many of the riots, particularly those occurring in the early part of the twentieth century, was white racism and the perception of blacks as being naturally inferior.

### ***Lynching***

A third important issue associated with race riots is lynching. According to The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a lynching is defined through the following criteria: 1) evidence exists that someone was killed; 2) the person was killed in an illegal fashion; 3) a group of three or more people participated in the killing; and 4) the group acted out of a perception of service to justice or tradition (Tolnay and Beck 1995). Between 1880 and 1940, an important form of social control

applied to citizens of African descent consisted of violent methods, particularly lynching. Throughout this era, lynchings took the form of ritual practices (Inverarity 1976). In general, harsh punishments throughout this period were essentially reaffirmations of the larger values of society (Garland 1990). Moreover, lynching was primarily a public act, an informal type of punishment that would eventually give way to an increasing privatization and more formal type of punishment (Foucault 1995). The Tuskegee Institute recorded 3,445 known lynchings of black persons throughout this time frame. The study also recorded 1,289 lynchings of whites (Linder 2000). Despite the illegality of lynching, which is simply a form of torturous homicide, penalties were largely nonexistent (Chadbourn 1933; Inverarity 1976). Moreover, in many cases, it was common knowledge among the community who was responsible for the assault (Black 1983). Williamson (1986: 126) stated:

“The tendency was for the white community to ascribe the actual lynching to boys and men of the lower class, but also to say that the victim fully deserved his fate. It seems strange that the active executioners were seen clearly enough to establish that they did not represent the quality of the community, being merely large boys and barroom toughs, but they were seldom seen clearly enough to be convicted in the courts of murder or any other serious charge.”

Many times, lynchings involved an accusation of rape. White (1929) noted that the “press and the pulpit” presented an image of blacks as prone to sexual violence and lynching was a legitimate means to preserving the purity of white women. Reports of forthcoming lynchings, or those already executed, were strongly felt to be direct causes

of particular race riots as well. To survive, many blacks turned to collective self-defense, which often resulted in physical conflict between the races (Lee & Humphrey 1943; Waskow 1966; Smith-McKoy 2001). Some of the riots characterized by these processes include Atlanta in 1906, Springfield in 1908, and Tulsa in 1921. Usually, the alleged offender was black and was believed to have either raped or murdered a white victim (Mitchell 1970). Lynching was predominantly a Southern phenomenon, where 88% of such acts took place (Zimring 2003).

### ***Migration and Social Change***

A fourth important issue involves the geographical shift of the black population. During the period known as the “Great Migration,” which lasted from 1910 to 1970, millions of blacks left their southern dwellings for northern areas in search of equality and increased opportunities for advancement (White, Crowder, Tolnay & Adelman 2005). Near the time of its onset, one sociologist noted blacks were becoming increasingly tired of the injustices they faced in the South (Woofter 1923). In addition, potential ramifications were hypothesized. Guy Johnson (1924) predicted three consequences of black migration to the North. First, the race problem of the South would become the race problem of the North. Whites would increasingly come into contact with blacks at levels they had not previously experienced. Second, there would be new racial adjustments. The dominant ideology of preaching equality in the North would give way to Southern-like prejudices towards blacks. Third, these processes would result in an emergence of Black Nationalism. Thus, blacks would have rising expectations of where their “place” would be in society.

Johnson's hypotheses were accurate, though this was already apparent at the time of his writing. The migration would create conflict in many institutions, particularly the occupational, as blacks offered their labor in return for lower wages than what whites had previously earned for similar jobs. In addition, overcrowding in less than adequate housing facilities left many blacks dissatisfied with inferior treatment. Despite Civil Rights legislation aimed to create equality between the races, conflict persisted. Bergesen (2003) noted the Newark riot was similar to many other riots that broke out around the nation in the 1960s. He argues a marking feature before the onset of these riots was economical deprivation and a lack of political participation among blacks. Many studies on the riots of the 1960s focused on these structural inequalities that were believed to cause riots, which are discussed in more detail later (for instance Lieberman & Silverman 1965; Spilerman 1970).

### ***War***

A fifth important issue in many riots involves wartime conditions. World War I provided an experience for several thousand black soldiers stationed abroad they had not enjoyed at home – freedom. Sweeney (1919) noted many black soldiers arrived home only to find the equal opportunities they had fought for were not granted in the very home that had sent them. Moreover, the war sent even more whites overseas, which opened up thousands of jobs in the U.S. Increasingly, blacks migrated to urban areas where they obtained jobs and wages once unavailable to them. As whites returned from the war, many discovered their jobs had been taken, which resulted in much resentment (Waskow 1966). Mitchell (1970) argued that in conjunction with a host of factors, military service figured prominently in riots from 1917 to the 1960s in cities such as Houston, East St.

Louis, Chicago, Washington, Detroit, Harlem, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Newark, and Detroit, “Common to all have been tremendous population shifts, occupational upgrading for blacks, an intensification of violence, and military service attended by enhanced pride and intensified bitterness by blacks” (Mitchell 1970: 50).

Participation in the war led to more demands for equal treatment among blacks. Moreover, this era witnessed more calls from blacks to embrace self-defense mechanisms. In 1919, *Crisis* stated, “To-day we raise the terrible weapon of Self-Defense. When the murderer comes, he shall no longer strike us in the back. When the armed lynchers gather, we too must gather armed. When the mob moves, we propose to meet it with bricks and clubs and guns” (cited in Ellsworth 1982: 23). Indeed, the rash of riots throughout the early part of the twentieth century would involve increased levels of self-defense among blacks unwilling to be victims of pogroms without fighting back.

### ***Police Brutality***

Despite the eventual decrease of lynching, another form of social control was seemingly increasing or at least gaining more national exposure – police brutality. The immediate cause of the Newark riot in 1967 involved the alleged brutality against a black cab driver, John Smith. Police brutality was becoming a common accusation before the riot’s inception, but this was not confined in Newark; rather, it was an accusation heard all across the country during this time period (U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968). Bergesen (2003) shows that police involved in the riots of Watts, Newark, and Detroit in the late 1960s were actually more violent than the black rioters themselves, an idea first laid out by Stark (1972), who argued that these riots were “police riots.” In fact, the role of the police is one of the defining differences between

early twentieth century riots and those which took place much later (Dahlke 1952; Waskow 1966). Police brutality was also an observable influence on the Los Angeles riot of 1992. Rioting began shortly after a not guilty verdict was reached involving members of the Los Angeles Police Department in court on charges of beating a black motorist, Rodney King. Images of this brutality were broadcast across the nation in the weeks leading up to the verdict. Many were infuriated when the verdict was reached because for many blacks, it served as just another example of unequal protection of the law (Hunt 1997; Bergesen and Herman 1998).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Research concerned with identifying the causative factors associated with race riots has largely considered the effects of local conditions. A brief commentary on the background of these studies is necessary before illuminating on their various findings. The findings of these studies have been largely contingent upon three factors: the types of riots they have examined, the dimensions they seek to study, and the year(s) of the race riots considered. As shown earlier, different types of race riots have erupted across the United States throughout its history. Therefore, it is important to note race riots are, in part, contingent upon the historical context in which they took place and various processes are unique to each riot. Second, these studies vary across the dimensions of riots they examine. For the most part, recent sociological studies have been concerned with identifying structural patterns that contribute to the onset of riots. This current project examines what are considered to be other relevant factors as well, particularly those that are cultural and contextual. Finally, most of the recent literature on race riots has been concerned with those occurring throughout the 1960s. Though some of the

contributing factors to these riots may have also been present in the Tulsa riot of 1921, it is important to keep in mind these are two different historical periods, which this analysis will consider. Having explained these differences, it is necessary to differentiate between five perspectives within the literature: (1) breakdown theories; (2) emergent norms; (3) absolute and relative deprivation; (4) competition; and (5) political opportunities.

Though some of these perspectives are interrelated with others, I have categorized these separately based on their differences.

### ***Breakdown Theories***

One way in which the cause of rioting has been explained is through the existence of some collectively-formed, crazed mind. Classical theorists of collective behavior such as LeBon, Tarde, and Robert Park offer that rationality and normative behavior breaks down during periods of social unrest such as riots and other civil disorders (Useem 1998). That is, during periods of disorganization, actors may join together and partake in collective actions that run in contrast to the ordinary normative structure. These theorists have painted the picture of a collective, irrational, and crazed mind. For example, Mason (1984) argued that rioters are typically perceived as either lower-class or “radical.” In addition, Rude (1964) discussed the “aberrant” rioter. According to his perspective, aberrants riot to “live in the moment” rather than to achieve some level of social change.

Critiques of breakdown theories argue these theorists overstate the extent to which nonsensical behavior takes place. McPhail (1991) argues the breakdown perspective, also known as the transformation hypothesis, is problematic on several fronts. First, research has consistently shown that assemblies of collective behavior seldom involve anonymous actors. That is, those who assemble often quickly find

family, friends, acquaintances, and others they are familiar with. Second, collective behavior does not involve panic, or unrestrained fear. Rather, action is more often purposive and goal-oriented. Third, breakdown theories suggest a sense of “collective hypnosis”, which research has continually failed to support. Finally, the behaviors that are explained have not been conceptualized or operationalized. Others have recently argued that entirely neglecting the insights of LeBon and others has been a shortcoming in recent research (Marx 1970; Useem 1998). Nevertheless, the bulk of research on collective behavior suggests that collective behavior is patterned, goal-oriented, and organized.

### ***Emergent Norms***

Others have suggested that collective behavior occurs through the formation of an emergent norm (Turner and Killian 1987). That is, riots can be explained through the development of new norms that temporally replace existing social norms and guidelines for conventional behavior. Referring to the actor, Turner (1994:317) writes,

“The emergent norm has provided a lens through which to see and understand what they and other participants are doing. For most of them, this is a lens that gives their actions meanings that are different from the meanings they would have assigned to such actions at other times.”

Thus, some of the oddest and most inconceivable behaviors can emerge because of the temporary formation of new meanings and interpretations. Specifically, according to Turner and Killian, collective behavior emerges when some aspect of the social order results in problems that emerge within its bounds. The social order consists of the normative order, the social structure, and communication channels. The normative order,



established through socialization, consists of names, definitions, and classifications of aspects from the world around collectivities. This order is maintained until it is collectively redefined as problematic. Social structure refers to the pattern of social relationships, division of labor, and the resultant expectations among collectivities that are formed. Finally, communication channels provide the nature of the situation, the norms that govern that situation, and what roles should be adopted. As micro-level processes (i.e., rumors, convergence on a common location, etc.) emerge to challenge the social order, the chance of collective behavior and the formation of an emergent norm is argued to increase.

Though this symbolic interactionist approach helps us to understand why this behavior is possible, it provides little insight into some of the more structural conditions that make these emergent norms possible. Its contribution to theories of rioting, however, should not be ignored. I contend that both micro- and macro-level factors contribute to the formation of race riots.

### ***Absolute and Relative Deprivation***

Numerous studies concerned with the causative factors associated with race riots have included deprivation arguments (Downes 1968; Gurr 1968; Schulman 1968). These perspectives have been further broken down into absolute and relative deprivation. Absolute deprivation positions hold that riots break out in cities in which minorities experience higher than usual levels of disadvantage in society (Downes 1968). On the other hand, relative deprivation holds that riots occur in cities where minorities adopt the expectations of the majority (Gurr 1968; Schulman 1968). Both of these perspectives contain an embedded assumption that minorities instigate the rioting. This is a plausible

assumption for the riots within the Civil Rights Era, but not as historically accurate for the riots occurring around 1920. Moreover, the conditions required to meet deprivation conceptualizations could be found throughout the U.S. throughout the 1960s and were present in numerous cities that did not experience race riots. Finally, it does not explain why riots have not involved other minorities, particularly Hispanics, who have large populations in many cities across the United States.

A related thesis is that riots are caused by rising expectations (Berkowitz 1968; Davies 1969, 1970). Contrary to the aforementioned deprivation perspectives, this work suggests riots and revolutions are the product of increased expectations after social conditions have gradually improved followed by a brief, but sharp decrease in such conditions. Known as the J-Curve explanation, Davies (1969: 86) stated,

“The all-important effect on the minds of people in a particular society is to produce, during the former period, an expectation of continued ability to satisfy needs – which continue to rise – and, during the latter, a mental state of anxiety and frustration when manifest reality breaks away from anticipated reality.”

Davies (1970) later argued that the urban riots of the 1960s followed a similar pattern. Further research also found that cities with less oppressive conditions and disadvantage among blacks than other cities had lower rates of rioting (Spilerman 1970).

### ***Competition***

Some research contends that desegregation and competition fuel riots (Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney 1996; Myers 1997). Here, empirical support was found for the hypothesis that Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) which experience

large decreases in residential segregation and increases in interracial contact lead to a higher likelihood of experiencing conflict. In sum, Olzak et al. (1996: 608) conclude:

“Racial competition depends on racial solidarity created by enduring barriers to interracial contact. Racial segregation may also result from previous racial strife caused by competition. Residential segregation therefore reinforces the salience of Black and White racial identities, as geographic boundaries overlap with family, religious, and social networks in neighborhoods. But competition also depends upon the deterioration of rigid racial barriers, illustrated by the effect of increased interracial contact and exposure on the rate of race riots.”

Thus, as competition intensifies, so does interracial contact. In turn, this produces a higher likelihood of interracial conflict. Similarly, an event history analysis by Myers (1997) concurs with this research by supporting the contention that ethnic competition helps to fuel the likelihood of rioting. Moreover, Myers’ research (1997) notes that diffusion processes also contributed to the rash of riots throughout this same period.

However, these studies are primarily concerned with the riots of the 1960s. Because segregation was fully entrenched, particularly in the South, throughout the early part of the twentieth century, interracial contact may have at the least taken a different form than that produced by competition. Therefore, it is important to consider the context, location, and specific historical intricacies affecting such riots.

### ***Structural Conduciveness and Political (In)Opportunities***

Smelser’s path-breaking study, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (1962), explored several factors that come into play throughout various forms of collective behavior.

Smelser examined the relationship between precipitating factors and structural strain that work together to form conditions of structural conduciveness for collective behavior to occur. Specifically, he maintains that there are six primary determinants of collective behavior, which include the following: 1) structural conduciveness; 2) structural strain; 3) generalized belief; 4) precipitating factors; 5) mobilization of actors; and 6) social control.

Smelser's notion of structural conduciveness refers to structural features permissive to collective behavior such as legal segregation. A second factor, structural strain, coincides with conduciveness. This strain can come in the form of absolute or relative deprivation such as a cognitive awareness that an injustice has been incurred. Third, generalized beliefs occur when this strain is made meaningful to the prospective actors. Smelser (1962: 16) notes that, "This meaning is supplied in a generalized belief, which identifies the source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to this source, and specifies certain responses to the strain as possible or appropriate." A fourth factor involves precipitating factors. These tend to be more immediate events, which trigger collective behavior, such as the infamous case of Rosa Parks and the refusal to give up her seat in a segregated bus. Fifth, precipitating factors often result in the "mobilization of actors," whereby participants gather for action. Finally, over-arching these is a sixth factor, social control. Smelser (1962: 17) adds, "Stated in the simplest way, the study of social control is the study of those counter-determinants just reviewed."

Smelser's theory provides an excellent overview of the structural characteristics associated with the facilitation of collective behavior. Individually, none of these factors can produce collective behavior. However, Smelser's work has been criticized to some

extent. For instance, Miller (2000) argues that Smelser's theory may be too broad by allowing nearly anything to be considered structural strain. Others have suggested more specific structural conditions that seemingly contribute to riots.

Social movement perspectives have also contributed insight. These theories focus on the political process (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Morris 2000). Morris (2000) notes that political process theorists have identified three critical components: mobilizing structures, political opportunity structure, and cultural framing. First, mobilizing structures, or the collective means through which others act, must be present. Mobilization can occur through formal organizations, informal networks, and preexisting institutional structures (Oberschall 1973; Morris 1981). A second component is political opportunity structure, or "the consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectation for success or failure" (Tarrow 1994:85). Thus, the system must be made favorable for action (e.g. the state weakens). Framing processes, which are shared definitions that are given to the particular situation, also contribute to the political process. These are discussed much further at a later juncture.

Finally, another classic study concerned with the effects of political conditions argues riots are the product of inadequately functioning municipal political structures (Lieberson and Silverman 1965). Specifically, Lieberson and Silverman argued that a predominately white police force composition and other local governmental inadequacies contribute to rioting. They further state that precipitating events can be found anywhere

as well as other sources of deprivation such as dilapidated housing and thus cannot be considered the general cause of riots.

### **Summary of Theoretical Contributions**

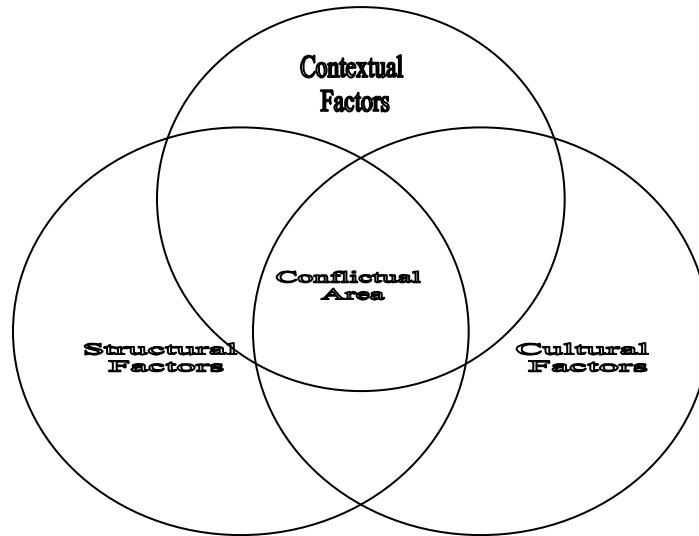
Though the Tulsa riot had a long-lasting impact, it cannot be ignored that the event took place in a specific time and place. Furthermore, the riot had distinct structural as well as cultural issues at bay. In essence, it is argued the Tulsa race riot, or any riot for that matter, cannot be explained in terms of only one of these factors. To ignore the effects of other contributors in pursuit of the “best” explanation, or the variables that produce the highest correlations, ignores the contribution of a variety of other factors that might also be in place when a race riot occurs. They must be studied together. Finally, it is argued that the very reason riots are often avoided is because at least one factor, regardless of the magnitude of its impact, is absent. For example, without a triggering event, such as the Rodney King beating, it is most doubtful that the Los Angeles riots would have occurred during the time in which it did. On the other hand, without the perception of racial injustice as being part of the culture, the King beating alone may not have been enough to incite rioting. In addition, without the media attention given to the case, presumably fewer citizens would have been aware of the perceived or actual injustice incurred. Thus, many elements have to be present. Though it may be considerably exaggerated, Lee & Humphrey (1943: 5) once wrote that, “Riots are the products of thousands upon thousands of little events that have affected the habits and emotions of thousands upon thousands of people, both future rioters and future innocent bystanders.” An integrative approach is necessary to better understand the cause of rioting.

## **An Integrative Model of Race Riots**

The research examined above provides ample evidence that there exists an ongoing debate concerning the cause(s) of race riots. Most of these are structural arguments; however, these perspectives interestingly omit much analysis of cultural factors such as racism as well as the historical context in which riots take place. I argue that a more integrative approach to race riots should be taken. Figure 1 provides an illustrative account. In this model, it is argued that *certain triggering events and contextual (historical) factors collide with structural characteristics and cultural factors, resulting in conditions conducive to race riots*. This model takes into account the various factors that previous research has deemed important variables in creating race riots. However, this approach is unique because it does not look for isolated structural or cultural characteristics that contribute the most to causing riots. Instead, this approach considers race riots to be much more complex social phenomena. It also allows for a clearer understanding of how triggering events and other contextual factors are manifestations of structure and culture, which should be considered interconnected issues. These factors will later be analyzed in terms of their influence on the Tulsa race riot; however, future research should consider the strength of this model in explaining other race riots as well.

This model is intended to be limited enough to allow for a complex understanding of race riots from a more local perspective. The manifestations of these factors will vary. That is, some riots may be characterized by structural factors that are not important contributors to others; therefore, the researcher must be able to identify these factors. For instance, the structure of segregation will be shown to have contributed to the

**Figure 1: An Integrative Model**



Tulsa riot, but other riots may have a different set of structural factors at bay, such as increased competition and interracial contact. Likewise, the context of the riot will inevitably differ across many riots. Triggering events will vary to a large extent, though there are certainly broader patterns, or classifications. Finally, cultural factors will vary as well. Attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, traditions, etc. are not static phenomena, but again there are patterns of culture and, furthermore, these are interconnected with structural and contextual factors. Therefore, I argue this model is best suited for a grounded theory approach because important contributing factors will be emergent and complex. A grounded theory approach assumes there is not only one answer to the particular issue. In addition, I argue that seemingly contradictory findings between the aforementioned theoretical perspectives are actually somewhat compatible.



A brief commentary on the origins of this model is necessary. McGarrell & Castellano's (1991) Integrative Conflict Model informs the research at hand. While the model was clearly intended to serve the specific purpose of providing a heuristic device for the study of criminal law formation, it is argued that their model is flexible enough to be applied to this research with a few modifications. A separate model from that offered by McGarrell & Castellano was adopted in order to provide a heuristic device more tailored to studying episodes of racial conflict. In essence, their model suggests that law formation develops out of the interconnectedness of structural foundations, triggering events, and perceptions of crime. In this research, I have adopted their conceptualizations of structural foundations and triggering events. Galliher & Cross (1983) first noted that structural foundations include both structural and cultural factors. These are the necessary factors for generating conflict and the response to that conflict. Structural factors can include differences in compositions such as race, gender, religious groups, etc. Another factor involves any economic or political inequality, as well as periods of economic instability, which can create conflict. On the other hand, cultural factors include prevailing ideologies and more local contextual factors. I have opted to separate these into two distinct categories for analytical purposes and will expand on these below.

Finally, triggering events involve the immediate factors that come into play to cause the consideration for changes in law. These come from a variety of sources such as interest group activities, Supreme Court decisions, moral entrepreneurs, and media attention. The media can play a particularly important role because of its ability to expand crime issues beyond policy and into the political arena. Triggering events are largely interconnected with structural factors. In addition to structural and cultural

factors as well as triggering events, I have added a fourth dimension to consider, which consists of micro- and macro- contextual factors, which can be considered local and national contexts. It is now necessary to elaborate on each of these aspects.

### ***Structural Factors***

By structural factors, I merely refer to those aspects contributing to riots that derive from an orderly arrangement of elements. Structure can refer to locations, roles, distributions, organizations, networks, and so on. Previous research has identified several structural characteristics that contribute to riots. The influences of each of these factors will be considered in this research. For instance, the political process model argues that two structural conditions must be present. First, there must be mobilizing structures, or collective means through which people act such as informal networks. Second, a political opportunity structure provides favorable conditions for collective action. This can emerge during periods of instability while grievances are high. Smelser (1962) concurs by arguing that certain structural conditions can be conducive for collective behavior and that precipitating factors reflect a larger conflict stemming from structural strain.

Others have provided a more specific account of the types of structural factors which are important. For instance, Lieberman and Silverman (1965) have argued that occupational and municipal characteristics are important contributing factors to race riots. Therefore, I consider the major occupations held by whites and non-whites in 1921 Tulsa and their impacts on the riot. I also consider the role of local municipal characteristics. Further, Olzak et al. (1996) and Myers (1997) contend that competition is an important characteristic. Others suggest the non-white population is an important variable

(Spilerman 1971; Morgan & Clark 1973). That is, urban cities with a large minority population are more likely to host race riots. In addition to the aforementioned factors, I consider other structural factors, such as segregation, which contributed to the Tulsa riot and emerged during the stage of data analysis.

### ***Cultural Factors***

This stage of the study is unique because it examines an aspect of race riots that is often neglected within sociological approaches, or at the very least taken for granted. That is, this examines the possible contribution of cultural factors, or elements of ideology, beliefs, practices, etc. that impacted the Tulsa riot. Previous theoretical models of riots have unexplainably given scant attention to these elements. This could be because they were either deemed irrelevant or their impacts were merely assumed. I contend much more consideration should be given to their role in episodes of racial conflict. Simultaneously, it is important to understand how the notion of culture shaped and was shaped by the structural factors that contributed to the riot. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how cultural issues such as race relations and ideology influenced and were influenced by structural factors such as segregation. This stage of the analysis is largely qualitative and involves the examination of themes such as perceptions of race, prevailing beliefs and values, religious influences, and how these ideological components were put into practice. An interrelated issue involves various contextual factors that contributed to the Tulsa race riot.

### ***Contextual Factors and Triggering Events***

By contextual factors, I refer to those characteristics that contributed to particular riots which were embedded within a particular historical juncture and a particular

locality. For instance, research suggests that the heavy migration of African Americans to Northern cities beginning in 1910 had at least some impact on the onset of a particular cluster of race riots throughout the same time period (Tuttle 1978). Likewise, acts such as lynching, or a threat thereof, were considered to be immediate causes of race riots. A key issue to address here is that contextual factors such as lynching were symbolic representations of cultural values and beliefs. Therefore, to exclude them in an analysis of the causative factors of race riots is a serious mistake. Another pertinent issue involves Jim Crow laws, not only in the structural sense of segregation, but the uniqueness of this structure in its historical context and how it was manifest in Tulsa, Oklahoma prior to and during 1921. Similarly, it is imperative to consider the media's portrayal of racial issues. The media has a tremendous impact on shaping perceptions of race (Wilson and Gutierrez 1995). In addition, I consider what role, if any, deprivation played in the onset of the riot.

Finally, this research considers the role of triggering events, also known as precipitating events. These are the immediate and direct occurrences that lead to riots. Presumably, every race riot is ignited by some event, or set of events that are symbolic of a larger perceived injustice. Lieberman and Silverman (1965) reported that riots typically start shortly after one was "wronged", and these events most often consist of crimes. Historically, triggering events have become manifest in the form of lynchings, rapes, police brutality, crossing segregation boundaries, etc. Therefore, this research examines their role and how they were embedded within larger cultural ideologies and structural characteristics. Another relevant issue to address in the analysis at this stage is the

potential role that either emergent norms or even a breakdown of norms may have contributed to the riot during the preliminary stages of collective behavior.

## 4

### **Responses and Framing**

In this chapter, emphasis is placed on two issues: 1) the immediate and long-term responses to riots and 2) the “framing” of riots. To do so, a discussion of community formation is presented, which is drawn from disaster research. I begin by conceptualizing race riots as a form of disaster. In turning to community formation, an examination of therapeutic and corrosive communities is provided. In addition, this section explores individual and organizational responses that may stem from these opposing types of community formations. Later, I address the social movement literature on framing and its role in riot response. This is used to better understand the complexity of the discrepancy between short-term responses to the riot and the more current reparations movement. These issues are not unrelated; indeed, the purpose of this stage of the research is to show how framing influences, and is influenced by, responses during episodes of civil disorder and after.

#### **Riot as Disaster**

In order to progress, it is necessary first to offer a conceptualization of disaster and to consider the classification of riots as disasters. Disaster research emerged around 1950 (Quarantelli 1987, 1994; Dynes 1993; Kreps 1984). Early disaster research focused on wartime situations. Over the years, this research has made a rather large transition. Fritz (1961) was one of the first scholars to provide a formal definition of disaster. He described it as “An event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a

relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure of the society is prevented” (Fritz 1961: 655). Fritz also holds that disasters are social constructions in that if an event is disruptive to only a few, then we have not a disaster, but rather an accident or a crisis. Kreps (1984) added that disasters are social catalysts in their ability to produce collective reactions. Moreover, disasters have four defining properties to consider: 1) length of forewarning; 2) magnitude of impact; 3) scope of impact; and 4) duration of impact.

This research will consider race riots to be disasters for several reasons. First, a race riot is an event, situated in a specific time and place that often brings destruction to human life. Most U.S. race riots have lasted between a day and a week and have resulted in at least some deaths. This destruction not only causes danger to human life, but to the social structure of the community as well. Second, collective responses and strategies to subside the riotous action characterize most race riots. These collective responses involve not only the police, but various informal networks and organizations as well. Third, though race riots are far from being “natural”, there are significant properties that can be analyzed such as the length of forewarning (if any), the magnitude of impact, the scope of impact, and the duration of impact that further classify the event as a man-made disaster.

### **Community Formations**

Following a catastrophic event, two types of community formations may emerge: therapeutic and corrosive. Key characteristics of therapeutic communities are organization and adaptation. Referring to recent terrorist attacks, Webb (2002: 91) noted

that, “At the community- organizational- and role-level analysis, social structure becomes flexible and adaptive, and we see those patterns emerging in response to the attacks of September 11.” Moreover, commonly-held perceptions of disaster include the belief that when a disaster hits, a period of panic emerges. However, these perceptions have been attacked by research suggesting otherwise (for example Quarantelli 1960; Fritz 1961; Dynes and Quarantelli 1968; Johnson 1987; Webb 2002). A clear description of a therapeutic community was previously offered by Fritz (1961: 689),

“The widespread sharing of danger, loss, and deprivation produces an intimate, primary group solidarity among the survivors, which overcomes social isolation and provides a channel for intimate communication and expression and a major source of physical and emotional support and reassurance.”

Group formation and performance is a key dynamic in therapeutic communities. Dynes and Quarantelli (1968) discuss four types of groups found immediately after disasters. Type I groups are those that have been previously established with fixed, regular tasks, such as the police. Type II groups are organizations that expand, but still have fixed and regular tasks, such as the Red Cross. These are usually voluntary groups. Type III groups are organizations that previously existed and extend their tasks to include non-routine work. An example is a group of construction workers who help to clean up a disaster site. Finally, Type IV groups are emergent groups that participate in nonregular tasks. These groups often form immediately after disastrous events. The group responsibilities described by Dynes and Quarantelli suggest that after natural disasters, the result typically involves the formation of a therapeutic community.



While therapeutic communities are often linked to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tornadoes, corrosive communities are often linked to technological disasters that carry long-term consequences such as cases involving chemical exposure (Cuthbertson & Nigg 1987). Several characteristics of corrosive communities have been identified including conflict among citizens and organizations, ambiguity toward the nature of the disaster (Cuthbertson & Nigg 1987), problems of litigation (Freudenburg 1997; Picou, Marshall & Gill 2004), and the discrimination of those affected by the disaster (Couch & Kroll-Smith 1985; Bullard 1990). The formation of corrosive communities is associated with disasters that require long-term responses.

This literature also generates several issues that are analyzed through this research such as 1) the types of primary groups responsible for action immediately following the riot, 2) the responsibilities of these groups, 3) the performance of these groups, 4) the formation of any emergent groups, 6) the evidence of a particular type of community formation, and 7) the implications that these findings might have in the larger context of riots.

### **Framing**

Early conceptualizations of disasters often suggested they occurred naturally; they were from the “hand of God.” However, researchers such as Dove and Khan (1995) and Kreps (1984) have shown these disasters often have roots in the social structure and are thus man-made inasmuch as they are natural. Dove and Khan researched the effects of a cyclone that struck Bangladesh in 1992, killing over 100,000 people. They questioned whether the cyclone was the only responsible agent for resultant deaths. They concluded that extreme poverty was a critical contributor as well. By reviewing internal and

external reports, they discovered Bangladeshi officials reported these disasters as a natural part of their society and the result of a poor geography. However, external sources showed the majority of the poor were forced to live on the coastline, which was the area in which most deaths occurred. Thus, the ways in which disasters and their causes are framed have to be seriously considered. In the sense that disasters are social constructions, they are no different than race riots. Riots involve framing through a plethora of means. The fact that at least three riots (Rosewood, Florida; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Wilmington, North Carolina) in the early part of the twentieth century have involved reparation movements decades later illustrates that riots are framed and that their interpretations can be temporally relative.

A key issue and development in social movement literature is the concept of framing, which has gone through introductions, applications, modifications, and critiques (e.g., Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Benford 1992; Benford 1993; Noonan 1995; Swart 1995; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Nepstad 1997; Steinberg 1998; Benford and Snow 2000). Actors within social movements frame, “or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988:198). Put more poetically, Snow and Benford (1992:137) define a frame as “an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment.” Framing permits the formation of collective identity and the reinforcement of shared beliefs and values

(Klandermans 1988). Further, framing points to collective injustices (Tarrow 1994).

Though a variety of issues central to the framing process have been introduced, I lend attention to three core ideas: frame alignment, framing tasks, and frame resonance. These issues are interconnected and are chosen in order to illustrate a clearer idea of how framing processes operate.

### *Alignment*

Snow et al (1986:464) note that a crucial aspect of frame construction and maintenance is the link between social movement organizations (SMOs) and the individual in terms of a congruency between values, beliefs, and goals, which is known as frame alignment. Further, they propose the involvement of four particular alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation.

Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al 1986:467). This involves the creation of a collective avenue whereby actors ideologically merge on a particular issue or set of issues. This can be accomplished through a variety of means such as postal mail, email, telephone calls, etc. For instance, Jenness (1995) has noted that gay and lesbian SMOs have disseminated statistical information concerning hate crimes through a variety of means including pamphlets, press kits, and flyers to show the extent to which hate crimes occur, which in turn has led to an increased awareness among recruits. Frame bridging can be initiated by the group or organization itself (Gerhards and Rucht 1992), or simply by activists (Robnett 1996).

Second, frame amplification refers to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events” (Snow et al 1986:469). Moreover, this process involves the amplification of both beliefs and values. Therefore, actors within the movement are actively engaged in construing values and beliefs that resonate with potential adherents. Frame extension is a third type of alignment process. Snow et al (1986:472) propose that movement organizations,

“Extend the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents. In effect, the movement is attempting to enlarge its adherent pool by portraying its objectives or activities as attending to or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents.”

Finally, frame transformation is a fourth type of alignment process. Here, an entire new frame emerges that overlaps an already existing frame in order to garner support. For instance, Noonan (1995) shows that frame transformation among women’s groups played a pivotal role in Chile’s transition to democracy. Despite agenda differences among women’s human rights groups, survival organizations, and feminists, the demand for democracy gained ideological ascendancy and became a master frame.

Snow et al (1986) do not propose that each of these processes is involved in every frame construction. Rather, they contend that “frame alignment, of one variety or another, is a necessary condition for movement participation, whatever its nature or intensity, and that it is typically an interactional accomplishment” (Snow et al 1986:467). Though I concur that frame alignment is a necessary condition, I further argue and will

demonstrate that these types can operate in conjunction with one another throughout the social movement. Moreover, competing SMOs do not have to emerge in order for these alignment processes to proceed.

### ***Tasks***

Another crucial process associated with framing relates to the tasks performed to construct and maintain a particular frame. Specifically, Snow and Benford (1988:199-204) propose that social movement actors must engage in diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing involves the establishment of blame or causality. Here, the root of the problem is identified. For instance, White (1999) argues in a study involving a feminist SMO, which particularly protested against rape, that the crux of the issue was attributed to the “misunderstanding of the seriousness of rape in the African American community. This problem is due to an oversimplified analysis of oppression (racism as primary), the acceptance of rape myths, and other forms of sexism that silence rape survivors” (White 1999:85).

Prognostic framing refers to the identification of remedial strategies and tactics, or the solution to overcome the problem. In addition, the “evil” is identified and a “common target” is located. Snow and Benford (2000) contend that prognostic framing is a primary source of differentiation between SMOs. They point to a case study by Haines (1996), which examines two movement wings within the U.S. anti-death penalty movement which adopt competing strategies to remedy the issues at hand. A third task involves motivational tactics. Motivational framing is the “call to arms” or “rationale for action”. For instance, in a study on music in El Salvador, Almeida and Urbizagástegui (1999) note that efforts by the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*

(*Farabundo Martí* National Liberation Front – FMLN) were aimed largely at motivational tactics through music to create active participation in the protest of insurgency. Further, Benford (1993) notes the effect of “vocabularies of motive,” which are described as accounts that persuade others to engage, or continue engaging, in collective action.

### ***Resonance***

A rather widespread concern for scholars of social movements is the method in which actors transform into members of a particular movement. In other words, what are some common strategies and tactics used to recruit members or garner support for social movements? How do social movements “sell” their story? Snow & Benford (1988:619) have called this “frame resonance,” or the ways in which SMOs attempt to legitimate their particular movement, or make their movement resonate with potential members. In other words, to what degree does the framing “strike a responsive chord” with the audience? They argue that two variables affect frame resonance: frame credibility and its relative salience.

Snow and Benford (2000) argue that the credibility of the frame is affected by three variables: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and the credibility of those who designed the frame. First, the frame must be consistent; that is, narratives, claims and actions must line up with one another and be congruently patterned. Second, empirical credibility points to the validity of frame. That is, the frame must be testable and verifiable. Observable evidence must be out there. Third, the articulators of the frame should be credible sources. Benford and Snow (2000:620) add, “It is a well-established

fact in the social psychology of communication that speakers who are regarded as more credible are generally more persuasive.”

A second variable of frame resonance is its salience. Three variables affect this salience: centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity. Centrality points to the requirement of congruency between the frame and the beliefs, values and actions of potential adherents. Experiential commensurability refers to the degree to which the frame directly affects people. Potential adherents must have experienced the phenomena that the frame centers around. Finally, the frame must have narrative fidelity. The frame must “resonate with cultural narrations, that is, with the stories, myths, and folk tales that are part and parcel of one’s cultural heritage and that thus function to inform events and experiences in the immediate present” (Snow and Benford 1988:210). Babb (1996) describes the importance of frame resonance and the implications for a lack thereof. In a study on the U.S. Labor Movement from 1866-1886, she examined greenbackism and found that experiences of potential adherents to the labor movement did not line up with proffered frames, which was a critical detriment to the movement’s success.

Moving beyond social movement literature and to an extension of the study at hand, I argue that framing was crucial long before the reparations movement began. Indeed, its framing beforehand may be largely to blame for the long discrepancy between the riot itself and when large-scale attempts for reparations were made. I examine these frames, particularly those proffered by media, city officials and leaders, and black survivors. Because the frames developed in 1921 are drastically divergent from those that exist today, a comparative approach is beneficial. Therefore, I consider the

transformation of frames concerning the riot by examining current frames offered through both the media and riot survivors and representatives in the legal system. I more fully elaborate on this idea in the next chapter.



## 5 METHODOLOGY

This research involves a case study of the Tulsa race riot, 1921. Stake (2003) identifies three case study varieties: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. This research, if categorized, is an instrumental case study. That is, the Tulsa riot was selected for theoretical purposes. Stake (2003:88) adds, “the case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, but because this helps us pursue the external interests.” The Tulsa riot was chosen because it represents an episode of collective behavior in which there exists a rather large compilation of historical data pertaining to the riot, and thus lends itself to a much richer contextual analysis. However, there is a hint of an intrinsic approach as well. That is, I am clearly interested in gaining a much deeper understanding of the Tulsa riot itself. Therefore, there are both instrumental and intrinsic goals to this study. Tellis (1997) notes that case studies can be advantageous if conducted properly through triangulation and following some general methodological procedures.

According to Yin (1994), a case study consists of four stages: (1) designing; (2) conducting; (3) developing an analytic strategy; and (4) reaching conclusions, offering recommendations, and providing implications of the research. These steps are also indirectly addressed and corroborated in other discussions of case studies as well (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg 1991; Yin 1993; Stake 1995, 2003; Tellis 1997). The remainder of this chapter elaborates on the first three stages and illustrates how the specific case of the

Tulsa riot is examined through this procedure. The fourth stage, which involves conclusions, recommendations and implications, is included at the end of this research.

### **Stage 1: Designing the Case Study**

A case study begins with the research design, which is “an action plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (Yin 1994:19). Yin further argues that some very important components to case study research designs should be considered. These include research questions, units of analysis, and the role of theory. A few specific research questions help guide the remainder of this study. Though some subsets to these questions remain, the following could be considered the core inquiries:

1. What factors contributed to the Tulsa race riot of 1921? In other words, what caused the riot?
2. What were the various responses, both individually and organizationally, to the riot? How was the outcome of the riot impacted by these responses?
3. How has the riot been framed in both a historical and contemporary perspective? Are these frames markedly different? If so, how?

The primary unit of analysis is the city of Tulsa itself. That is, I examine numerous issues associated with the city, including but not limited to, municipal characteristics, the social climate as it related to issues of race, population characteristics, key leaders within the community (both the black and white), and key historical events/processes affecting the onset of the riot.

This research is inductive, at least in the first stage of the research, and largely consists of a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In order to determine the causes of the Tulsa riot, I have argued for the use of an integrative approach that

incorporates structural and cultural factors, in which contextual factors and triggering events are also embedded. However, this theory is not tested inasmuch as it emerged through the stage of data collection and analysis. Some factors have been introduced in previous research, but in this project, various themes are synthesized with each other as well other emergent thematic categorizations.

A similar approach was taken to examine the organizational responses and resultant frames associated with the riot and the ensuing reparations movement. Though I largely borrow from a social movement framing perspective, I explore how these factors have been made manifest in the movement to obtain reparations. In addition, new themes emerged to help build upon the existing perspective.

Finally, another imperative step in designing the case study involves deciding on an appropriate methodological technique. Primarily, this research involves content analysis. Stated simply, this is an approach in which “the many words of the text are classified into much fewer content categories” (Weber 1990: 12). One of the first steps is to define what is being recorded. This research is concerned with themes, rather than merely words or sentences. That is, emergent and recurring patterns concerning the causes and framing associated with the Tulsa riot were developed. Next, I explain more fully how this research is content analyzed and conducted.

## **Stage 2: Conducting Case Studies**

Yin (1994) points to two key issues associated with conducting a case study: data collection and collecting evidence. The investigator must require certain skills such as the ability to ask further questions, listening or observing intently, being flexible and

adaptive, having a deep understanding of the issues being studied, and lacking a biased perspective.

Data sources are imperative to case studies as well, preferably those that are triangulated with other sources (Yin 1994; Stake 1995, 2003). This research relies primarily upon three types of primary and secondary sources of data for analysis. These include data from the U.S. Census Bureau for the years 1910 and 1920, newspaper articles from 1920-21 and other archival records, and narratives.

All of these sources are existing data and include numerical as well as qualitative data. As such, the methodology of the study combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. In addition, statistical analysis were performed throughout various stages of the research. Rank (2004) contends that bridging both quantitative and qualitative methods is a useful technique that can enhance validity. Taken separately, each method has particular strengths and weaknesses, but when united and blended in research, they can help overcome some of the weaknesses associated with using only one approach. For instance, quantitative methods have the strength of generalizability by allowing for an understanding of a general population. Reliability is also more easily developed in quantitative research, but these approaches don't often deal well with contextual issues. On the other hand, qualitative methods allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied and validity is strengthened, though sometimes at the expense of reliability (Rank 2004). Hence, by bridging the methods, the researcher is able to add validity, while still maintaining a certain level of reliability. Because the use of these methods alternated throughout various stages of the research, I look more fully at the

different methods used within each level of analysis. This includes not only the sources of data, but the purpose of those sources as well.

### *Sources for Locating the Causes*

The integrative model developed in this study calls for three levels of analysis. The first level, consisting of structural factors, first warrants the study of 1910 and 1920 census records to determine structural characteristics such as the racial composition, gender composition, primary occupations, etc. How these structures interact with one another is also very important. The census records allowed for a more descriptive approach to show how these distributions painted a picture of what Tulsa looked like prior to the 1921 riot. By examining both 1910 and 1920 records, it also allowed for an investigation of how these structures had changed throughout the decade. In addition, 1920 census microfilm was used. This allows for not only the general investigation of those demographic characteristics available through the 1910 records, but it also permitted a more complete examination of particular families, housing units, occupations, and literacy rates existing in 1920. Thus, the 1920 microfilm data allowed for a richer micro-level analysis. Statistical analyses were performed on significant changes in the population characteristics of the population, such as race compositions, age structures, gender structures, employment structures, etc.

In addition to census records, newspaper sources were used to more deeply understand the cultural factors such as perceptions of race within Tulsa, city politics, and other attitudes towards social issues such as crime and class. The primary method used for conducting this portion of research was content analysis. Because the newspapers are used more for determining cultural and contextual aspects, the consideration of

interpreting text is imperative. Hodder (1998) argues that the researcher must be aware of the context in which texts are created and should strive for internal and external coherence (findings do not contradict each other and findings relate to theory, respectively).

Primarily, three sources were used during this stage. These include the *Tulsa Tribune*, *Tulsa Daily World* and *Tulsa Star*. The first two newspapers allowed for the examination of issues for the years 1920 and 1921, while the latter, *Tulsa Star*, was examined for the years 1914-1919. *Tulsa Tribune* and *Tulsa Daily World* were both white-owned newspapers. *Tulsa Star* was a black-owned newspaper that circulated weekly, but the office was destroyed during the riot, and therefore, records are limited. This newspaper was used in conjunction with the others in order to more deeply understand the black experience in everyday Tulsa life, which was not of much concern for white-owned papers. Needless to say, there is a gap in this experience because issues of *The Tulsa Star* released just prior to the riot are not available. However, it was quickly discovered during the initial analysis of this periodical that themes were rather recurrent and could be safely assumed to be themes one would have found in 1920 and 1921. Nevertheless, the bridging of quantitative data from the census records with qualitative data from the newspapers provides a much deeper understanding of the elements that caused the riot including structural, cultural, and contextual factors as well as triggering event(s).

Finally, to address important contextual factors, it was more suitable to identify key events, people, and other historical processes important at both the national and local levels. Therefore, this stage of the analysis included a review of secondary sources. The

analysis begins with a discussion of Oklahoma and Tulsa history using these secondary sources. However, local newspaper accounts were also consulted to better understand the intricacies of key processes. Once again, a more qualitative approach was taken at this stage of the analysis.

### ***Sources for Responses and Framing***

To examine the key events, processes, and actors involved in the response to the riot, a qualitative approach was used. This stage of the analysis calls for examining not only the original responses and resultant frames immediately following the riot, but current framing strategies and techniques among riot survivors and representatives in order to investigate the ways in which the story of the riot has transformed. To examine immediate responses and frames, the local newspapers, *Tulsa Tribune* and *Tulsa World*, were examined and compared. In addition, other journalistic accounts outside of the city were referred to in order to obtain the general perception of the riot. This approach enables a better understanding of the general individual and organizational responses to the riot. Emergent themes associated with city government responses, state government responses, the framing of the riot at the local level, and individual actions and perceptions among both races were analyzed. Also, narratives were reviewed which provide personal experiences associated with the riot from black survivors. These narratives mostly came from Eddie Faye Gates (1997, 2003) and Parrish (1998), and include not only themes concerning experiences, but prevailing attitudes and perceptions following the riot as well.

In order to examine contemporary and extant cognitive schemas concerning the riot, I primarily focus on framing strategies and techniques used by the Tulsa race riot

survivors and their representatives. To do this, I used several sources. First, I considered the most current legal attempt made in order to obtain reparations, which involves a lawsuit filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Ogletree 2005). In addition, local press coverage is examined, particularly the *Tulsa World*, 1997-2007. The year 1997 was selected because it marked the beginning of an investigatory commission formed to study the riot, which eventually led to recommendations for reparations in 2001, and soon thereafter, more formal attempts to garner reparations by the survivors themselves.

### **Stage 3: Analytic Strategy**

Data analysis consists of the examination and categorization of evidence (Tellis 1997). This research consists of a methodological approach known as grounded theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 204-205) state:

“Grounded theory...is a necessary consequence of the naturalistic paradigm that posits multiple realities and makes transferability dependent on local contextual factors. No *a priori* theory could anticipate the many realities that the inquirer will inevitably encounter in the field, nor encompass the many factors that make a difference at the micro (local) level”.

Though the first stage of the analysis, determining the causes of the Tulsa riot, utilizes an integrative approach that involves previous theoretical frameworks, I have also argued that by themselves, these theories are inadequate in getting at the complexity of riots, particularly at the local level. Therefore, this is a grounded theory approach because it integrates not only previous research, but also considers the effect of emergent themes in



the stage of data collection and analysis. More accurately, themes emerged from the analysis and these were then compared and contrasted to alternative theoretical frameworks.

A chief concern in using a ground theory approach consists of coding data, which entails constructing categories after locating emergent themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Within these categories, subcategories may also be necessary. In addition, it is also imperative to offer the properties and dimensions of these categories. A grounded theory approach can consist of two types of coding: axial and selective. Axial coding involves making connections between a category and subcategories once open coding has been completed. At a more abstract level of coding, selective coding integrates the emergent categories while deciding what categories are most important in explicating the storyline. Both axial and selective coding procedures were used.

Grounded theory approaches further consist of four stages: (1) comparing incidents in each category; (2) integrating categories and their properties; (3) delimiting the theory, in which some concepts can be ignored; and (4) writing the theory, or adequately communicating one's findings. The first phase of this project – determining what caused the Tulsa riot – resulted in the development of three particular and broad categories: contextual factors, structural factors, cultural factors, and triggering events. These categories and their associated themes are interrelated. “Contextual factors” was developed as a category to discuss numerous themes relating to factors which contributed to the riot and embedded within the particular historical context. These included riot diffusion, migration, segregation, lynching, and economic advancement of the Black community.

“Structural factors” is a category that includes several patterned features which had at least some role in the riot including population changes, population characteristics, and municipal functioning. “Cultural factors” categorizes themes of the local media’s portrayal of race, and the manifestation of culture. Here, specific attention is given to portrayals of blacks as socially and politically inferior, criminality-prone, and more generally, as a social problem to control. Finally, “triggering events” categorizes the various factors which directly and immediately contributed to the riot.

At times, these themes were consistent with theory, although some themes also emerged which have been somewhat neglected in previous sociological research, particularly issues at the more micro or local level. Within these categories are interrelated themes. The thematic categorizations emerged from the examination of the numerous sources listed above and include both quantitative and qualitative data, though they were largely derived through the latter.

The second stage of the analysis, which is concerned with the response stage of the riot as well as resultant frames, utilized a framing perspective to identify themes consistent within the theoretical framework. While examining resultant frames immediately after the riot, I particularly gave attention to both diagnostic and prognostic framing, which refers to assessing the problem and determining viable solutions. I look at both how the city of Tulsa framed the riot as well as how black survivors immediately responded to the riot from a prognostic standpoint. However, when examining the more recent move for reparations, I offered a more holistic approach to the framing strategies and techniques used by Tulsa race riot survivors and representatives. By adopting the categories previously theorized by various researchers, particularly Snow and Benford, I

located themes consistent with these categories. This approach was used because a more formal movement for reparations has emerged in conjunction with less biased journalism, which has provided a better opportunity to understand its intricacies. In addition, I have offered emergent themes not previously addressed in research. Together, themes relating to frame transformation, frame bridging and extension, frame revolution, diagnostic and prognostic framing, and themes associated with frame resonance were identified.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability involves the evaluation of the methods and techniques used in research (Denscombe 2002). At each stage of the research, the methods primarily involve historical sociology. The use of census records would appear to offer reliability due to its consistency of data. However, these census records were produced in a manner that leaves some of the information illegible. To deal with this issue, those variables affected were coded as such unless this information could be clearly understood through the patterns of other variables. For instance, if the race of a child is illegible it is logical to assume that if the parents of the child were black, then the child was as well.

More important is the reliability associated with using a content analysis approach. Consistent classification is imperative to content analysis (Weber 1990). That is, the coder must use the same classification of textual material throughout the analysis. To enhance reliability, Weber suggests the researcher should use an additional coder(s). Therefore, I have utilized the assistance of another coder to ensure the text is consistently coded throughout the stage of data analysis. Furthermore, there are three types of reliability: stability, reproducibility, and accuracy. That is, coding should be consistent, reproducible, and it should correspond to an established norm. Because a grounded

theory approach was used, the categories developed were emergent. Moreover, they emerged from using each type of reliability criteria.

Validity involves the data and analysis in the research. Primary concerns are associated with whether the right questions have been asked and if the data and explanations are accurate (Denscombe 2002). This investigation is strong in criterion-related validity in that the findings should be strongly related to previous theoretical considerations. For instance, in the stage of examining the causes of the Tulsa riot, I considered, in part, previous theoretical approaches such as political opportunity theory, competition theory, breakdown theories of collective behavior and so on. Thus, while the categories developed were emergent, they were then integrated with previous theoretical frameworks. In addition, while looking at framing processes, the categories developed were consistent with previous literature, though some were emergent.

Finally, this research has content validity due to the range of possible meanings covered through the use of not only previous theoretical considerations, but also the triangulation of sources as well. However, the use of historical documents also poses a challenge. There is a high degree of interpretation involved in studying an era long passed. One particularly interesting note relevant for the discussion at hand relates to the census data. Many extant narratives from African American survivors of the riot provided certain background information such as parent's name, place of residence prior to the riot, place of birth, occupation, etc. The census data confirmed most of the stories, which adds much legitimacy to the statements proffered by the survivors. Nevertheless, it was expected that through the triangulation of sources that interpretation is less problematic, or less questionable.

## 6

### **Causes of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921**

The cause of the Tulsa race riot can be attributed to much more than a precipitating factor. An integrative approach allows for a much more complex and accurate understanding of these causative factors. This chapter focuses on the causes by looking at the relationship between structure, culture, contextual factors, the portrayal of these issues in the media, the triggering events, and how each of these factors were interconnected and led to the Tulsa riot of 1921. One suggestion offered in 1921 is similar to the conclusion reached at the end of this research, albeit summarized more succinctly:

“The causes behind the Tulsa explosion and similar outbreaks of the last few years, editorial observers tell us, are the lynch-law spirit, peonage, race prejudice, economic rivalry between blacks and whites, radical propaganda, unemployment, corrupt politics, and the new negro spirit of self-assertion” (Literary Digest 1921: 7).

I begin by discussing each of the primary factors associated with the riot separately and then move to a presentation of how these issues affected and were affected by each other. In so doing, these issues are incorporated within a model that integrates structural, cultural, and contextual factors as well as triggering events. Finally, it is argued that these causes are not consistent with only one previous theoretical perspective, but several.

It is important to provide a brief overview of Oklahoma's unique origins of statehood so that the context and structure of the black population in Tulsa prior to the riot can be better understood. Some key elements of this historical juncture include migration patterns, segregation, lynching, and economic advancement among the black community in Tulsa. Before the local context of the riot is addressed however, it is necessary to discuss first the rash of riots throughout this era.

### **A Diffusion of Riots**

The Tulsa riot was only one of many that swept the nation throughout the time period. Race riots broke out in Arkansas, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Washington D.C., and numerous other places. Many of these riots were caused by similar processes such as problems emerging as a result of segregation, heavily biased police responses to potential interracial conflicts, and threats of – and sometimes the administering of – lynching. In addition, blacks increasingly fought back. It is for a reason 1919 was known as the Red Summer. As Lovelace (2000) explains, the fear of communism and racial matters were interconnected.

“The real agitators...were the Bolsheviks, or Reds, especially those leading labor strikes. Following the founding of the Communist party, individuals accused of being ‘Reds’ were rounded up and tried for sedition in secret court hearings and then deported. Because the issues of race and economics are entwined, wherever you find one, you will find the other. The riots against African American economic progress and the deportation of those agitating for improvements in wages and working conditions, both became symbolized by the color red” (Lovelace 2000: 5).

According to Waskow (1966), the plethora of riots in 1919 marked the beginning of a new era in race relations as blacks increasingly fought to end their subordination. It was also host to the emergence of more private collective violence, which in turn led to the use of “legitimate violence” by police to quell conflict. However, this violence was most often one-sided; police responded according to white needs and desires. Waskow (1966: 8) summarized this idea:

“In the postwar atmosphere of 1919, under the pressures of fear of radical social upheaval and in the consciousness that it actually possessed enough armed forces to effect its will, the federal government acted not only to monopolize violence but to use its monopoly to take one side in conflicts that had not yet become violent.”

Although Tulsa’s episode of conflict occurred two years after this rash of riots, many characteristics presented above were contributing factors – including a biased police response.

### **Local Contextual Factors**

Oklahoma gained official statehood in 1907. Prior to this, the area was set aside by the federal government as “Indian Territory” (Johnson 1998). However, Native Americans were not the only race present prior to statehood. Duncan (1933) reported that blacks also lived in the area as slaves for various tribes including the Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. Then, in 1889, the Great Land Run sparked a rapid influx of whites (Lamar 1993). The Land Run had significant and lasting implications for blacks. Some of these implications were positive such as enhanced opportunities for blacks (Gates 1997), enhanced racial solidarity in the development of

all-black towns (Johnson 1998), and opportunities for entrepreneurial development seldom found among black populations throughout the Progressive Period (Butler 1991). But other consequences resembled those across the South. Laws of segregation stripped away many human rights and were immediately established after statehood (Brophy 2002). Racist ideologies and actions left blacks in a subordinate state. These issues are addressed next.

### *Migration*

The state of Oklahoma was certainly affected by the larger migration patterns of blacks throughout the late part of the nineteenth century and thereafter. Smallwood and Phillips (1993: 48-67) provide a larger account of black migration into Oklahoma. When Benjamin Harrison declared the land once reserved for Indians open for settlement on April 22, 1889, blacks increasingly came to acquire property. This settlement arrived from both the North and South. As blacks arrived, propaganda was spread calling for more blacks to move into the area by leaders such as W.L. Eagleson, a black politician from Kansas. By 1890, nearly 19,000 blacks lived in former Indian Territory. Nearly one-third of this population settled in Logan County. Within 10 years, this population had increased to approximately 37,000. In 1910, the black population had skyrocketed to over 137,000 and by 1920, the figure was around 149,000. The increase in the white population of Oklahoma was also dramatic. Of primary importance for the population boom in the early 1900s was the discovery of oil and the increasing opportunities for fast money (Ellsworth 1982).

An example of this population boom occurred in the city of Tulsa, which was incorporated in 1908. Ellsworth (1982) noted that in 1900, the estimated population was



around 1,390. By 1910, this figure had increased to 18,182 and in 1920 the population was 72,075. Tulsa was never the site of oil production, but neighboring towns were. In 1904, a toll bridge was constructed across the Arkansas River that allowed for easier access to Red Fork, which supplied Oklahoma's first heavy load of oil. A year later, oil was struck in another neighboring town, Glen Pool, which at one point produced over 2,000 barrels a day. In 1907, Oklahoma led all states in oil production and Tulsa itself became promoted as the "Magic City" (Dunn 1979). Tulsa became one of the richest per-capita cities in the United States nearly overnight (Ellsworth 1982). But Tulsa was not confined to a white population; blacks also moved in and, as will be demonstrated later, developed a self-sustaining and thriving economic community. Unfortunately, while economic opportunities were available to blacks, improved race relations were not. Segregation and discrimination were central features of the newly-formed state of Oklahoma.

### ***Segregation***

The issue of segregation could have been addressed as both a contextual or structural factor. Certainly, legal segregation was historically situated, but its structure contributed to the manifestation of Tulsa's Greenwood community. Thus, it is addressed in both discussions, albeit with a different focus in each. Even before Oklahoma became a state, blacks experienced the discrimination of Jim Crow laws beginning in the 1890's (Smallwood 1981; Ellsworth 1982). When Oklahoma gained statehood, these laws were some of the first steps taken by the legislature to ensure white supremacy. Oklahoma even became the first state to segregate phone booths (Brophy 2002). Prior to 1910, blacks still had the right to vote, but this was defeated as well. The Grandfather Clause

that spread throughout many other states made its way to Oklahoma in 1910 and remained intact over the next five years. This law called for general educational requirements in order to become eligible to vote unless the person's grandfather had been a qualified voter in 1866, thus severely restricting the black vote (Smallwood 1981). However, this was overturned through *Guinn v. United States* in 1915 (Brophy 2002). But the legislature was determined to limit the black vote, so brief registration periods were constructed for those who were not already eligible (Ellsworth 1982). Other rights limited by Jim Crow laws in Oklahoma included a prohibition of intermarriage, school segregation, and segregated public transportation (Smallwood 1981). A.J. Smitherman, editor of the *Tulsa Star*, was baffled by the paradox of segregation blacks experienced in a country which they had fought and died for. In one editorial, he stated:

“American negro. He is born into the world in a country almost wholly developed by the labor of his ancestors and passes through a life of ostracism which he is yet a supposed citizen, he is denied most of the rights of a citizen however, and when his country is engaged in deadly conflict on the battle field the Negro's blood mingles freely with that of the white soldiers who give all that they have for the glory of their country. When these black boys return home they find foreigners of almost every nationality enjoying the rights and freedom of the country for which they have fought and died, while they, their wives and children are denied, debarred and discriminated against in every manner. Surely there is no greater patriot than the Negroes of America” (Negro Patriotism 1914: 4).

Racist laws are a product of racist ideologies and this was the case in Oklahoma before, throughout, and beyond the Progressive Era. Segregation was not enough for many whites – blacks in cities such as Lawton and Okmulgee were issued warnings by whites to leave their cities and to find their own place to live (Franklin 1966; Smallwood 1981; Ellsworth 1982). Some of them did; all-black towns were developed throughout the state during the mid-nineteenth century. A few examples of these towns include Taft, Langston, Redbird, and possibly the most famous, Boley (O’Dell available online). Over 50 all-black towns existed at one point in time within Oklahoma. The populations of these towns often had an intimidating effect on whites. For instance, whites in Okfuskee County were determined to block the immigration of blacks because they feared the possible consequences of black self-support (O’Dell available online). O’Dell noted that several of these all-black towns would ultimately fall apart because of their dependence on agriculture, primarily cotton, for economic gain. The Great Depression served a devastating blow to these communities. Despite the existence of these all-black towns, many blacks increasingly chose to dwell in other mixed, but still segregated towns.

### ***Lynching***

In the analysis of local newspapers, much front-page material consisted on lynching. Racial violence was a significant force during the Progressive Era and permeated the state and southern region in general. Between 1907 and 1921, thirty-two individuals were lynched in Oklahoma. Of these, twenty-six were black (Franklin and Ellsworth 2001). In addition to reporting most acts of lynching, the local papers often recounted episodes of lynching across the United States (for example, Mob Lynching 1920; Carolina Negro 1920; Mob 1000 1920; Mob Lynches 1920; White Man 1921).

Moreover, press coverage of lynchings very often provided the gruesome details of the violence. In one local lynching, the *Tulsa World* graphically rehashed the results (Mob Lynches 1920: 1):

“Hundreds rushed over the prostrate form to get bits of the clothing. The rope was cut into bits for souvenirs. His trousers and shoes were torn into bits and the mob fairly fought over gruesome souvenirs...The body was carried to the car, late arrivals still grabbing for bits of clothing on the now almost nude form.”

The fact that lynchings flourished throughout this period, coupled with their lack of prosecution, understandably contributed to the riot. Lynching was part of a larger “culture of vigilantism” in which citizens took matters into their own hands, bypassing legitimate governmental procedures of due process. The media perpetuated the portrayal of these events as a justified response to episodes of moral mishaps by blacks. In addition to offering the details of the lynching through graphic and sarcastic details, by providing accounts of lynchings across the nation, the media sent the message to both blacks and whites that such events would be left unpunished.

Such violence was not an unfamiliar event in the city of Tulsa either. According to Ellsworth (1982), in October of 1917, the home of a wealthy oilman was bombed and the local papers immediately attributed the destruction to a group known as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Within two weeks, members of the party were found guilty. While being transported by the police to the local jail, around 50 members of the Knights of Liberty halted the group and took them to a ravine in the western part of the city where seventeen members of the IWW were tied to a tree and whipped.

A similar event occurred in 1920 which illustrated the hostility among some whites when their way of life was threatened. On August 21, three “bandits” shot a taxi driver and stole his cab (Victim May 1920). Five days later, the driver died. In the meantime, the *Tulsa World* continued to provide details of the crime and the three suspects (First Degree 1920). Then, on August 27<sup>th</sup>, one of the two captured suspects was taken from the local jail to the outskirts of the city by a mob and was lynched (Mob Lynches 1920). The *Tulsa World* also reported that pieces of the suspect’s clothing were distributed as souvenirs. In addition, the local police followed the mob to the scene and served as spectators to the lynching (Probe Belton 1920).

The events which directly led to the Tulsa riot were similar. Black Tulsans gathered at the courthouse to protect a member of their own community accused of raping a white woman. The justice system was perceived among many blacks to be inadequate in its capability of offering due process to a black man accused of such a crime. For instance, one narrative offered after the riot stated,

“This lack of confidence in law enforcement causes the Negro to feel that it is necessary to protect himself in most cases of threatened lynching. If the party is a member of our group, he is most generally lynched, even though promised the assurance of protection by law” (Parrish 1998 [1923]: 45).

Despite social and political subordination, some black Tulsans thrived economically.

This is evidenced through the ensuing discussion of “Black Wall Street” (Johnson 1998).

### ***The Black Community and Economic Advancement***

Like other cities in the South, segregation had a dramatic impact on the social life of blacks in Oklahoma. It forced many black communities in the state, including all-black towns, to develop their own economic strategies. Franklin (1980: 26) stated,

“Segregation (and an economic detour) gave to the black professional a virtually protected market, but that represented a mixed blessing. If they profited economically by avoiding intense competition from their white counterparts, which was not always the case, they also suffered from being unable to practice their professions in the best institutions and in the best atmosphere.”

The structure and context of segregation thus served as both an advantage and detriment to entrepreneurialism. Through maintaining the legal separation of race in sociality, businesses, education, residential areas, and so on, the structure of segregation encouraged initiative, but it also placed parameters. Tulsa was no exception; it served as a model for economic achievement during the time period. The *Tulsa Star* called for financial autonomy in order to avoid being dependent on a white community that Jim Crowed the black community:

“Let us make employment for our own. To do so means race independence and progress. Not to do so means race dependence and wealth for others who would segregate you and covenant against you by means of your own money...Keep as much wealth as possible within the race. The future will take care of itself” (Insure Race’s 1918: 4).

Thus, segregation would assist in lessening dependency on the white community and the inevitable exploitation that would ensue. Because agriculture had declined, blacks

increasingly moved to urban areas to find work and new ways of life. The black community of Tulsa provided such a place. In one of the only articles addressing this growth and casting the black community in a positive light, the *Tulsa World* reported, “Residents in the Negro section of the city have proven themselves no less enterprising than the white people. In all of the Negro additions numerous dwellings are to be seen” (Fastest Growing 1920: 5).

A plethora of narratives offer some insight as to why Tulsa lured many blacks into the city prior to 1920. One of these reasons was the perception of increased financial opportunities for blacks. Black entrepreneurship increased in each sector throughout the 1907-1923 era. Mabel Little (1992) wrote that she arrived from Boley, a famous all-black town, because she wanted to earn enough money to go to Langston for a college education. She noted the town was booming during this period and mentioned several businesses that flourished during this period such as Huff’s café, Tipton’s and Uncle Steve’s (barbecue), J.D. Mann’s grocery store, barbershops, theatres, medical and dental offices, dance halls, and two funeral parlors. After arriving, she quickly met her future husband, Pressley. Later, he opened a shoeshine parlor and she operated a beauty parlor. LaVerne Davis and Wilhelmina Guess Powell also contend that the financial opportunities were the prime motivators for their families to move into Tulsa (Gates 1997). W.D. Williams’ parents, John and Loula, moved into Tulsa prior to the rapid influx of other blacks. The Williams’ were a model for other black families. They were the first black family to own a car in Tulsa and John later owned and operated a garage, while Loula did the same with a confectionary. Together, they also opened the Dreamland Theatre in 1914. Other examples of economic achievement were J.B.

Stradford, the proprietor of the Stradford Hotel, along with O.W. and Emma Gurley, owners of the Gurley Building and several rental properties (Ellsworth 1982).

Other narratives have been offered that describe some of the accumulated wealth within various households. One of the recurrent themes in regard to the riot offered through various narratives related to personal losses incurred. Muriel Mignon Lilly Cabell (Gates 2003: 60), referring to the destruction experienced by her family during the riot, recalled: “We lost everything, and we had some nice things including a Kimball piano, photographic equipment, tools, furnishings, one Ford sedan car, one Ford coupe car, and miscellaneous things”. In his recollection of the Greenwood community and its subsequent destruction, James Durant stated,

“Some of the finest black homes that were burned on the second day of the riot, June 1, 1921, were on Detroit Avenue. The site of these elegant homes, magnificently furnished, so infuriated white mobsters that they smashed fine dishes, hacked up valuable pianos, victrolas, musical instruments, tore down fancy lace curtains from Europe” (Gates 2003: 66)

The narratives of black Tulsans who survived the 1921 riot recalled not only the violence, but the prosperous conditions they experienced similar to those mentioned above.

Moreover, these narratives provide a glimpse of the everyday life that could not be captured through census records. For instance, Jimmie Lilly Franklin remembers,

“My sisters...and I lived with our parents... in a beautiful home on North Elgin Street at the time of the Tulsa race riot. It was a large home with four bedrooms, one bath, living room, dining room, and an office which was used by Papa, who was a photographer. The house was furnished



with beautiful things, including a living room which had a Kimball piano, two sofas, two upholstered chairs, a settee, and four bedrooms full of oak furniture, and a dining room which contained an oak dining room set. Papa had a photographic studio, a darkroom, and several large cameras. Papa also had numerous household, carpentry, and plumbing tools which the mobsters took” (Gates 2003: 68)

**Table 1: Black Business Establishments in Tulsa, 1907, 1909-1914, and 1916-1923**

Establishments	07	09	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Bath parlors								1							
Billiard Halls			2	1	3	3	3	6	5	4	5	6	9	4	6
Cigars and tobacco							1	2				2			
Clothing, dry goods, racket, second-hand, music, furniture, paints and oils, shoes			1	1	3	1			2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Confectionary, soft drinks			1	2	1	1	3	4	5	7	16	2	4	6	6
Feed and Grain											1	1	1	1	1
Furnished rooms, boarding and rooming houses	3		2	3	2	1	4	3	1	6	5	9	11		3
Garages, auto repair and filling stations							1	1	1			1	2		3
Grocers, meat markets	3	3	2	5	8	10	9	7	18	11	21	23	41	34	31
Hotels			1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	4	5	4	9
Restaurants	1	1		5	3	13	17	15	11	17	21	20	30	29	19
Theatres								1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Undertakers' parlors								1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1

Sources: Ellsworth (1982) and 1920 Census

Quantitative evidence supports these narratives. Table 1 demonstrates the many businesses and trades that were offered throughout this period. This has been offered previously by both Ellsworth (1982) and Butler (1991) and includes information retrieved from city directories for the years 1907, 1909-1914, and 1916-1923. However, for the year 1920, I have adjusted the list of professionals and skilled crafts persons from the

census that were not included in the city directory for that year. The adjusted figures are highlighted in bold.

**Table 2: Black Business Persons in Tulsa, 1907, 1909-1914, and 1916-1923**

Professionals	1907	09	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	1923
Dentists				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<b>3</b>	2	2	2
Druggists and medicine manufacturers		1			1	2	1	1	4	3	3	<b>6</b>	4	3	3
Jewelers										1	1	<b>1</b>	1		
Lawyers	1	1	3	4	2	1	5	6	4	4	5	<b>8</b>	3	4	6
Nurses												<b>2</b>		1	
Photographers											1	<b>1</b>	2	1	2
Physicians and surgeons	2	2	2	3	4	7	5	3	4	10	12	<b>19</b>	15	10	10
Real estate, loans, and insurance agents	2						1	2	4	4	3	<b>6</b>	6	4	5
Private detectives															1
Skilled Crafts Persons	07	09	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	<b>20</b>	21	22	23
Bakers												<b>8</b>			
Blacksmiths		1				1	1	1	1	1	1	<b>5</b>		3	2
Contractors, carpenters, builders, house and sign painters								1		2	7	<b>48</b>	5	6	2
Dressmakers					1			1	1	3	4	<b>7</b>	2	1	1
Milliners												<b>1</b>			1
Plumbers										2		<b>6</b>	1		
Printers						1				1	1	<b>1</b>	1	1	
Shoemakers and shoe repairers			2	2		1	2	1	1	1	3	<b>4</b>	4	6	3
Tailors				1		1	2	3	2	5	6	<b>22</b>	10	6	9
Upholsterers													1	1	
Service Workers	07	09	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	<b>20</b>	21	22	23
Barbers	1	2	2	4	3	3	5	7	6	10	11	<b>36</b>	12	11	13
Cleaners, hatters, dyers, and pressers			2	2	1	6	4	4	7	10	7	<b>13</b>	5	5	6
Hairdressers								1		3	3	<b>14</b>	3		1
Launderers							1		1			<b>291</b>		2	1
Shoe shiners							2	2	5	4	6	<b>18</b>	6	6	1
Semi-skilled workers	07	09	10	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	<b>20</b>	21	22	23
Expressmen and messengers							2	1				<b>2</b>			
Housemovers					1							<b>1</b>			
News dealers											1	<b>1</b>			1

Source: Ellsworth (1982) and 1920 Census

Table 2 demonstrates that the majority of the workers were employed primarily through professional and service sectors. A close examination of the data suggests that the city directories containing information on black employment had rather grossly

underestimated several occupations. Many of the occupations listed in the directory had fewer than 10 individuals, but when compared to the census data, the number of individuals working was much larger. For instance, according to the city directory of 1920, there were 6 contractors, carpenters, builders, and house and sign painters. However, the census lists 48 individuals with these occupations. Thus, city directory figures underrepresented the economic conditions in the Greenwood area. Also noteworthy is the steady increase of business establishments and professional/skilled craftsmen workers throughout the period. For instance, in 1907, one lawyer was available. By 1920, this number had increased to eight. Similarly, there were two physicians/surgeons in 1907 compared to nineteen by 1920. In 1907, there was one restaurant in Greenwood, compared to 30 dining options by 1921. This rather dramatic increase is illustrative of the economic strides accompanying a rapid population growth.

Previous work offered by White (1921, 909-10) and Ellsworth (1982) have shown that there were a few blacks in the Greenwood area who had accumulated fortunes over a brief period of time. Specifically, White (1921) noted that two blacks were worth \$150,000, two worth \$100,000, three worth \$50,000 and four valued at \$25,000. If this holds true, then it can be accurately argued that the fortunes of these people would rely upon more than the economic conditions than the tables suggest. Nevertheless, these data demonstrate that blacks began to develop their own trades and skills that were distinct from the agricultural skills developed in neighboring communities.

Greenwood was largely portrayed as an area of poverty and social problems by the local white media. Like any other city, the Greenwood section did include levels of poverty. For instance, according to 1920 census records, nearly 10 percent of the black

population worked in the private family industry. This typically involved black servants who worked for white households doing housecleaning, driving, cooking, etc.

Presumably, these were not high-paying jobs. In addition, nearly 1,000 workers were deemed “laborers” in the “general labor” industry, which included those individuals who found work as it was made available. In all, the top five occupations held by blacks in Tulsa consisted of laborers, cooks, launderers, maids, and porters. However, some research contends that even these jobs would have offered higher wages to blacks in Tulsa than in other cities due to the prosperity of the white community. Madigan (2002: 44) stated,

“Oil money did flow into Greenwood through the wages that the rich whites paid their black domestic workers, wages previously unheard of in the South. Maids received \$20 to \$25 a week; chauffeurs and gardeners, \$15 to \$20. Porters and janitors also made good money; black shoeshine boys could pocket \$10 a day.”

Regardless, it was the economic success and value of land in which they inhabited that served as an economic threat. The idea that economic success among blacks contributed to the riot was expressed shortly after when Walter White of the NAACP investigated the riot’s causes.

“First, the Negro in Oklahoma has shared in the sudden prosperity that has come to many of his white brothers, and there are some colored men there who are wealthy. This fact has caused a bitter resentment on the part of the lower order of whites, who feel that these colored men, members of an ‘inferior race,’ are exceedingly presumptuous in achieving greater

economic prosperity than they who are members of a divinely ordered superior race” (White 1921: 909).

Thus, there is little evidence to suggest the plausibility of deprivation arguments concerning the causes of the Tulsa riot. Deprivation arguments assume that racial and ethnic minorities riot out of collective frustrations. Certainly, poverty was disproportionately situated within the segregated Greenwood district, but contrary to beliefs immediately following the riot, the true “rioters” were not the African-American citizens of Greenwood. Rather, the rioters consisted of white citizens who entered the black district to torch each household and business establishment. The only evidence pointing to any sort of deprivation refers to the point at which blacks appeared at the courthouse armed, with the goal of protecting the black suspect accused of rape. However, this involved political deprivation. That is, the armed groups of blacks believed the suspect would be lynched and that police procedures would not effectively protect him. Nevertheless, the actual direction the riot would take indicts white rioters rather than those who appeared at the courthouse armed. Indeed, it is more likely the Tulsa race riot was, in part, a product of a larger economic threat. As Butler (1991:221-222) states:

“Afro-Americans in Tulsa were victims because of their own economic success. When reports of the alleged assault by a black man on a white woman reached the white community, blacks had already been warned to leave...In short, blacks were considered to be an economic problem. This helps to explain the fact that, when the riot started, white men and boys

from every part of the city armed themselves, raided hardware stores for arms and ammunition, and burned the Greenwood section to the ground.”

As shown later, organizational responses to the riot also provide evidence of an economic threat. For instance, within a week of the destruction resulting from the riot, plans were made to industrialize that portion of the city and to move black Tulsans to a place less desirable for white Tulsa businessmen. Nevertheless, now that the more local, and somewhat national, context has been outlined, it is necessary to move into a discussion of the various structural conditions present in Tulsa.

### **Structural Factors**

To introduce an analysis of the structural contributors to the riot, it is necessary to first address the demographic changes Tulsa experienced between 1910 and 1920, which was a rather dramatic population boom. To do so, it is also useful to compare and contrast these changes with the larger state of Oklahoma throughout this period.

### ***Population Changes***

**Table 3: Population Change From 1910 to 1920**

	Year	Total Population	Total Black Population	Percent Blacks
Oklahoma	1910	1,657,155	137,612	8.30
	1920	2,028,283	149,408	7.37
Tulsa City	1910	18,182	1,959	10.77
	1920	72,075	8,878	12.32

Source: 1910 and 1920 U.S. Census

Table 3 illustrates the changes which occurred in the black population of Oklahoma throughout the decade (U.S. Bureau of Census 1910, 1920). In 1910, blacks comprised 8.3 percent of the population in Oklahoma in 1910. In the city of Tulsa, blacks constituted 10.8 percent of the city's population. By 1920, these figures took on a significant change. The overall percentage of the black population in the state of Oklahoma decreased to 7.4 percent, but blacks living in Tulsa increased to 12.3 percent of the population. The decrease in the overall black population throughout the decade can be explained by northern migration patterns (Gregory 2005), and the increase in the city of Tulsa can be explained, in part, by the migration of blacks to urban dwellings.

In 1910, Tulsa County ranked sixteenth out of seventy-six Oklahoma counties in total black population. By 1920, Tulsa County ranked third. Further, in 1920 the city of Tulsa hosted a higher black population than any other city or town in the state. Forty-seven Oklahoma counties decreased in their overall black population throughout the ten-year period. Counties that did experience a growth in their black composition came nowhere near the population growth that Tulsa witnessed. It is also important to note that those counties with the largest number and percentage of persons of African descent were located adjacent to the Tulsa area. Table 4 shows Tulsa's black population growth in comparison to the other fifteen counties that exceeded its population in 1910 (U.S. Bureau of Census 1910, 1920). The table shows the total black population and percentage of population by county and by year. Note that the percent change reflects the overall change of the black population relative to the total population of the county. This shift in population is explained, in part, by the pattern of overall migration of blacks to northern cities, but certainly part of the explanation might be intrastate migration. The

all-black towns that had developed in the late nineteenth century in Oklahoma relied on agriculture as its chief source of economy. During the latter part of the Progressive Era, particularly the years between 1910 and 1920, agricultural production began to decline (O'Dell available online). This decline forced many blacks to seek alternative sources of income. Tulsa offered opportunities for new migrants.

**Table 4: Population Growth or Decline for Selected Counties 1910 and 1920**

County	Black Population in 1920	Black Population in 1910	Percent Change
Muskogee	15310	16454	-6.9
Oklahoma	11401	9227	+23.6
Tulsa	10903	2754	+295.9
Okmulgee	9791	5933	+63.4
Okfuskee	8617	8073	+6.7
Wagoner	7093	8761	-19.0
McCurtain	6914	4576	+51.1
Creek	6794	2778	+144.6
Logan	6422	8196	-21.7
McIntosh	5950	5283	+12.6
Choctaw	5242	4303	+21.8
Seminole	4517	4081	+10.7
Carter	4257	4315	-1.3
Pittsburg	4005	5244	-23.6
Lincoln	3955	3945	+.3
Sequoyah	2766	3178	-13

Source: 1910 and 1920 U.S. Census

***Population Characteristics***

As previously mentioned, Tulsa was a distinct city in Oklahoma. It boasted of one of the most rapid population growths in the state between 1910 and 1920 (Ellsworth 1982). Blacks were part of this growth. Moreover, some unique population characteristics regarding age and sex existed in Tulsa that made the city distinct from the nation as a whole.



Table 5 shows the sex ratio of the entire country as it compares to the city of Tulsa (U.S. Bureau of Census 1920).

**Table 5: Comparative Sex Ratios, 1920**

	Sex Ratio
United States (all races)	104.0
Tulsa city (all races)	109.3
Whites in Tulsa	111.1
Blacks in Tulsa	96.8

Source: 1920 U.S. Census

This table shows that the sex ratio was 104 males to every 100 females for the entire country. But the sex ratio of the city of Tulsa, particularly in regard to the white population, is very high at over 111. This can largely be explained by the attractiveness of the oil industry to young, white males. Indeed, the age distribution of Tulsa in 1920 shown in Table 6 further demonstrates this point (U.S. Bureau of Census 1920).

Table 6 shows that a large percentage of those living in Tulsa in 1920 were relatively young, specifically males in the 25-34 cohort. This would support Ellsworth's (1982) contention that the migration into Tulsa just prior to 1920 brought large waves of young workers. He also holds that the young, white population can be explained by the oil boom in surrounding areas, but this doesn't explain the expansion of the young black population; other forces, such as racial solidarity and better opportunities explain the latter.

**Table 6: Age Distribution by Race and Gender in Tulsa 1920**

Age	White Male %	White Female %	Black Male %	Black Female %
0-5	4.5	4.4	4.2	4.2
5-9	4.2	4.1	5.2	5.5
10-14	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.3
15-19	3.8	4.3	3.8	5.1
20-24	5.9	6.3	5.3	7.2
25-34	12.7	11.4	11.0	12.2
35-44	8.8	6.7	8.7	7.5
45-64	7.5	5.3	6.3	4.3
65+	1.2	1.1	.7	.7

Source: 1920 U.S. Census

Population characteristics have been shown in previous research to be important to riots. In cities with virtually no minority population, a race riot is highly unlikely. However, cities with a larger proportion of minorities are at the very least more susceptible to experiencing racial disorders. In Tulsa, population growth was both dramatic and rapid. This fact alone however does not explain why the riot occurred. It only helps to show that the city was more conducive to riots than others may have been. Later, I will discuss more fully the role of population structures and its contribution to the Tulsa riot. Other factors contributed as well, including Tulsa's municipality.

***Inadequate Municipal Functioning***

Many problems associated with Tulsa's municipality prior to the riot, of which many were structurally-oriented, were present. However, these problems were also

affected by and affected the cultural context as well. Moreover, they contributed to the riot. For instance, in 1909, shortly after the city became incorporated, a commission system replaced the city's aldermanic system. Mitchell (1950: 47) described the new charter:

“Under the charter a mayor, city auditor, and four commissioners were to be elective, with other administrative officials appointed by the board of commissioners. The four commissioners and the mayor made up the commission board. The mayor as a member of the board had all the rights, powers and duties that other members possessed. He was designated as the chief executive officer of the city, which placed upon him the responsibility of seeing that all laws were enforced, franchises complied with, contracts executed, and appointive officers nominated”

The goal of this charter was to implement a system in which nonpartisan politics would prevail. However, inherent in a system in which one individual has overriding power is partisanship. An ongoing debate in the city of Tulsa revolved around whether it should be an open or closed town. In an open town, it was said that lawlessness could prevail in contrast to a closed town, which would be much less permitting of the vice that affected Tulsa (Mitchell 1950; Tracy 1996). Recall again the structure of the population of Tulsa in 1920, which was abnormally male and young. Many had moved to the city for instantaneous wealth. With this migration came a “frontier culture.” The issue of lawlessness proved to be a predominant theme in every election thereafter for some time. In 1916, a mayor was ousted for his role in permitting lax law enforcement. Over the

years, several changes would be made to this system, but not until the mayor's role would present major obstacles for black survivors in 1921, which is discussed at length later.

Nevertheless, complaints of lawlessness persisted and many pointed to police corruption. These allegations came to the forefront in Tulsa only two months before the riot. In March of 1921, a ministerial alliance was formed to investigate possible lax law enforcement (Enforce Law 1921:1). Days after this alliance was formed, suspiciously a reverend was beat up by a police officer after he was accused of driving recklessly and refused to admit that he was doing so (Attack Crum 1921:1). Due to criticisms published in the newspapers from the editor and also from citizens, the Mayor and Police Commissioner of Tulsa requested that all complaints be voiced during a hearing which was held beginning on May 20, 1921 (No Proof 1921:1). After many testimonies, they decided that there was no proof of corruption by city officials. This was mostly because the people who claimed to have sufficient evidence did not want to testify under a city meeting, but rather in a court of law where legal actions were most likely to be taken (No Proof 1921:1). Several examples of these criticisms emerged, however. An editorial on May 18 argued that the police department often overlooked bootlegging, prostitution, and gambling (City Calls 1921:1).

Nevertheless, this was an important aspect of Tulsa just prior to the riot. The structure of the commission system provided the mayor and city commissioners with a great deal of authority in the city (Mitchell 1950). It is not coincidental their investigation did not turn up evidence of lax law enforcement, because in essence, the administration was investigating itself. This is why many refused to testify (No Proof

1921). As will be shown, existent crime was attributed largely to the black community and whites who were engaging in interracial contact.

In addition to the corrupt nature of the police prior to the riot, the police were certainly direct contributors to the magnitude of the riot as well through a variety of means. First, they failed to implement any structural tactics to prevent such a large gathering at the courthouse. Moreover, there were few steps taken to protect Rowland, the black man accused of assault. However, evidence of steps which could be taken to protect a prisoner was provided by other cities' approaches. Importantly, the local media prior to the riot often included stories which referred to mob-related activity and how it could be quelled and averted. For instance, in the neighboring town of Okmulgee nearly three months before the Tulsa riot, a potential lynching was prevented:

“Deputy sheriffs, having in custody Charlie Clark and E.G. Wallace, negroes, accused of shooting to death William Deathridge, a white man, at Beggs last night, left Okmulgee this morning for another county, the name of which they refused to divulge, in order to prevent a possible lynching.”  
(Hide Black 1921).

By taking the suspect out of the local jail and escorting him to another undisclosed site, the officers in Okmulgee potentially prevented a lynching. Similar steps were taken in other places. This is important because had the Tulsa police used similar measures to protect Rowland, arguably the riot would have not broken out. Instead, the police merely moved Rowland from the local jail to the courthouse, which was thought to be safer. Without taking any other precautions, this strategy allowed the crowd gathered outside the courthouse to increase and intensify. Moreover, it was hours before they sought any

outside assistance. Shortly after the riot, one journalist attributed its direct cause to the inadequacy of police response to lynching threats:

“In recent years there have been many lynchings in Oklahoma. There has yet to be chronicled the instance where any individual has paid a legal penalty for participating in murder as part of a mob. There is yet to be chronicled the first instance where in Oklahoma an officer has been removed from office for failure to perform his most primary duty of an officer, to wit; to protect the life of his prisoner from criminal violence” (Let Us 1921).

Thus, a more systemic problem was perceived in which blacks throughout the South could not experience due process.

A second way in which law enforcement practices fueled the riot was through the issuance of police commissions to white civilians during the riot without discretion. It took orders from the Adjutant General for these commissions to be recalled. The following article states the obvious – the commissions were not used for legal purposes, but rather for legitimization techniques, “Frequent reports have been received by officials that these special commission cards have been used for questionable purposes by the holders and that a few have even used them in violating the law under the pretense of enforcing it” (Commissions Invalid 1921: 3). In addition to becoming deputized, guns were also administered to white civilians. This is illustrated in a statement released by the Chief of Police, which requests that the guns be returned to the police.

““These guns were only loaned,’ the chief explained, ‘and were loaned with the understanding they would be returned as soon as the situation had

improved to a point sufficient to justify their return. We expected all the guns would be returned within two or three days after the city had become quiet, but there are yet a number of guns out” (Guns Taken 1921: 2).

A third way in which police practices contributed to the riot was through the active, but biased participation by law enforcement. In its response to the riot, police officers did not seek to arrest white civilians involved in the disturbance. In addition, violent social control methods were only employed against the black community. The African Blood Brotherhood issued the following statement after the riot,

“As at Washington, D.C. so at Tulsa, Okla. The entire power of the State, all of the forces of capitalist ‘law and order,’ were turned upon the Negro in the process of ‘putting down’ race riots that were started and most actively prosecuted by white mobs. All the deputies sworn in Tulsa authorities during the recent race riot were *white*. All the prisoners taken up and sent into concentration camps by these deputies, the Tulsa city police and the Oklahoma State militia were *colored*.” (Commander, Tulsa Post, African American Blood Brotherhood 1921: 8).

Municipal characteristics and conditions contributed to the riot through a variety of ways. This is consistent with the findings of Lieberman and Silverman (1965) that local governmental conditions are important in explaining riots. For Tulsa, these conditions were explained in terms of the political structure where the mayor was given full authority over the city. Though this structure was developed in order to prevent partisanship, it led to distinct interests being served, particularly in the mayoral position. Lawlessness prevailed in a young, booming city and this was in part due to laxity in law

enforcement. Finally, at an even more micro-level, police failed to implement procedures in which a prisoner could be protected and decidedly fueled the violence which took place during the riot. However, the tactics used were a reflection of the white hegemony that controlled social, cultural, political, and economic life for blacks. That is, the practices were part of a larger systemic racism (Feagin 2006) that subordinated and oppressed blacks during this era.

### **Cultural Factors**

Two factors, or themes, point to the cultural underpinnings which contributed to the Tulsa riot: the local media portrayal of race and the manifestation of racial issues. Within these themes, both of which are related strictly to race relations, are aspects related to perceptions about race.

#### ***Local Media's Portrayal of Race***

The media's portrayal of race continues to both mold and reinforce dominant ideologies and perceptions of race within society (Oliver and Fonash 2002). One example of the racial frame in media accounts involves crime in the United States. Media depictions disproportionately present crimes committed by African Americans, resulting in reinforced stereotypes among the public regarding serious crime and its most likely offenders (Entman 1992, 1994; Dixon & Linz 2000). In turn, an increased level of fear and demands for social control among the public occurs as a result of these media efforts (Scheingold 1975; Surette 2007).

Locally-owned and white Tulsa newspapers provide illustrative evidence that contemporary disparities in positive press coverage between racial groups have been persistent media phenomena for some time. I also argue that negative portrayals of



Tulsans during the era under consideration were an abetting contributor to the riot by reinforcing dominant ideologies about issues pertaining to race, particularly stereotypes of race and crime. Moreover, the portrayal of racial issues was a reflection of white superiority and racism, which is discussed further. It is important to note, once again, that each of these factors are interconnected in their contribution to the Tulsa race riot. The *Tulsa World* and *Tulsa Tribune* seldom mentioned black life in Tulsa. City and world politics, social events, sports, business, and sensationalism mixed within, comprised the papers, but rarely were the everyday lives and contributions of Black Tulsans an issue. Though blacks made up over 12% of the city's population and displayed glaring evidence of entrepreneurship, newspaper accounts offered primarily evidence of criminality and immorality among blacks. To illustrate the ways in which blacks were portrayed, consider the following excerpt from an article published near Christmas, 1920. Here, in an article titled, "Samaritans Want Genuine Poverty," the author discussed holiday donations that could be given to needy families. However, "Everybody always refuses to take a Christmas basket to a negro family, and nowadays the humane society workers do not even suggest such a move" (Samaritans Want 1920: 20). Thus, not only did whites not want to donate money to blacks, but organizations perceivably dissuaded anyone from doing so. The title of this article is telling in itself; it suggests that black poverty was not genuine poverty and that any sort of interracial contact, even if it involved benevolence, should be discouraged – and once again, no reference is given to some of the wealth stored in the black community.

Specifically, two themes emerged through examining the local portrayal of race: one of inferior intelligence and one of black proneness to criminality. Often blended into

these articles was a heavy dose of sarcasm. The following examples provide ample evidence of the discrepancy between perceptions and portrayals of race and reality.

*Intelligence.* Several narratives included themes of better education for black children. Indeed, Ellsworth (1982) notes that the illiteracy rate among blacks in Tulsa county during 1920 was the second lowest in Oklahoma. Robert Fairchild was one example of those who valued learning. During the period under consideration, Robert was a teenager who graduated from Booker T. Washington High School. Later, he would go on to attend and graduate from the University of Nebraska. Ernestine Gibbs recalled that Booker T. Washington provided kids with an excellent education via principal Ellis Woods. She also remembered that this education remained superior despite inadequate supplies, such as books (Gates 1997). The belief that education for blacks was superior in Tulsa compared to other cities was not limited to Tulsans. Carter Woodson (1933), the second black to graduate with a Ph.D. from Harvard, demanded that black Tulsa schools were among a select group of schools which adequately taught black history and its contributions.

However, it should be recalled that state laws mandated segregated schooling. According to the Department of Education in Oklahoma, “The public schools of the state of Oklahoma shall be organized and maintained upon a complete plan of separation between the white and the colored races, with impartial facilities for both races” (Department of Education 1921: Section 280). To make a clearer distinction, it added, “The term colored as used in the preceding section shall be construed to mean all persons of African descent who possess any quantum of negro blood, and the term of white shall include all other persons” (Department of Education 1921: 281). Despite institutional

discrimination in the form of unequal educational materials (Gates 1997), which was contrary to the goals of the Department of Education, other data suggest that black Tulsans were indeed educated.

Quantitative evidence supports the notion that education was of importance to the black community in Tulsa. For instance, among blacks and mulattos in Tulsa who were ten years of age or older, nearly 95% could read and write in 1920. This is compared to the national illiteracy rate among blacks ten years and older of 23%. In addition, 89 % of those who were between the ages of 7 and 17 were enrolled in school (U.S. Bureau of Census 1920).

There is little evidence, however, that a much larger, white portion of Tulsa was aware of educational achievements among black Tulsans. In fact, newspaper accounts seemingly suggested otherwise. A close examination of articles shows that most blacks were portrayed through their language to show a level of intellectual inferiority. This can be seen through statements they included from blacks. For instance, Tucker Gilbert, a black porter who worked at a local white bank was described as “an old fashioned ‘befo’ de wah’ darkie” (Faithful Negro 1920: 9). Or consider a quote provided from a black woman after being asked if she lost something: “Los’ somethin’? You ax me has ah los’ somethin’? Ah done los’ mah home and ah done los’ mah close, ‘ceptin these heah on mah back, and mah shoes is burned” (Negroes Gladly 1921:1). Another example offers the interconnected portrayal of blacks as not only unintelligent and criminal, but people not to be taken seriously.

“Commodore Polk, colored, residing at 207 N. Hartford av., is learning.

It is alleged that Commodore, early last night, belted his wife over the eye with his fist and his wife, retaliating, whaled him across the head with a pop bottle, cutting a slight gash from which blood trickled. That was enough, Commodore called the 'law'... 'I jus wants you gentlemen to make wife subside.' Commodore said, when the officers arrived. 'She's got rampageous in my house and is smacking me wif bottles. All is wants is for you to make her cam herself...Here I is, 21 years old. I've been somewhere. What I mean is that I've been everywhere and I never been in no jail house. Never in my life was I even threatened with a jail house. Then I gets myself married and the fust thing I knows Ise right here in the police station and the jailer is rattling the keys" (Negro Dead 1921: 2).

This particular article suggests that the accused offender was "learning." The patriarchal character of a white racial frame provides a discourse full of stereotypes and organized beliefs which legitimizes the discrimination of blacks, even in contemporary society (Feagin 2006). One such stereotype is the perception of a lack of intelligence among blacks, as is evidenced in the article above. However, another recurrent stereotype associates blacks with crime.

**Crime.** Tulsa had a national reputation for its lawlessness. In his nationwide study of prostitution, for example, Howard Brown Woolston in 1917 determined Tulsa to be one of forty cities most noted for vice (Woolston cited in Lemons 2004:23). Prior to the riot, most portrayals of the segregated Black community were of a crime-infested district labeled as "Niggertown" or "Little Africa" by editors. Indeed, a reader would be led to believe that crime was primarily a black problem. The *Tulsa Star*, a local black

publication, was aware of this tendency and its ramifications. In one article, a journalist stated,

“The World-Sun have at least 500 subscribers among the Negroes of this city, which amounts to \$3,900.00 per year. Quite a fat sum to pay to be insulted and outraged at frequent intervals, eh?...A paper which will not publish their social news, but take a keen delight in publishing any article calculated to discredit the Negro in any way and to stir up prejudice against him” (Would Bar 1914: 1).

When a crime was committed by a black, not only was their color identified, but their residential address was offered as well. Though numerous studies have documented the persistence of crime within Tulsa prior to the riot, fewer studies have shown that crime was not attributed to all of Tulsa, but rather criminality was a problem among blacks. This problem was made manifest through not only the identification of one’s race (so long as the accused was black), but also through lengthier, and more sarcastic, portrayals of black crime. Moreover, the portrayal of criminality among blacks was not restricted to the city of Tulsa. Consider the following account of a fight that broke out in the neighboring city of Muskogee, Oklahoma between what at first appeared to be a white man against a black man:

“Two revolver shots, only a few minutes apart, in the heart of the downtown district here today sent crowds of shoppers scattering helter skelter, and brought a large crowd of white men to police headquarters in the belief that a negro had attempted to take the life of a white man. One of the negroes is of such fair skin that the crowd, thinking him white,

followed to headquarters. When told that both men are negroes the throng dispersed” (Downtown Shooting 1921).

Interracial violence warranted white concern, but when the discovery was made that the altercation involved black citizens, whites seemingly reacted to the violence as merely an everyday occurrence. However, the white press in Tulsa often confined their presentation of crime to the city itself, most often involving blacks. The following excerpt from *Tulsa World* is offered as an illustration.

“Somebody’s perfectly good clothes are now hanging in the boiler room of the city police station, drying as peacefully as if they had been hung there by their owner, but they are not. Marie Dasher, negro woman dope addict and familiar police character was picked up Thursday on West First street in possession of the clothes, which were very bulky and soaking wet, wrapped in a large sheet” (Negro Steals 1921).

The woman accused of stealing the clothes was considered a drug addict and no stranger to the police. This type of reporting continued and became more extreme in the days and months leading to the riot. In fact, reporters at times attempted to add a touch of humor to instances of black crimes. This humor was typically directed at black intelligence.

Another article sarcastically points to a murder of another man:

“Choc beer and a woman have surely brought Dock Adams, negro, a lot of trouble. Anyway that is what he blames. Dock was arraigned Monday before Justice H.J. Gray, on a charge of murder for the death of Fletcher Hamilton, another negro early Monday morning, when the two blacks engaged in an altercation over ‘love’” (Women and Beer 1921 ).

Black crime became of utmost importance shortly before rioting broke out. Amidst an investigation into the local police and potential law enforcement laxity, city representatives focused on existing vice in the city, particularly the black community and their alleged involvement in prostitution rings. One biased Judge argued that certain black porters were to blame, suggesting, “the negro porters be taken out and killed” (City Not 1921: 1). In addition, immediately after the riot, many would contend that black crime ultimately caused the devastation to Greenwood. One journalist stated,

“It was in the sordid and neglected ‘Niggertown’ that the crooks found their hiding place. It was a cesspool of crime. There were the low brothels where the low whites mixed with the low blacks. There were the dope venders and the dope consumers. There crimes were plotted and loot hidden. One city administration after another looked after the ‘uptown’ traffic regulations, saw to it that you did not park your auto where you should not, but let ‘Niggertown’ pretty much alone. There, for months past, the bad ‘niggers,’ the silk-shirted parasites of society, had been collecting guns and munitions” (Comstock 1921: 460).

This type of literature exemplifies the cruel nature of racism that existed within Tulsa before and after the riot. The editor contends that police administration continuously turned a blind eye to black crime. Numerous local editorials made a similar argument. However, Tulsa police clearly did not ignore crimes committed by blacks. At a daily rate, local white papers repeatedly reported black crimes, enough to lead a reader to perceive that white crime was nonexistent.

This is not to suggest that black crime itself was nonexistent. Indeed, even the editor of *Tulsa Star* was concerned that black crime, which he perceived to be situated in the “East End” of the Greenwood community, caused harm to the Black race as a whole. In one editorial, he stated:

“And so it continues, and the people of Tulsa, the best as well as the rest, are suffering because of the reputation thus being made. We can do nothing to undo any of the murders and other crimes already committed, but there is much we can do to lower the percentage of crime by bettering our social conditions” (Another Murder 1918: 4).

Despite Smitherman’s admittance that crime was a problem within the black community, he continually maintained that the white press in Tulsa dramatically overrepresented this crime. It is also important to note a tendency for the local white press to blame white crime on black criminality. That is, crimes committed by whites, (which were presumably the same as those committed by blacks) such as drug use, prostitution, bootlegging, and gambling were often attributed to the black section. So when whites engaged in these activities, the local press had a tendency to blame it on race intermingling. For example, one article pointed to the criminality of whites who dared to be entertained in the black neighborhood of a small Oklahoma town. After the article points to the names of whites who appeared in court on charges of drunkenness and lewd conduct while at the home of a black citizen, the author offers the following details:

“During police court this morning, Mayor Bone warned taxi drivers about driving white persons to the negro section. He instructed the police to



shoot the tires off of every taxi found hauling white men or women to the negro district” (Cops Break 1920).

The issues of crime portrayed in the local white papers served as an impetus to the riots. In both cases, blacks were perceived to be overstepping their boundaries. Indeed, following the riots, a plethora of city of leaders would frame the riot as an uprising stemming from a set of blacks whose expectations for racial equality exceeded those acceptable to the white majority. This will be amply evidenced later.

### *The Manifestation of Culture*

Mary Jones Parrish (1998) recalled that she did not necessarily come to Tulsa because of the opportunities for economic advancement like many others did, but rather she arrived because she was aware of the great racial solidarity that existed in Tulsa among blacks. Wilhelmina Guess Powell also recalls that her family decided to come to Tulsa not only because of the economic opportunities, but also to escape the racism of the deeper South. LaVerne Davis also hoped that social conditions would be better (Gates 1997).

However, upon their arrival they discovered their hope for social equality could not be found in Tulsa. Segregation and discrimination were complete in Tulsa. With the usual segregation laws in place, other forms of institutional discrimination also took form. Evidence of absolute deprivation, black schools received less supplies, and moreover, old supplies. Black streets were not paved, so when it rained, people such as LaVerne Davis were forced to walk through piles of mud to get anywhere. Blacks also experienced inadequate water and sanitation that whites enjoyed.

According to Wilson (1973: 32), racism is “an ideology of racial domination or exploitation that (1) incorporates beliefs in a particular race’s cultural and / or inherent biological inferiority and (2) uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe inferior or unequal treatment for that group.” As noted before, old-fashioned racism flourished throughout the nation during the period under consideration. In conjunction with old-fashioned racism, there is ample evidence of aversive, laissez-faire, and institutional racism existing in Tulsa prior to the riot. Moreover, it certainly and directly contributed to the riot’s outbreak. Two manifestations of this racism were discussed at length above. First, the racism built into the social structure, which resulted in the development of Jim Crow laws, forced Greenwood to develop its own means of living. Second, the media both portrayed and reinforced dominant ideologies about race through its vivid illustrations of blacks as uneducated and criminally-prone. In addition, Tulsa society clearly frowned upon episodes of interracial contact. In essence, white racism framed blacks in Tulsa as a social, political, and economical problem.

An important emerging theme during this stage of the analysis was the attempts by white Tulsans to maintain the status quo, or the extant power differentials within the city. For instance, articles suggested organizations, be they Ku Klux Klan-affiliated (KKK) or some other type of reactionary group, could form to prevent episodes of lawlessness. One article, referring to a prior event involving the Knights of Liberty, illuminated not only on what these self-preserving organizations aimed to achieve, but also the types of people associated with them:

“But it was generally rumored that they were prominent business men who decided their own brand of punishment in times of emergency. Since then

no more has been heard of the secret organization, but a number of persons have said they believe it could be quickly called together if services were considered necessary for the preservation of patriotic harmony” (Tulsans Discuss 1921: 16).

This article refers to one of the first recorded instances of lynching within Tulsa, which occurred in 1917. Importantly, less than a week before the Tulsa riot would virtually destroy the African-American district, the editor of the *Tulsa World* laid aside the paper’s comical approach to race relations and inserted an article referring to the KKK. Prior to the article, there had been no recent mention of the organization whatsoever. However, the editor noted that recent periods of lawlessness may necessitate the organization’s formation, though he also noted that the KKK may have already been established in Tulsa. He later added:

“It would be easy enough to indulge in academics against such a movement, but strange enough, we feel a thrill of hope instead. Possibly it will prove the balance wheel in every great community which will hold society together” (No Longer 1921).

Similarly, the *Tulsa Tribune* addressed the possibility of the KKK the next day by noting “Tulsa has had a pretty exhibit of the sort of thing that brings such as the Ku-Klux into a town. The purpose of any such organization might be as much to put the fear of God into the hearts of derelict officials as the fear of death into the hearts of criminals” (Not Courageous 1921). Importantly, the editor noted that the actual presence of the KKK is not the issue at bay inasmuch as the effectiveness of police in upholding the dominant perception of morality.

In sum, cultural factors of white superiority and privilege contributed to the riot in several ways. Black citizens were portrayed through the media as being collectively uneducated and criminal while enough evidence refutes this picture. Perceptions of white superiority flourished not only within the media, but ordinary citizens as well. Moreover, racist organizations such as the Knights of Liberty existed to ensure white domination. As will be shown next, these issues came to the forefront when a black man was accused of assaulting a white woman. The prevailing racist tone of Tulsa became much more overt overnight.

### **Triggering Events of the Tulsa Race Riot**

The altercation between Dick Rowland and Sarah Page certainly served as a triggering event for the riot of May 31 and June 1. This is also consistent with the findings of Lieberman and Silverman (1965: 887) who noted that precipitating events tend to be “highly charged violations of one racial group by the other.” A closer review, however, shows that more insight may be gleaned into this triggering event. The article produced in the *Tulsa Tribune* that reported this altercation had a much larger impact on triggering the advent of the riots. The article, though non-existent today, was previously made available by Gill (1946: 22):

“A negro delivery boy who gave his name to the public as ‘Diamond Dick’ but who has been identified as Dick Rowland, was arrested on South Greenwood avenue this morning by Officers Carmichael and Pack, charged with attempting to assault the 17-year-old white elevator girl in the Drexel building early yesterday...The girl said she noticed the negro a few minutes before the attempted assault looking up and down the hallway

on the third floor of the Drexel building as if to see if there was anyone in sight but thought nothing of it at the time. A few minutes later he entered the elevator she claimed, and attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes...He was captured and identified this morning by both the girl and clerk, police say...Tenants of the Drexel building said the girl is an orphan who works as an elevator operator to pay her way through business college.”

The finding that this inflammatory article served as a triggering event is consistent with previous research showing the importance of the social phenomena of rumors directly leading up to riots (Knopf 1975). The explanation behind this argument lies behind the idea that Rowland was relieved of all charges, casting suspicion on the idea that Rowland was actually guilty. However, as a result of the article published in the *Tulsa Tribune*, numerous citizens of Tulsa believed that Rowland had committed the crime. For instance, following the riots, the Adjutant General blamed the events on “an insolent Negro, a hysterical girl, and a yellow journal reporter” (Officials Under 1921:1). While the Adjutant General placed the blame on three people, there was already prior evidence that the altercation between Rowland and Page had been misinterpreted. One of the officers during the riots, Sheriff McCullough, stated that Page told the police that Rowland had merely grabbed her arm. Rowland provided the same account (Story Attack 1921:14). Nevertheless, the article had a tremendous impact on the perceptions of many citizens in regard to what events took place. As a result, many people believed that an attempted sexual assault had taken place.

Regardless, hundreds were gathered at the courthouse immediately following the periodical's distribution (When Riot 1921:7). As a protective measure, two different black groups, one of nearly 25, and later another estimated at 75, appeared at the courthouse armed in order to ensure Rowland would not be lynched. These groups were perhaps composed of at least some members of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), an organization which aimed to advance the black race through preaching self-protection at all costs. Responding to reports that some of its members were responsible for the riot, the organization stated: "As to whether the Tulsa Post of the A.B.B. had any part in *organizing* and *directing* Negro defense once the riot had started – that is another matter, and something that the Oklahoma authorities can find out for themselves" (Commander, Tulsa Post, African Blood Brotherhood 1921: 10).

Because the ABB also stated that a chapter did indeed exist at the time of the riot, a brief note should be presented on their core principles and characteristics. With headquarters located in New York, the ABB was:

"founded in response to the bloody race riots during the Red Summer of 1919 and drew its name from the symbolic blood sharing ceremony performed by some African tribes. The ABB credo, largely manifested from articles within the Crusader, merged black nationalism with Marxism, espousing workers' rights, black liberation, and anti-imperialism. Perhaps its most distinctive characteristic was its support for armed black self-defense." (Parascandola 2006: 7).

The armed black men, whether ABB-affiliated or part of a smaller informal network, served as a mobilizing structure, or a collective unit engaged in protest responding to a

perceived injustice. Importantly, the editor of the *Tulsa Star* urged black Tulsans to make such a response if threats of lynching occurred. One article, referring to a lynching that had recently occurred in Eufaula, Oklahoma, pointed to the importance of upholding law and order even if it meant gathering arms to do so:

“We believe in upholding the law at all times even if to do so means death...These lynchings are getting to be far too common in Oklahoma, and something must be done to stop it. There is no hope of protection from the State authorities, and the federal government is silent on the question. Women and children have been lynched in Oklahoma, to say nothing of the scores of negro men who have been murdered, and not a single man of these infernal mobs has been punished – nor have the officers of the law made any effort to suppress the crime or punish the criminals. Negro men, it’s up to us to act. We must have justice! Let us respect the law and enforce it at the point of guns...If bloodshed must come, let us welcome it, and die if need be in defense of the law and justice” (Another Man 1914: 1).

In summary, this research emphasizes three different triggering events involved in the Tulsa Race Riots of 1921. First, the altercation between Page and Rowland impacted what would lead to the race riot. Second, the article produced that reported this altercation triggered hundreds of people, both black and white, to gather at the courthouse. Third, the gathering of these people had the final triggering effect of producing the gunshot that led to the beginning of the riots (When Riot 1921:7). Perhaps the article that presented the Rowland-Page encounter actually had a much larger impact

on triggering the riots. Without such an article and its dangerous implications, there would have presumably been no such gathering of large groups of citizens.

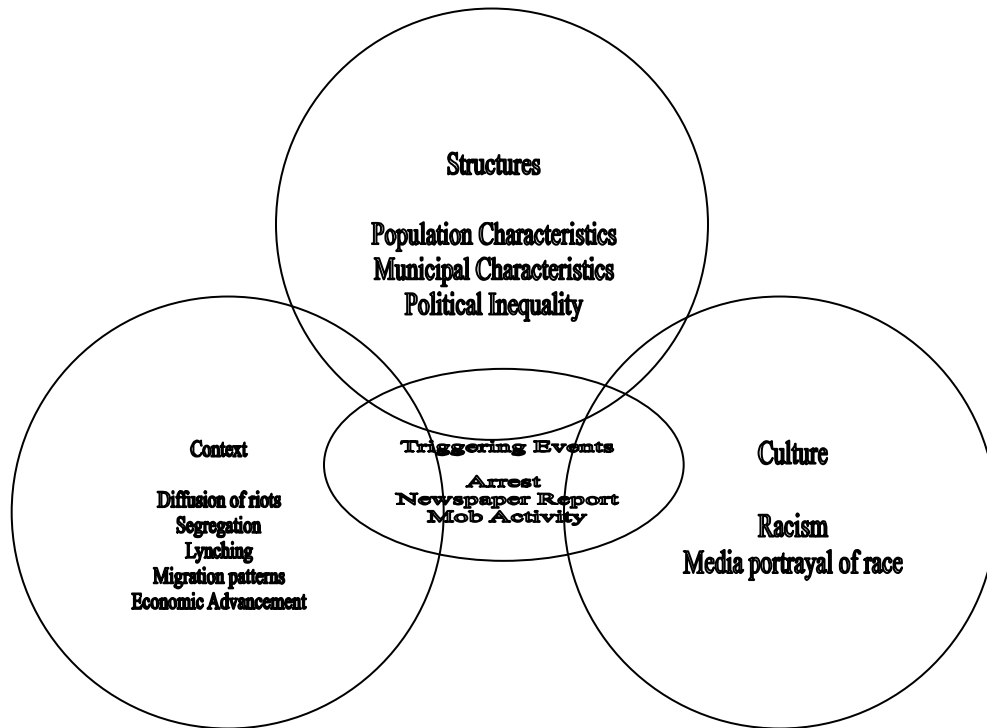
Nevertheless, these triggering events are very similar to those that have precipitated many other riots throughout U.S. history (Lieberson and Silverman 1965). Moreover, these were symbolic of much larger issues of race surrounding this era. It should be recalled that attacks against white women by black men often served as an impetus for lynching, which went unpunished throughout this period. Though the alleged crime might not elicit feelings of lynching among many today, there are certainly crimes that occur today that leave many individuals demanding the death penalty, or at least harsh penalties. Some of these crimes include torturous forms of murders and various crimes against children. In 1921, one of those crimes was an assault upon a white woman by African-American man.

### **Conclusion: An Integration of the Factors Contributing to the Riot**

Clearly, the Tulsa race riot was not caused by some simplistic issue such as the reported rape of a white woman by a black man. Nor was it caused solely by the presence of other riots across the nation throughout the era. Rather, it was caused by a complex set of forces that must be understood in relation to one another. Furthermore, structural and cultural characteristics fueled the riot. This summary is aimed towards such a synthesis. Figure 2 provides an integrative model with the particular factors which were important contributors to the Tulsa riot of 1921. It is important to note that this model attempts to grasp the interconnectedness of structures, culture, context, and triggering events.



**Figure 2: Key Characteristics of an Integrative Approach**



First, structural conditions within Tulsa were conducive to riotous conditions, of which there is ample evidence. The structure of segregation, rooted in white racism and premises of superiority, created a complete separation of the races. Segregation served to isolate the Greenwood community, which encouraged black entrepreneurialism. Rapid strides were made, which resulted in largely successful business ventures. This, in turn, created animosity between the black community and local white Tulsa business leaders, who desired the land on which blacks resided. This land was situated in a place white Tulsa deemed desirable for industrial purposes, largely because of its precise location.

Many would presumably argue that segregation cannot be considered an underlying cause of race riots because it could be found everywhere throughout this period.

However, I maintain that segregation certainly did play a role, but not merely in an isolated fashion. Rather, it is how the issue of segregation was made manifest and was interconnected to the issues below that contributed most strongly to the riot.

Municipal characteristics also contributed to the riot as both an underlying and immediate factor. First, a city charter drafted during Tulsa's inception ruled that power in the city lied disproportionately in the hands of the mayor. Second, police and municipal characteristics fueled the onset of the riot. Though previous research has focused on issues such as police composition, I have focused more on their practices. At a general level, the police had consistently been accused of, at the very least, negligence and, at the very most, corruption prior to the riot. This was largely evidenced by the state's involvement in an investigation into accusations of lax law enforcement of bootlegging, prostitution, and gambling – problems which were, for the most part, attributed to the black community. At a more immediate level, the Tulsa police had no structural procedures in place to ensure the protection of its prisoners. This was evidenced by the fact that a lynching occurred nearly nine months prior to the riot in the city of Tulsa. Moreover, their response to the growing mob hours before the riot actually started was less than adequate. Neighboring cities provided examples of procedures to follow for not only escorting prisoners away from mob threats, but also ways in which mobs could be dispersed. Instead, they merely waited patiently as if the white mob would evacuate on its own. At the riot's onset, police were further detrimental to the black community through the issuance of commissions to white civilians, essentially

deputizing untrained and unsympathetic individuals. This, in turn, led to the immediate destruction of the Greenwood community.

Population characteristics arguably impacted the riot as well, which is consistent with previous theoretical statements concerning riots. Many of the aforementioned studies argue that the proportion of blacks in a given community can influence the probability of the riot. By 1920, Tulsa's blacks comprised over 12% of the city's population, or close to 9,000 people. This increase was rather dramatic considering that fewer than 2,000 resided in the city in 1910. Moreover, this entire population was segregated. Arguably, this led to a strong sense of solidarity among members of each community. Numerous narratives (Parrish 1998; Gates 2003) pointed to the strong social bonds between black members of the Greenwood community. Thus, when an immediate threat of lynching occurred involving one of its own members, black Tulsans were unwilling to be bystanders. Without the political opportunity among blacks to receive due process procedures, members of the black community were aware that his protection was in their hands. Thus, a network of individuals, perhaps members of the ABB, formed to ensure their brother's safety. Without these population characteristics, the severity of the riot simply would have been lessened. Moreover, it was argued that in towns with a lesser proportion of blacks, social control mechanisms could be strengthened (Race Riot 1921).

Cultural factors also contributed to the Tulsa riot of 1921, particularly ideological factors such as white racism and a tendency toward vigilantism. Perceptions of white superiority overtly flourished across the nation throughout the era. Structural conditions conducive to race riots were merely a reflection of this racism. Black Tulsans were

expected to know their place, which was designated as a small section in the northern part of the city. This racism was particularly evident in local journalistic portrayals of racial issues, most notably crime. Sarcastic and overrepresented accounts of criminal offenses committed by blacks were made available to the local public daily. Arguably, many white Tulsans knew nothing about the everyday social activities of their black neighbors due to strictly enforced segregation laws and discouraged interracial contact. Therefore, the only understanding they had of black life would presumably result from what they read in the local papers, which had cast anything linked to black a social problem. Moreover, as illustrated later, whites immediately and predominately blamed Tulsa blacks for not only the riot itself, but also for their demands of social equality and justice.

The riot also needs to be understood in terms of how it was historically situated. Perhaps there was a diffusion factor. Indeed, the Tulsa riot was only one of many that swept the nation throughout the time period. Riots broke out in Arkansas, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Washington D.C., and numerous other places. Many of these riots were caused, in part, by similar processes such as problems emerging as a result of segregation, heavily biased police responses to potential interracial conflicts, and threats of – and sometimes the administration of – lynching. In addition, blacks increasingly fought back.

This era also bore witness to the first World War, which resulted in thousands of blacks, including many in Tulsa, fighting for their country, while their country would not fight for them. Indeed, much evidence suggests that the original groups of armed blacks gathered at the courthouse, were also war veterans (Ellsworth 1982; Gates 2003). The link between being a war veteran and also a member of the ABB should not be

considered coincidental. The United States sought to fight human atrocities abroad and the war was also a measure of self-protection. Similarly, the ABB preached self-protection through arms if necessary in order to prevent racial injustices at home.

Finally, there were triggering, or precipitating, events which directly contributed to the riot. These processes were merely microcosms of the larger underlying factors discussed at length above. The accused assault of a white woman by a black man served as a blatant symbol – a black man had not only overstepped the boundaries of his white counterparts, but he was a disgrace to white purity. The response was unsurprisingly symbolic of a vigilante culture, in which white citizens intended to ensure the accused black man was dealt with harshly. Moreover, it cannot be ignored the media's influence on the circumstances surrounding the riot. A story informed the uninformed white community in an exaggerated fashion of the events that had supposedly occurred. Like many episodes of collective behavior, rumors quickly permeated Tulsa followed by the ensuing formation of a massive white mob. Black men arrived at the courthouse because they were well aware of the possibility of a lynching. Furthermore, they came with guns as a result of an increased encouragement among black leaders to do whatever was necessary to prevent racial injustices. Even this was not enough to cause the riot, though. The immediate tactics of the police, or lack thereof, permitted the mob to swell, burst, and destroy the Greenwood community.

## **Resultant Frames and Responses**

Despite ample evidence which suggests black citizens were victims of a pogrom, immediately after the riot most accounts, especially local Tulsa reports, framed the riot as a “negro uprising.” A key theme emerging from this analysis is that the group of armed black men were viewed as militants and blamed for the riot. The interpretation of the riot as an uprising is evidenced in a formal report prepared by Charles Bates of the Oklahoma National Guard prepared for the Chief of the Militia Bureau (Special Report 1921). In this report, Bates refers to the event as an “uprising” and provides a justification: “The word uprising is used everywhere instead of riot because the colored element seemed to have prepared for some time an effort of this kin to maintain and assert their alleged rights.” The diagnostic frames extended by media and city officials and leaders immediately after the riot are offered. Later, I illustrate how local responses, or prognostic solutions, were merely a reflection of diagnostic claims.

### **Diagnostic Frames**

Two sets of actors were largely blamed for the riot within Tulsa: militant blacks and inadequate local law enforcement. However, a closer analysis suggests that claims of lax law enforcement were centered on the Black community.

### ***Black Militancy***

By most accounts, the entire black population was not blamed for the riot, but rather a group of black individuals who arrived armed at the courthouse (Black Agitators

1921). It was the ideology of these “militant” individuals which concerned white leaders of Tulsa. A critical actor associated with the riot was the city mayor, who situated the blame on the shoulders of militant blacks. Evans offered an extensive assessment of his diagnosis of the riot:

“Let the blame for this negro uprising lie right where it belongs – on those armed negroes and their followers who started this trouble and who instigated it and any persons who seek to put half the blame on the white people are wrong and should be told so in no uncertain language...It is the judgment of many wise heads in Tulsa, based upon observation of a number of years, that this uprising was inevitable. If that be true and this judgment had to come upon us, then I say it was good generalship to let the destruction come to that section where the trouble was hatched up, put in motion and where it had its inception” (Riot Statement 1921: 7).

Actors such as the mayor felt the black district had its victims, but overall, because the riot was inevitable, at least it happened in the “problem area.” Others made similar comments. The Police Commissioner added:

“Chief Gustafson and I have made several trips into ‘Little Africa,’ and on those occasions we told the Negroes that if there ever was an uprising we would hold them responsible. We told them to talk down the possibility of a race riot. They promised they would, and they said they would hold weekly meetings to try to dissuade the other Negroes from ever taking part in a race riot if it should be started” (Warning Against 1921:11).

The mayor added that there were black victims, but that in warfare, the innocent suffer with the guilty. Importantly, the mayor not only described the violence as an uprising, but was relieved that the destruction occurred in the Black community. This proffered frame considers the white reaction to militancy as natural and necessary. Referring to gun battles during the riot, one national guardsman reported, “The most visible point from which *enemy* shots came was the tower of the new brick negro church” (Lt. Col. L.J.F. Rooney to Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett, 3 June 1921). Thus, the Black community was considered the “enemy.” Clearly, a frame had been articulated which exonerated whites.

Other city leaders offered similar assessments. The Police Commissioner stated, “Chief Gustafson and I have made several trips into ‘Little Africa,’ and on those occasions we told the Negroes that if there ever was an uprising we would hold them responsible” (Warning Against 1921:11). Thus, blacks were warned of such an impending frame.

Perhaps the most detrimental diagnosis came from the jury formed to study the causes of the riot. The verdict provides a telling account of opinions within the city of Tulsa regarding who was to blame for the riot: “We find that the recent race riot was the direct result of an effort on the part of a certain group of colored men who appeared at the courthouse on the night of May 31, 1921, for the purpose of protecting one Dick Rowland” (Grand Jury 1921: 1). The actions of the armed blacks were thus interpreted by law enforcement, city officials and the grand jury as an “uprising.”

However, to more fully understand the context of such accusations, it is important to draw upon the larger white racial frame which characterized U.S. society, particularly



during the Jim Crow Era. Despite the elimination of slavery, blacks endured legal segregation, which, for whites, was employed to maintain racial purity and superiority (Feagin 2006). The emergence of Black Nationalist groups can be explained as a response to such subordination. These groups, in turn, were viewed as a threat to such goals. Thus, African Americans had to be socially controlled. Segregation, lynchings, and pogroms were such mechanisms. Indeed, white Tulsans borrowed from some of the core facets of the white racial frame. The violence on May 31, 1921 was not merely about a potential lynching, but about perceptions of social injustice in the minds of a subordinated group, and the subsequent social control thereof. The grand jury emphasized the demands for equality among blacks,

“We find that certain propaganda and more or less agitation had been going on among the colored population for some time. This agitation resulted in the accumulation of firearms among the people and the storage of ammunition, all of which was accumulative in the minds of the negro which led them as a people to believe in equal rights, social equality and their ability to demand the same” (Grand Jury 1921: 1).

White religious leaders concurred (Vice Bottom 1921). Many blamed the same small group of blacks and pointed to the larger problem of demanding equality. Bishop Mouzon of Boston Avenue Methodist Church, referring to desires among blacks for equality, told his congregation, “This is something that the negroes should be told very plainly. Steps toward social equality are the worst possible thing for the negro man and the white thing” (Causes Riots 1921: 1). Later, the finger was pointed more directly at W.E.B. Dubois. In an era characterized by the emergence of Black Nationalism, Dubois

extended an ideology aimed at improving the status of blacks through self-sufficient means. One minister, referring to a recent visit from Dubois just prior to the riot, stated, “I knew at the time that Dubois was here, and I very keenly regret now, in view of the events of the past week, that I did not take advantage of that knowledge, and inquire into the purpose of his visit” (Causes Riot 1921: 1). Nevertheless, blacks were not the only group blamed for the riot. Local accounts also pointed the finger at the Tulsa police department for their entire handling of the events occurring throughout the riotous period.

### *Inept Law Enforcement*

Several practices directly contributed to the progression of the riot including deputizing white civilians, administering guns to whites, and few efforts made to disperse the white mob in the first place. In fact, the sheriff in charge of protecting the prisoner admitted to taking a nap while the mob intensified (End Argonaut 1921). Many individuals saw the police department as a direct problem associated with the riot rather than a solution. One editorial stated: “It is a fundamental fact that the agencies of government broke down in Tulsa very early in the proceedings Tuesday evening and either stood helpless when needed most or deliberately joined in the mob enterprise” (Martial Law 1921: 4). However, a white racial frame contributed to the white definition of the situation. Many whites believed that the role of law enforcement perpetuated the underlying problems in Tulsa, which they believed was situated in the Black district. More specifically, similar to the white racial frame that stereotypes blacks as disproportionately criminal, media accounts in 1921 Tulsa provide insight into the long history this frame has endured. One editor wrote,

“Gambling and bootlegging and hi-jacking have gone on little molested. And some of the time protected by the police. This has developed a lawless element. Lack of law enforcement has permitted a bad negro element to develop a disrespect both for county and city officials and a lack of fear of all officers of the law” (End Argonaut 1921: 10).

The grand jury also blamed “little molested” vice. However, in an article aptly titled, “Grand Jury Blames Negroes for Race Rioting: Whites Clearly Exonerated,” the jury concluded that lax law enforcement could be attributed to a few black police officers. They offered,

“We find that police protection with negro policemen as officers has been inefficient; that violations of law have been condoned and while raids have been made and also some arrests, the same offense by the same offenders was repeated almost immediately. We therefore recommend that ‘colored town’ be policed by white officers” (Grand Jury 1921: 8).

### **Victim Frames**

Another important theme which emerged from the analysis of local newspapers was that black survivors agreed with the diagnostic assessment which framed the riot as a militant uprising. For instance, the *Tulsa World* included a quote from William Cherry, a black “refugee”: “That fellow Dick Rowland should have been taken out to the edge of town and horsewhipped, tarred and feathered. He is one of the same bunch that started this awful thing” (When Riot 1921: 7). Similarly, another article included interviews with several of the survivors then being held at detention camps. One woman stated, “We’ll all come clear in the judgment day. That niggah that done wrong, he cain’t come

clear” (Negroes Gladly 1921: 7). Likewise, Barney Cleaver, a black officer, was quoted: “I am going to do everything I can to bring the negroes responsible for the outrage to the bars of justice. They caused me to lose everything that I have been years in accumulating and I intend to get them” (Negro Deputy 1921: 1). Though local media portrayals suggested the larger majority of blacks agreed with the jury and other local leaders as to the riot’s causative factors, it is logical to assume that these quotes were not representative of the larger black community; after all, their entire district was torched to the ground by whites.

A review of the narratives cited in Parrish (1998) suggests there was indeed disagreement among blacks with the media over the issue of blame. Importantly, these narratives were given to Parrish immediately after the riot. The book was originally published in 1923 and then republished in 1998. Some narratives argued that the black community had been mischaracterized as radical. M.D. Russell stated, “We do not wish to be radical, as a large number of white dailies and pulpits have been placing in blame. They have based their argument on racial equality, which the Negro has never hoped for nor worked for” (Parrish 1998: 59). This is an important statement because it symbolizes the fear and subordination black citizens experienced during the era. Laws, attitudes, practices, and acceptable lifestyles were in line with white hegemony. Therefore, this statement should be understood within the context it was presented, which was only decades after slavery, the very epitome of hegemonic power, had been abolished.

Many narratives emphasized the unjust administration of law enforcement. R.T. Bridgewater, a prominent physician within the Black community, argued that the riot

resulted from a lack of police protection and an unwillingness to offer due process. He stated:

“Causes: Race prejudices and the national lack of confidence in law enforcement. This lack of confidence in law enforcement causes the Negro to feel that it is necessary to protect himself in most cases of threatened lynching. If the party is a member of our group, he is most generally lynched, even though promised the assurance of protection by law” (Parrish 1998: 45).

C. L. Netherland, a barber shop owner at the time agreed that the lack of police protection leading up to the riot fueled its onset: “I feel that corrupt politics is the cause of the whole affair, for if the authorities had taken the proper steps in time the whole matter could have been prevented” (Parrish 1998: 57).

E.A. Loupe, a plumber in Tulsa at the time, argued that even after the inept police response, the local National Guard unit made matters worse for black citizens: “Most people, like myself, stayed in their homes, expecting momentarily to be given protection by the Home Guards or State Troops, but instead of protection by the Home Guards they (the Home Guards) joined in with the hoodlums in shooting at good citizens’ homes” (Parrish 1998: 49). Similarly, A.J. Newman stated, “But instead of protection, it was seemingly a matter of destroy and abolish all Negro businesses and nice residences” (Parrish 1998: 54).

These frames are important because they call attention to biased police response in favor of whites, which the local media had ultimately neglected to assess. Instead, the media focused on police actions in terms failure to enforce the law prior the riot. In

addition, local media members argued that lax law enforcement was only present within the patrolling of the black community. Prognostic assessments within the local white community were a reflection of the blame it had placed on black shoulders.

### **Immediate Responses and Prognostic Solutions**

A universal response to episodes of collective behavior is the operation of social control (Smelser 1962). Following the arrival of National Guard units from Oklahoma City, numerous social control mechanisms were put into place, which effectively served to subjugate black victims. Ample evidence exists to suggest the black community was considered a social problem to remedy. One exception to this pattern involved the work of the Red Cross, whose work during the riot is the focus of a book previously offered by Hower (1993). However, an array of local organizational responses served to be merely a microcosm of the forces contributing to the riot in the first place. In addition, local reactions provide strong evidence of the attempt by white Tulsa leaders to maintain the status quo, particularly in the form of white superiority. One particular response involved the placement of black survivors in detention camps.

### ***Detention Camps***

Throughout the course of the riot, black rioters were arrested and placed into various detention camps where they were held until given permission by White authorities to leave (5000 Negro 1921). Two camps, located at McNulty Park and Convention Hall in North Tulsa, reportedly held nearly six thousand blacks (Martial Law 1921). By June 2, the four thousand who remained interned were moved to the fairgrounds (Ellsworth 1982). Some of the arrests were far from traditional. One article stated,

“Six blacks roped together in a line, were hauled into Convention Hall early this morning by Leo Irish, motorcycle officer, who held up and corralled the band on the outskirts of the North Greenwood district. He tied them together with a line and led them a hot pace behind his motorcycle on the return trip” (Blacks Tied 1921: 2).

At detention camps, blacks were placed into forced labor. After declaring martial law and issuing a number of policies and procedures, the Adjutant General issued Field Order No. 4, which stated,

“All the able-bodied negro men remaining in detention camp at the Fair Grounds and other places in the city of Tulsa will be required to render such service and perform such labor as is required by the military commission and the Red Cross in making the proper sanitary provisions for the care of the refugees. Able-bodied women, not having the care of children, will also be required to perform such service as may be required by the care of the refugees” (Barrett 1941: 216).

Thus, the Red Cross and black civilians were held responsible for the relief work which was made necessary by whites. Another order, issued by Mayor Evans warned of impending arrests as a result of refusing to work, “All men who have no jobs and who refuse to work will be arrested as vagrants” (Must Work 1921: 1).

The length of stay at detention camps varied, with nearly four hundred and fifty citizens remaining one week after the riot. By the second week, all detainees were released. Lengths of stay varied because blacks could leave the premises only if vouched for by white employers. After their release, blacks were issued green cards, which had

“to be signed by the employer or employers of such negroes to show that such negroes are employed either temporarily or permanently” (All Blacks 1921: 9). However, the release of interned blacks did not come without disapproval. One minister stated,

“Negroes held in the detention camps have been turned loose indiscriminately. There is a general feeling in the city that Tulsa is no safer tonight than it was Tuesday night. Without proper police protection, with the negroes resentful over the loss of their property, there is an increasingly apprehensive feeling that something else is going to happen” (Warning Against 1921: 1).

Thus, despite many claims that blacks were held in detention camps for their own protection, some were fearful of black retaliation. With no possessions, no place to live, and newly-formed bans on gun possession among blacks, whites were somehow still concerned for their own safety. Decisions were rapidly made concerning what to do, at least with the destroyed land.

### ***Competing Prognoses***

Following the riot, two suggested solutions regarding the devastated area were debated: rebuilding the destroyed community or moving the black population elsewhere to make way for an industrial zone. Before I turn to these opposing options, however, it is important to note an important commonality and area of agreement among city leaders and officials: the desire to maintain the status quo. Some were concerned with the future behavior of the black community, which was framed as a problem before the riot.

Following the disorder, the editor of the *Tulsa World* stressed a few “bad niggers” had to be dealt with. Referring to the law-abiding blacks of the community, he wrote, “The time



is here for the colored citizens of the city, who work for their living and render a substantial service to the community, to band themselves together for their own protection against this element of non-working, worthless Negroes” (Bad Niggers 1921:

4). In another editorial, more specific suggestions were offered:

“School yourselves to a becoming attitude in your associations. Exert yourselves to bring to justice criminals and law violators of your own color. Be respectful. You have leaders of your own race who are safe and sane. Hear them. Avoid the boastful intriguers who prate to you of race equality. There has never been such a thing in the history of the world. Nor will there ever be” (Which Is 1921: 4).

Another example of this general theme was made manifest in a description of an inter-racial committee, which was formed immediately after the riot. Its mission:

“To recognize and by its conduct, exemplify, a superior dominant white citizenship in government, and in all the social relations of life, and while observing with gratification the remarkable progress of the American negro since slavery, to recognize also his immaturity as a race and the hopeful possibilities and opportunities for development...” (Good May 1921: 7).

Indeed, the chief concern among city leaders related to the black community. Some believed that it should be redeemed through public assistance and city-wide efforts to help the community rebuild. The Public Welfare Board, which was formed by private citizens after the riot upon the advice of the Adjutant General, unanimously decided to assist the destitute. The organization stated, “It is the committee’s contention that those

who lost their homes lost virtually all they possessed, and as a result were the worst sufferers from the mob's depredations" (Citizens Help 1921: 8). One member, a former Tulsa mayor, stated,

"Tulsa can only redeem herself from the country-wide shame and humiliation in which she is today plunged by complete restitution of the destroyed black belt. The rest of the United States must know that the real citizenship of Tulsa weeps at this unspeakable crime and will make good the damage, so far as it can be done, to the last penny" (Tulsa Race 1921: 647).

Another editor concurred with calls for restitution by stating that relief efforts should, at the least, consist of private financial contributions. Despite offering a markedly different opinion a few days later, the immediate concern for the black community was evident:

"The innocent homeless must be sheltered and fed and cared for. That is not merely a today and a tomorrow duty...If this cannot be done through public funds it must be done by private contributions of those who love justice and who love the fair name of our fair city and who take pride in our growing prosperity and who are jealous of our growing greatness. This is not only Tulsa's chance, but Tulsa's duty to itself – and TULSA WILL" (Tulsa Will 1921: 5).

This *Tulsa Tribune* editorial argued that the larger white community of Tulsa should assist Greenwood in rebuilding; however, within a few days, the same editor based his opinion on his idea that the white community now had to portray concretely their superiority over the black race: "It is a cross that must be shouldered willingly and

heroically. This restitution, not because of affectionate regard for the colored man, but because of an honorable and intense regard for the white race whose boast of superiority must now be justified by concrete acts” (Disgrace Tulsa 1921: 4). However, not everyone supported the idea of rebuilding. The editor of the *Tulsa Tribune* stated,

“Such a district as the old ‘Niggertown’ must never be allowed in Tulsa again. It was a cesspool of iniquity and corruption...In this old ‘Niggertown’ were a lot of bad niggers and a bad nigger is the lowest thing that walks on two feet. Give a bad nigger his booze and his dope and a gun and he thinks he can shoot up the world. And all these things were to be found in ‘Niggertown’ – booze, dope, bad niggers and guns” (It Must 1921: 8).

The racism in this statement is powerful, regardless of the context in which it was issued. The editorial points once again to the perception among many of Greenwood as a crime-infested district which did not deserve a second chance. However, other responses reflected aims of institutional discrimination.

The mayor soon disbanded the Public Welfare Board, which had called for rebuilding and restitution and replaced it with a Reconstruction Committee. The mayor clearly recognized the economic impact an industrial zone would have for white Tulsa. The Reconstruction Committee quickly suggested the development of an industrial zone, including a union depot. Several organizations offered their own details of turning the torched area into an industrial zone. Though these plans may have developed solely out of economic interests, there was also a desire for a more expanded version of segregation

between the races. In justifying these decisions, city leaders pointed to the economic and social benefits,

“We do this for the reason that the area is accessible to all railroads at a small cost ... We believe by converting this area into property for the purposes suggested, that it would add much to our city both from a business and a civic standpoint. You must realize that the first impression of men entering our city is lasting” (Plan Move 1921: 1).

In particular, these plans, which were more fully and clearly detailed, point to several issues. First, they were suggestive of the desirability the area presented to local white economic interests. These plans were made only two days after the riot ended. Second, the recommendations offer insight into the living conditions of blacks prior to the riot, which were characterized by inadequate sewerage systems, water supplies, gas, and electricity. Importantly then, business leaders determined that the area was worthy of improvements only if an industrial zone was completed. Third, it was argued that an industrial zone would benefit white Tulsa from an impression management standpoint; that is, visitors to Tulsa wouldn't have to come into contact with the Black community.

In addition, other organizations attempted to persuade the Black community to move elsewhere. Local railroads began to offer discounts to black citizens who wished to leave the city: “Effective June 10 the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway company will put into effect for Tulsa charity half-fare rates to negroes who desire to leave the city” (Half Fare 1921: 10). Thus, a plethora of individuals and organizations would benefit from the placement of the black population elsewhere.

Plans to industrialize the destroyed area became much more specific. In fact, the city proposed to extend fire ordinances (Burned District 1921). By requiring certain fireproof material and buildings to be at least two stories high, these policies essentially would have forced black citizens to incur too many financial costs associated with rebuilding. In the meantime, local whites who perceived a degree of vulnerability among blacks provided financial offers to property-holders:

“It has reached the ears of those in control of affairs that several white men have made offers to negro property owners, believing they will accept almost any price for their property in Little Africa, not only because they are hard pressed for money, but because they fear to rebuild in Tulsa” (Militia’s Reign 1921: 1).

The media offered little evidence to suggest any sort of black resentment or disagreement about the plans; this is evidenced in an article concerning the response among blacks to the industrial plans:

“Negro property owners are in complete harmony with the plans of the reconstruction committee to rebuild the burned district of Little Africa as an industrial section; they also agree with the committee that the proposed union station project as outlined is both feasible and desirable, from their viewpoint as well as from the viewpoint of the whites” (Reconstruction Plans 1921: 2).

However, this account exaggerated the extent to which black survivors were willing to simply move their entire community. Instead, black lawyers quickly responded in opposition to the plans. The law firm of P.A. Chappelle, I.H. Spears, and B.C. Franklin

successfully argued to the district court in the case of *Joe Lockett v. The City of Tulsa* that the fire ordinance proposal would take away land without due process (Ellsworth 1982). However, this success did not result in financial assistance from the city to rebuild the black community. Property damage was estimated to be at least \$1.8 million. However, the city ultimately would cover less than \$100,000 of the cost (Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 (2001)). Perhaps even more importantly, the city refused offers of financial assistance from other cities (Dallas Offers 1921). The justification for this decision was that “this is strictly a Tulsa affair and that the work of restoration and charity would be taken care of by Tulsa people” (Dallas Offers 1921: 4). However, Tulsa did not rebuild and restore, but rather only accepted local donations given to the Red Cross for relief work. Furthermore, insurance companies refused to cover any costs incurred from damages during the riot by citing a riot clause. Importantly, this lack of justice not only is explained in terms of race relations, but also the way in which the riot had been framed.

### **Community Formations**

In most natural disasters, a therapeutic community often emerges and is characterized by strength, coordination, assistance, and widespread concern for the affected. Man-made disasters, in contrast, are often marked by conflict, litigation, and interests. The Tulsa race riot was man-made and a corrosive community resulted. Two conflicting communities emerged: a white, business-minded community and a black community of victims. The competing prognostic assessments outlined above provide evidence of this type of community formation. Litigation provides more evidence. Beyond the attempt to prevent the city of Tulsa from expanding fire zones, black

survivors of the riot repeatedly attempted through legal means to be given financial assistance, though no claims were ever supported within the city of Tulsa or the state of Oklahoma. Moreover, historical records suggest that these claims were given little attention through the media. Instead, documented accounts of the riot in history books of Oklahoma for decades merely stated that a riot occurred and that the city had rebuilt what it destroyed (Ellsworth 1982). However, these interpretations of the riot would later change.

Most white frames regarded the Tulsa race riot of 1921 as an “uprising.” Only a few years after the riot, scholarly activity on the history of Oklahoma would provide a misleading account of the events and aftermaths. For instance, Thoburn (1929: 694) wrote:

“On the evening of June 1, 1921, there occurred a disgraceful race riot at Tulsa. At least one hundred people were killed and property to the value of approximately one and one-half million dollars was destroyed. Three hundred officers and men of the Oklahoma National Guard were placed under arms and ordered to the scene of the disturbance, Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett personally taking charge. As soon as the militia had restored order, the civil authorities at Tulsa and in Tulsa County, exerted themselves to the utmost to alleviate the suffering and distress of the negro people whose homes and other property had been destroyed. The city of Tulsa promptly announced that it would rebuild their homes.”

This account ignored official death counts and decided on “at least one hundred” among those killed. Also, this statement led readers to believe the National Guard helped quell

the situation, when, in fact, the local chapter actually fueled the riot. In addition, the author noted the city's intention to rebuild the community, despite minimal follow-through on that promise. Another account, in addition to framing the detention camp experiences of riot survivors as a protective measure, went further and contended that the city of Tulsa *had* rebuilt Greenwood by stating:

“In 1921, 31 persons were killed in a race war that broke out in Tulsa. A reign of terror existed that did not subside until state troops took charge of the situation. The negroes, for their own protection, were concentrated in a camp under guard, and were kept there until order was restored. The negro section of the town was set afire and wiped out during the rioting. The citizens of Tulsa later restored and rebuilt the devastated section”  
(Thompson 1921: n.p.)

These types of frames, which suggest repentance and reconciliation, lasted for decades, until the 1970s and 1980s bore witness to new scholarly investigations of the riot. One article in 1971 emphasized a theme of Tulsa blacks as victims, which was markedly different from previous accounts (Wheeler 1971). Later works expanded upon the victimization of the black community and also began to examine the unfulfilled promises made by the city to rebuild the Greenwood community. Finally, in January of 1997, Don Ross, a state representative and former resident of the Greenwood community, put forward a proposal that reparations be granted to riot survivors and descendents. Following his suggestion of reparations, a commission was established to determine the events of the riot and to make recommendations for reparations. Nevertheless, national



attention given to the Tulsa race riot of 1921 increased significantly, and a frame was successfully transformed.

### **Frame Transformation**

Frames are fluid and are often subject to change. A host of factors can produce a frame transformation. First, survivors actively altered preexisting ideas and notions concerning the perceived causes of the riot. It is important to recall that a group of armed black men were initially blamed for the riot in 1921. This was even the conclusion of a grand jury created to investigate the direct causes of the riot. Therefore, black survivors of the riot had to alter this frame to one that establishes victimization rather than guilt. In fact, in the most current legal case, the constituents were referred to as “victims” rather than survivors (Ogletree 2005). One reparations supporter stated “The real victims were my entire community. My community had to start again with no help, by borrowing money and going into debt” (Latham 1997: A9). To establish victimization, representatives have provided accounts of blacks who had lost property, family members, and hope as a result of white citizen and governmental riotous actions.

### **Attributing Blame**

Another daunting and challenging task is to diagnostically frame an issue, or to establish blame or causality. Unique to the Tulsa reparations movement, constituents have focused on an injustice that occurred over eighty years ago, which includes survivors who were barely children at the time. Nevertheless, blame has been attributed to three particular areas: actors, context, and a conspiracy.

This link between actors, context, and conspiracy can be seen in the following statement included in the most recent legal case brought to the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights. In a statement of facts pertaining to the riot, legal representatives stated:

“Victims brought suit in a timely manner with respect to personal safety, the revelation of critical information held in secret to evade accountability, and the viability of resorting to the courts. The United States District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma dismissed Victims’ claims on March 19, 2004, saying that the statute of limitations on these crimes had run; in so doing they furthered a longstanding injustice that was racially discriminatory in intent and effect” (Ogletree 2005: 1).

This statement includes each of the primary justifications for reparations offered by race riot survivors and their representatives. I will examine more fully each of these areas, which are labeled as actors, context, and conspiracy.

#### *Actors*

Tulsa race riot survivors and their representatives and supporters have been careful in placing blame. One stated, “We’re not blaming the living individuals. But, you do need to recognize who put this into place – European-Americans” (Espinosa 1997: A1). Importantly, the more recent narratives of survivors make no mention of “black militants” when the issue of blame has been addressed. Instead, they transferred responsibility to the hundreds of whites who were involved in destroying the Greenwood community. In addition, survivors claim that issues of race and power played a pivotal role in the riot and that the riot needs to be readdressed.

Others have directly blamed government officials for their lack of duty during the riot. In fact, the laxity in assistance given to blacks by police officers, firefighters and

national guardsmen has been repeatedly emphasized by survivors (Espinosa 1997; Gates 2003; Tiernan 1998; Krehbiel 2000 a, b; Ogletree 2005). One survivor stated, “It’s time for the world to acknowledge the suffering of Tulsa’s riot victims and for those in the U.S., the state of Oklahoma, and the city and county of Tulsa, who were culpable for the riot to acknowledge their wrongdoing and to rectify the damages done. It is long past time for healing and justice” (Gates 2003: 60).

Survivors have also targeted recent court decisions (Ogletree 2005). That is, they contend that recent decisions to not hear the case because of a statute of limitations are unfair considering the unsuccessful attempts by riot survivors to obtain compensation immediately following the riot. Indeed, a plethora of cases were dismissed in which compensation was sought on behalf of blacks who had lost property as a result of the riot. It has been further argued the statute of limitations itself is a form of racial discrimination, which is an argument centered on the context of the riot, a second theme.

### *Context*

A second frame target is context, or the general climate in which the riot took place. It is argued among reparation supporters that an understanding of the context is an imperative consideration concerning reparations. Survivors and representatives point to an era of racism and discrimination that prevailed during the time of the riot. Specifically, survivors’ representatives point to slavery (which had only ended less than sixty years before the riot) and lynchings, a common occurrence at the time of the riot. It is stated:

“During this time, city and state officials engaged in official policy, practice, custom, habit, and usage of denying African-Americans their

equal rights under the law. City and state officials created and condoned a climate of racial hatred that presented a clear and present danger, led to tragedy, and contributed to the environment of racially motivated suppression... This climate of racial hatred prevented the riot's victims from obtaining redress for the harms they suffered and from rebuilding their community" (Ogletree 2005: 9).

Importantly, the riot is not only about a destroyed community, but also about blackness and what its consequences were in 1921.

A diffusion of riots characterized this historical juncture. Furthermore, in 1997, reparations were given to black survivors of the Rosewood, Florida riot of 1923. A similar event in which black homes were torched, representatives of Tulsa survivors have used this case as a legitimation technique. In sum, lawyers for black riot survivors have argued that they could not have succeeded in being granted reparations during the era in which the riot occurred (Gates 2003; Harper 2003; Krehbiel 2003; Myers 2005; Ogletree 2005).

### *Conspiracy of silence*

Finally, another common target of blame was a "conspiracy of silence" (for example, Underwood 1997; Gates 2003; Krehbiel 2004; Ogletree 2005). That is, riot survivors and supporters have claimed that the city and state deliberately tried to hide the fact that the riot ever happened. One supporter stated, "The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot has been a victim of a conspiracy of silence for 75 years. This is the first year the city has stepped forward and admitted it happened (Underwood 1997: 1). They support this contention by noting that certain key newspaper articles have disappeared from files and

that bodies were unsystematically buried in order to prevent an adequate knowledge of how many people actually died. Referring to the immediate aftermaths of the riot, lawyers have stated,

“At the same time, the city and state quickly took steps to hide the truth about the Riot. Victims were buried in unmarked graves, neither the state nor the city took any investigations or prosecutions into their murders, and documents relating to the riot vanished from state archives” (Ogletree 2005: 12).

Furthermore, “This ‘conspiracy of silence’ surrounding the Riot fell particularly hard on African-Americans, who believed it would not be safe to speak of their experiences” (Ogletree 2005: 13). In fact, representatives demanded that this “conspiracy” was not terminated until the commission was established to study the riot. Others simply stated that the city had not paid enough attention to the riot (Krehbiel 2003). Survivors and their representatives have maintained that actors, context, and conspiracy are interrelated factors that have operated to produce racism and discrimination toward themselves and other blacks.

### **Justifications**

Prognostic framing consists of remedial techniques and strategies used by SMOs. Since the establishment of the commission to study the riot, one remedy has gained primacy over all others – reparations. Though this research is not concerned here with the legality of reparations, Brophy (2002) provides an excellent source for future research. My research is concerned with the subjective reasons that survivors and others have aimed for reparations. In other words, why did the survivors and supporters strive

for reparations above all other possible solutions? A review of the reparations movement led to the construction of three themes relating to justifications made for reparations: impact, culpability, and reconciliation.

### *Impact*

An emergent theme pertaining to justifications for reparations is impact, which refers to short- and long-term ramifications of the riot. One survivor stated:

“We did go on with our lives after the riot, but the memories of what happened to us then will never go away. The injustices we suffered the two days of the riot, and the injustices we suffered after the riot when insurance companies failed to pay riot victims for their losses, and when court officials summarily threw out all riot victims’ cases between 1926 and 1936, are blots on Tulsa’s image that have not been erased to this day” (Gates 2003: 77).

Other survivors and supporters often point to human and financial losses incurred from the riot, which they argue directly affected their future (Latham 1997; Underwood 1997; Espinosa 1999a; Gates 2003). One survivor stated: “That is why I believe I am owed reparations. My family lost a lot. Things might have been different for me had the riot not happened” (Gates 2003:67). Others have focused on the larger devastation to the entire community brought upon by the riot. One supporter stated, “The real victims were my entire community. My community had to start again with no help, by borrowing and going into debt” (Latham 1997: A9). Another community member stated, “One of the most devastating effects of the riot is it stopped the potential for accumulated wealth.

Once prosperous families were reduced to poverty” (Underwood 1997:1). Beyond the economic impact was the loss of human life. One descendent stated,

“I can never replace my grandfather. I’d like to see it forgotten if I could. We’re too well-educated to go through that kind of drama again, but I think reparations should continue. I think they’ve apologized, but apologies won’t bring back people who were killed and property that was destroyed” (Bryant 1999:17).

This recollection points to the impact the riot had on individuals and families. More narratives not only pointed to the personal devastation experienced, but also the broader community effects as well. One supporter believed that the deceit associated with the riot had devastating effects on the community,

“One of the most profound effects in the long run is what it did to the city. It robbed the city of its honesty, and it sentenced it to 75 years of denial...The actual amount of dollars – that is mere pittance compared to the three-quarters of a century of suffering the victims of the looting, burning, and killing and bombing, as so many endured” (Espinosa 1999a: 1).

Finally, others have stated that an important effect of the riot was the fear it fostered among victims. Indeed, the most current lawsuit filed against the federal government contends that black residents in Tulsa lived in perpetual fear after the riot, causing them to remain silent in order to avoid the potential repercussions. In their representation of the survivors, the legal firm stated,

“These effects included persistent and deeply felt fear, reluctance and suppression regarding subjects related to the Riot, reluctance and fear regarding contact with whites and a pervasive compulsion to avoid ‘stepping out of line’ in general, and additional persistent fear of unpredictable disaster” (Ogletree 2005: 19).

Survivors have elaborated on this fear. One resident recounted the nightmares which the riot would produce for years after and the loss of security. This survivor stated,

“The worst thing about the riot wasn’t the loss of those beautiful material possessions, though, no matter how much we love them. The worst thing lost was my peace of mind. For many years after the riot, I suffered horrific nightmares of the bloody killings, the strewn, mutilated injured, the dead bodies, and of the searing-hot blazing fires that burned our homes to the ground” (Gates 2003: 68).

### *Culpability*

A second theme related to the justifications for reparations was state and city culpability. Many point to the actions of governmental figures. One reparations supporter stated that the evidence “shows the city of Tulsa has its fingerprints all over the riot” (Espinosa 1999b: 1). Another supporter stated, “When the state was called, the National guard quelled the riot but most of the burning and looting happened after the riot. What they did was arrest all the blacks and left the whites to roam freely. We have photos documenting this fact” (Underwood 1997:1). In addition, another citizen made the full link between reparations and culpability: “If you look at the factors typically used to determine reparations, it’s still possible to identify direct victims and their



descendants...Also, there's a great deal of credible evidence of complicity – particularly acts of omission by failure of the government to stop the riot once it got under way” (Tiernan 1998: 1). Others maintain that reparations involve accountability and admitting culpability. One supporter stated, “I think it is time that Tulsa and the state of Oklahoma seriously consider reparations for victims of the race riot. I think we have to be held accountable for the sins of our fathers, not only in race but in all things” (Latham 1997: A1).

Finally, another representative pointed to the admission among city leaders that retribution would be given. He stated:

“The city of Tulsa and the Chamber of Commerce promised reparations for rebuilding down to the penny. After the riot, the nation was in shock. People offered money to help, but the mayor said, ‘No, we will rebuild the city.’ But they didn’t...What the city did was try to steal the land for use as an industrial park. Blacks from the Greenwood areas rebuilt their property without any assistance, and in fact, all their claims to the city were rejected” (Underwood 1997:1).

### *Reconciliation*

A third type of justification is “reconciliation.” The lead attorney representing the survivors stated, “In talking about reparations, I’m talking about repairing. I’m talking about reconciliation. This is not just financial” (Krehbiel 2002: A13). Many survivors and supporters believe that race relations can improve through reparations (“Horner Calls” 2001; Krehbiel 2002). One supportive minister offered the following argument:

“Reparations can be a way to recognize the injustice and suffering that the race riot perpetrated on this community. Reparations can be a significant investment in the restoration of good will and trust. Reparations can move us toward reconciliation. Reparations are the manifestation of our genuine desire to be in a righteous relationship with our neighbors of color” (Blaine 2000:2).

Senator Maxine Horner stated, “I hear many people say that we should not be blamed for the past, but there are some things that we have to correct. Reparations would be a start” (Latham 1997:A9).

Finally, the issue of symbolism was a common theme regarding reparations and reconciliation. One community member stated, “It’s a powerful symbolic gesture of trying to right a horrible wrong” (Tiernan 1998: 1). Another supporter stated, “Money is a magnificent healer...My community is bleeding economically, and money is a hell of an elixir...You know that they mean forgiveness when they are willing to pay” (Latham 1997:A9). Julian Bond, former chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), stated, “The general idea of reparations is to somehow make whole. There is no way that money can make whole such a grievous wrong. It is more the acknowledgment that some wrong has been done” (Dean 2000:7).

### **Resonance**

Making a frame resonate is imperative to the level of support that will be given to SMOs. Benford and Snow (2000) propose that frame resonance has two requirements. First, the constructed frame must be credible. To be considered credible, Benford and Snow argue that frames must have consistency, empirical credibility, and credible

articulators. In terms of frame consistency, reparation movements once again provide a unique case. An analysis of the frames offered within the reparations movement reveal that successful movements benefit from both expressive consistency and instrumental consistency. Expressive consistency can be described as congruent claims concerning the overall injustice that has been incurred. On the other hand, instrumental consistency refers to the degree to which frame intricacies are congruent. The Tulsa riot survivors are unified in terms of the overall injustice that they have claimed to experience and thus have expressive consistency. However, they do not have instrumental consistency. That is, there is evidence that survivors and supporters of the reparations movement have not all offered the same narratives, claims, actions, etc. (Gates 2003). This is important because the framing of the riot is a pivotal component to any legal case as well as to public support. These instrumental inconsistencies relate specifically to various features of the riot such as means of assault, culpable actors, death totals, burial procedures, and so on. For instance, some survivors maintain that airplanes were used to shoot at victims, while others suggest that planes were used for protection purposes. Yet other accounts hold that planes were never used at all (Ellsworth 1982; Gates 2003). In addition, there is no consensus as to how many people lost their lives during the riot. Official reports hold that the number was around 36. However, the most recent legal case only mentions estimated deaths of 100-300 victims (Ogletree 2005). Though there is understandably no agreed-upon number, the persistence of such large discrepancies leaves frame inconsistency and thus affects the degree to which the proffered frame resonates.

Empirical credibility signifies that the frame can be tested and verified. Once again, survivors and supporters have encountered a variety of challenges. First, the

primary historical sources of data paint a slightly different picture of the riot than survivors have today. This mainly refers to the experiences that survivors claim to have been a part of. Though their reported experiences are by all means plausible, a lack of official documentation which verifies these reports is detrimental to the movement's success. Second, and arguably more important, the blame that has been attributed, to a certain extent, has not been verified. It was discussed earlier that there are primarily four areas in which blame has been attributed: white rioters, government officials, the culture of the time, and a conspiracy of silence. There is little doubt that white rioters and government officials were directly responsible for the magnitude of destruction that took place in the riot of 1921, at least among those who have previously studied the riot. Moreover, few disagree that the historical context played at least some role. There were a plethora of riots that broke out within a very similar period. Cities such as Omaha, East St. Louis, and Chicago all experienced them. Indeed, a period of overt racism and discrimination is often cited as being the cause of many riots (for example, see Waskow 1966; Williams and Williams 1972; Tuttle 1978). However, a "conspiracy of silence" is not so verifiable. Nevertheless, the idea has been expressed in numerous articles as well as the most current legal case itself (Ogletree 2005). Certainly the riot was publicly ignored for decades, but whether this was a conspiracy among city and state officials is another matter that has not been verified with strong evidence. For instance, representatives in the most recent legal case have not identified specifically how the riot was silenced, or who was responsible for the perceived cover-up. However, it is an important strategy because if the riot and response was proven to involve a "conspiracy of silence," perhaps the preexisting statute of limitations could be circumvented.

A particular strength of those pursuing reparations for survivors and descendants involves those who have helped create and extend frames to the public, or frame articulators. Numerous people have been used to garner further support, or to aid in establishing frame legitimacy. Though these were not always the articulators themselves, they were nevertheless important to the movement. For instance, the late Johnny Cochrane, a lawyer for the survivors, certainly had a reputation for selling his frames. John Hope Franklin, a distinguished historian and former advisor on race relations to President Clinton, was the son of a riot survivor and Greenwood lawyer. The reparations movement was largely initiated by a state representative, Don Ross. In addition, a meeting organized to discuss the progress of the movement featured a speech presented by Chicago Alderwoman Dorothy Tillman, a leading advocate for slave reparations. However, despite the support of a vast array of widely known public figures, the reparations movement continues to encounter other barriers.

Another requirement for frame resonance proposed by Benford and Snow (2000) is salience. They further contend that three elements are associated with establishing salience: centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity. Centrality means that the frame must be associated with values and beliefs that are central to the lives of its potential adherents. Benford and Snow (2000:621) state that “Hypothetically, the more central or salient the espoused beliefs, ideas, and values of a movement to the targets of mobilization, the greater the probability of their mobilization.” In order to establish centrality, supporters of the reparations movement often make comparisons to other injustices or larger societal values in general. For instance, one supporter stated, “We are on the side of righteousness” (Krehbiel 2005:A1). Another proponent stressed

the value of justice by noting, “We live in a society built on justice and that’s the cornerstone of Anglo-American civil justice that we expect to have justice. I think we can all look at the riot and say that justice was probably not served” (Espinosa 1999b:1). Others made more specific comparisons between the response to the riot and other current events such as the war in Iraq. One supporter stated, “If we can rebuild Iraq, we can rebuild Tulsa” (Krehbiel 2005:A1).

Experiential commensurability refers to the degree to which the frame directly affects people (Benford and Snow 2000). Another problem which reparation movements encounter is the difficulty in making a link between the current state of affairs and an injustice that occurred long ago (Howard-Hassmann 2004). The Tulsa reparations movement presents a unique case because nearly a quarter of those that initially filed for reparations directly survived the riot. However, a larger portion of those filing were not yet alive during the time in which the riot took place. Nevertheless, it is the survivors who have been given the most media attention. The survivors have used these opportunities to give their personal experiences in the riot, many of which have been repeated in articles, books, discussions, and legal testimonies. These testimonies are given to show that their experiences were real and that they were directly affected by the riot. A second challenge facing the movement is that the frame has the potential to affect the pocketbooks of a larger set of citizens who had no direct association with the riot and feel no personal responsibility for the acts of others, which will be further addressed later.

The final variable associated with frame resonance is narrative fidelity. That is, the frame must take into account the “culture out there” (Benford and Snow 2000:622). To attain this level of narrative fidelity, survivors and supporters of the Tulsa reparations

movement have pointed to other reparation movements as well, such as those surrounding slavery (Underwood 1997). Indeed, the Tulsa reparations movement is one of several attempts aimed at gaining repayment for past injustices. Thus, there has emerged a reparations boom, or a culture of reparations. However, as Howard-Hassmann (2004) notes, reparation movements among African-Americans have been largely unsuccessful because they typically involve actions that have long since passed and victims that are no longer living, such as those stemming from slavery or the Jim Crow era. Nevertheless, it should not be considered coincidental that the Tulsa reparations movement emerged when it did.

### **Public Framing of Reparations**

It has been established that framing is an integral part of the current move for reparations among survivors, representatives, and their supporters. Though reparations remain to be granted, the master frame has unarguably transformed from an uprising to a social and racial injustice. The “victims” have gone from being white to black. Nevertheless, the very idea of reparations, or any policy or procedure that requires money funneling from one racial group to another, can cause a certain level of resentment (Omi and Winant 1994). So, how about the general public? Do they support reparations? Why or why not? These are important questions because too often social movement analysis is constrained to only the perceptions and experiences of key leaders on each side of an issue (Benford and Snow 2000). In fact, one poll found that 62% of Tulsans were opposed to reparations. This figure was slightly smaller across the state of Oklahoma at 57% (Martindale 2000: 1). Though support for reparations is low, it is important to understand the reasons why there is such minimal support. In this section, I

explain the key ideas and themes resulting from a content analysis of opinions sent into and published by the *Tulsa World* from 1997-2007, each of which are concerned with the very issue of reparations. 1997 was selected as the starting date because it marked the beginning of reparation discourse for the riot survivors.

Throughout the ten-year period under consideration, forty-five statements of opinion were sent into the *Tulsa World* and published. Among these, thirteen (30.9%) clearly supported the idea of reparations, in some form or another. However, thirty-two (71.1%) clearly did not support any form of reparations. These statistics are not given to generalize public opinion, but only to provide an account on the background of the statements offered below. Another important qualifier is necessary. Many of these opinions were clearly in response to statements issued by political leaders or representatives of the reparations movement concerned with the reparations case. This could help to explain the large degree to which these ensuing opinions are unsupportive of reparations – because they were in reaction to those who do support reparations. Moreover, these statements were temporally clustered. That is, opinions were offered at times when important decisions were in the process of being made or were very recently decided upon relating to the reparations case. Finally, another important qualifier relates to the issue of race. Because these statements were submitted to the newspaper, the race of the issuer was unavailable, which could be considered a very important limitation. However, I maintain for this stage of the analysis that reasons cited for support or nonsupport for reparations are important regardless of race, though they are certainly interconnected issues. I will begin by looking at supportive opinions.

### **Public Support for Reparations**



Those who supported reparations were citizens who believed that an injustice occurred long ago that needs to be reconciled. Though there was slight disagreement over how reparations should be distributed and to whom, the consensus among these opinions were that reparations in some form or another should be granted. Responding to the formation of a commission to study the riot, one wrote:

“Once the commission has determined to the best of its ability the number of dead and all other historical detail surrounding this tragedy, amends must be made. We Tulsans – as a city, as a county and as a state – must take the next and final step: Make reparations to the black community and specifically the known survivors and family members of those harmed and killed” (Tulsa Time 1999: 18).

This individual argued that reparations should be granted to the survivors and their descendants. Another respondent concurred, but encouraged others to take on the generalized other by stating:

“Had members of either of our families been physically injured or killed as a result of the riot, or had they lost all of their property and possessions, we would be adamant in our claims for reparations. It would be right and just that our families be compensated for their losses due to societal and governmentally sanctioned violence. If it is fair for our families to be compensated, then it is fair that other families be compensated” (Pay Up 2000: 2).

Specifically, two themes emerged from reviewing claims supporting: one related to an opportunity to rewrite history and a second associated with the beneficiaries of reparations.

### *Rewriting History*

Rewriting history was a dominant theme in many of the responses associated with the support for reparations. This theme relates to the belief that history is best served by being confronted, handled, and modified, if possible. Recall that one of the justifications for reparation requests by riot survivors, descendants, and their representatives is the notion of reconciliation. Among the public, some agreed a potential outcome of reparations would be more social cohesion that surpassed the issue of money. One individual stated: “At the heart of the reparations debate is not money...At issue is the acknowledgment by white Tulsans that a grievous wrong was done to the black community...We all want to move on, but not at the expense of ignoring the past; otherwise we cannot learn from it” (Heart Debate: 2007: 20).

Others made similar statements. A key aspect of these positions was linking history to reparations and reconciliation. That is, these individuals argued that although the Tulsa riot was a dated fragment of history, scars from the riot still remain and there are lessons left to be learned. One individual offered:

“Money will never undo the sufferings that were endured, but it will do something and that is surely better than nothing. We are dealing with emotions, and emotions cannot be exchanged for money; but time is also a factor and money can make time more enduring. As a city we all need to heal from this dark chapter of our history. I commend the commission on

its perseverance, and pray, hope and encourage us as a city of people to embrace this opportunity of true brother-sisterhood that can be our future” (Reparations Better 2000: 18).

### *The Beneficiaries of Reparations*

A second theme related to the beneficiaries of reparations, or who or what would receive restitution. Importantly, respondents who supported reparations felt the issue was about a community rather than a few isolated individuals who lost homes and possessions. Indeed, the concept of community was emphasized in the content of these opinions. One excerpt reads, “What was taken from the black community was far more than just of life. It was the loss of future. I would like to see Tulsa raise the money to rebuilt the Greenwood district back to its past glory” (Community’s Future 1999: 18). From this perspective, reparations would be a win-win situation; that is, the entire Tulsa economy would be impacted positively through reparations. Another respondent stated, “To me, it’s all about the black people and business owners in the Greenwood area...Let’s give them the opportunity to rebuild what they lost – the opportunity for a growing business nestled inside a growing community” (Right Thing 2000: 2). Here, the individual contends that reparations would best be served if they were funneled into the entire community rather than solely direct survivors and their descendants. Another individual argued that the primary beneficiary should be victims themselves:

“Before building a museum or a memorial to remember the 1921 Tulsa race riot...Tulsa must make right the horrendous wrongs that were inflicted by this riot on its black victims and their families...I am not sure

that Tulsa needs to be known for a riot. I am sure, however, that it needs to be known for helping its own” (Help People 2006: G2).

Some respondents did draw a line between those who they perceived to deserve reparations and those who did not. Referring to reparations for descendants, an individual stated, “Those younger know only what was told to them. Only the ones who were born before the 1921 riot deserve any compensation” (Forgive Forget 2005: A16). Still, others argued that reparations would best be served in the form of educational scholarships (Look Future 2000: 7) or building a memorial to commemorate the riot (Objective Memorials 2002: 2).

### **Public Opposition to Reparations**

The majority of public opinion offered in the *Tulsa World* was unsupportive to potential taxpayer dollars being earmarked for reparations. One individual, apparently deeming reparations unimportant, stated, “Let’s forget about the race riot memorial, museum, and put that money to good use. Let’s put water in the pools for the kids” (Let’s Put 2003: A2). Another wrote, “I would be in favor of reparations to people who lost their businesses in the north Tulsa riots if the black community made restitution to the federal government for what they destroyed in the Watts and Detroit riots in the ‘60s” (Blacks Should 1997: A2).

One interesting theme relating to the opinions of those against paying reparations was their interpretation of the riot, which has been clearly impacted by once prevailing frames of the riot as a black uprising, or, at the very least, a battle between two races. One individual, comparing black survivors of the riot to the Japanese interned during World War II, stated:

“The latter clearly was an action for which our government was responsible, whereas the race riot was touched off by the confrontation of two angry, hostile groups – one black, one white – all private citizens. The then-governing body of Oklahoma moved immediately to quell the rioting by sending in the National Guard to restore order. Within hours, the looting, burning, and shootings ceased and homeless and frightened blacks were placed willingly into protective custody” (Cows Different 1999: 24).

Research now suggests the local chapter of the National Guard itself contributed to the riot’s intensity and there is also little evidence that blacks were “willingly” arrested and placed into detention camps (Ellsworth 1982; Gates 2003). Others were under an impression that the “truth” of the riot has never been established. Despite unquestionable historical evidence that Greenwood was torched to the ground by white rioters, some still remain skeptical. Many legends persist today within the city of Tulsa through stories handed down over generations that relate to riot events. One individual wrote, “I’ve seen a lot of innuendo, a lot of supposition and a lot of people saying things that just aren’t true. According to people I know, the area in question was no mecca. Who started the fires? Do we know that? Do we know who started the shooting?” (No Tax 1997: A2). Nevertheless, three categories emerged from the analysis of citizens’ statements, signifying their opposition to reparations: avoiding history, an “us” and “them” ideology, and denial of responsibility.

### *Avoiding History*

It was noted above that a key theme associated with support for reparations is the belief among some that pursuance of history is important in order to make amends and the ability to rewrite history, or at least edit it. However, many statements associated with those unsupportive of reparations argued that *bad* history should be ignored. As noted earlier, research suggests that, in some cases, disastrous events can enhance social solidarity (for example, Webb 2002). Pertaining to the riot, however, a corrosive community was formed and many believe the event should be forgotten. One individual believed that such history is better left alone by stating, “Modern psychology tells us that reopening old wounds is counterproductive; so why celebrate a painful event like the Tulsa race riot or the Oklahoma City bombing? Focusing on past acts of horror certainly doesn’t prevent similar acts in the future. It may even encourage them” (Let Painful 1998: 16). In fact, a number of statements were thematically similar. Another person added, “Someday we have got to try to get past all of this racial positioning and we do not need to pay for a constant reminder...We should put the past behind and move ahead” (Let’s Move 2004: G2). Indeed, “moving ahead” was a common statement among several citizens.

In addition to ignoring events associated with the riot, many felt that current attempts to garner reparations would only cause more racial animosity. One person wrote, “The 1921 riot is an embarrassing episode in Tulsa’s history and should not be commemorated...Let’s quit mending fences between the races and start tearing them down. Let’s learn from the past and move on” (Tear Down 1997: A16). Similarly, another asked, “Why are we spending so much money to investigate this when we need

to move forward instead of backward? This brings up hard feelings with everyone” (Race Riot Study 1997: A2).

*“Us” and “Them”*

A second emergent category was an “us” and “them” mentality among some individuals opposed to reparations. Cornell and Hartmann (2007) note that an “us” and “them” ideology involves creating and maintaining racial boundaries. Recall that many of those in support of reparations emphasized reconciliation and group cohesion as potential consequences. However, for many opposed to them, reparations were perceived to be unjust and biased toward blacks. For instance, one person vehemently opposed to reparations wrote, “Taxpayers have in effect been paying reparations to blacks for many years in the form of welfare and various government subsidies” (Welfare Form 1997: A2). Another stated, “They want us to pay not because we are guilty but because we are white” (Tulsa Race 1999: 18).

Adding to this mentality, some citizens have questioned why it is only blacks who are seeking reparations when whites were among the dead as well. One respondent said, “I have read and reread many articles and not one has mentioned the dozen or more whites who lost their lives, some of them policemen and firemen. Where are the reparations and memorials for them and their surviving families? Doesn’t this seem to be one dimensional?” (Something Seems 2002: 14). Once again, many remain unaware of evidence that whites entered the black district to torch, loot, and destroy. Moreover, some have failed to discover that police officers participated in the rioting and firefighters did not fight fires. Nevertheless, many statements revolved around the theme of reparations as being one dimensional or historically inaccurate.

Finally, a few linked survivors' claims for reparations stemming from the riot to reparation movements for slavery, which suggests some may currently perceive that reparations themselves are strictly a black phenomenon. Unsupportive of providing reparations to survivors, one person offered,

“I don't believe that the taxpayers of Tulsa – the vast majority of them totally unrelated to the events of the race riot or slavery – should make reparations for a minority of evil people. Concerning the slavery issue, every black should have the chance to go to Africa and see the culture they were robbed of. I believe they would then see the many opportunities they have in America, even if slavery was the vicious way their ancestors arrived” (Money Won't 1997: A16).

Interestingly, just as the interracial committee was formed in 1921 after the Tulsa riot to show the “remarkable progress” of blacks since slavery, this individual evoked precisely the same argument in 1997. This individual's statement also addresses a third theme related to anti-reparation opinions, which is the denial of personal responsibility.

#### *Denial of Responsibility*

The most cited reason for opposing reparations among those who offered statements to the *Tulsa World* was associated with the denial of responsibility, or the perception that current citizens of Tulsa should not have to pay for “sins of the past.” Referring to his extended family, which was located in Kentucky at the time of the riot, one respondent stated,

“They paid their debts, carried their grudges, forgave their enemies and were beholden to no one. I am the same. Now strangers have come to



Tulsa saying that I am responsible for paying the debts of whites, living states away, just because we now live in Tulsa. I will protest if allowed.

This is not my debt!” (Correcting Some 2003: A9).

Many respondents argued that the riot was indeed devastating and an atrocious act that was committed long ago. However, crucial to this argument is that, unlike the aforementioned proponents of reparations who argued history should be acknowledged and reconciled, anti-reparation citizens merely acknowledge the riot, but deny being personally responsible, and are thus not obligated to pay reparations.

In addition, a small portion of adherents to these positions actually did favor reparations, but with restrictions. For instance, another citizen maintained, “I think the only people who should voluntarily contribute to that are families who were residents of that date. I moved here 15 years ago, and I sure don’t want to pay for it” (Tulsan Not 1997: A2). Indeed, this was the most frequently cited reason concerning the opposition of reparations, or the belief that reparations are not justified in situations where the reparation-seekers are attempting to gain compensation from those not associated with the riot.

## 8 Conclusions

### Final Comments

This chapter provides some concluding comments pertaining to this research. In addition, I offer some implications for future research and limitations to the study. In the first stage of this project, the research examined forces which contributed to the Tulsa Race Riot. An integrative model was introduced which synthesized various structural, cultural, and contextual factors in addition to triggering events. It is proposed that this is a more appropriate model for studying race riots because it takes into account a variety of factors that have been identified in previous research as important contributors. However, this research also diverges in some important respects from seminal works which focus on the causative factors associated with riots (for example, Lieberson and Silverman 1965; Spilerman 1970, 1971). That is, the central question(s) presented in this research did not focus on accounting for why some cities with certain conditions experience riots while other cities with similar conditions do not. Moreover, the study went beyond Smelser's (1962) theory of collective behavior by showing that the context of riots are just as important as, for example, structural conduciveness and the formation of generalized beliefs. Instead, this research utilized a grounded theoretical perspective to develop themes that actually complement and integrate various factors previously argued to be important factors associated with riots. Moreover, it begins to offer reasons

why these factors are important and why they cannot be understood without also considering how they interact with other contributors.

Though certain aspects of the Tulsa riot will remain unknown, such as the amount of deaths or the role of airplanes throughout, a rich amount of data exist that allow for better understanding of the complexity associated with forces that cause episodes of collective racial violence. Many studies seeking to generalize various aspects of riots have been hindered by the absence of extensive data concerning one riot. It is maintained, therefore, that before we can better understand race riots from a broader perspective, research must take into account their complexity essentially by using more data to interpret them.

In addition, this research introduced the social movement perspective of framing into the analysis of race riots, again focusing on the Tulsa riot. It is argued that framing riots is a crucial aspect of outcomes from racial disorders. Frames affect not only governmental responses, but social interpretations of the causes, events, and aftermaths of riots. I first examined framing as it related to 1921 interpretations of the riot. The analysis of this frame was actually made easier due to the absence of racial codes in the various documents examined (Gilens 1996; Wheelock and Hartmann 2007). In other words, little was held back in terms of attitudes and perceptions related to race. In contrast, today there exist a plethora of racial codes.

Despite ample historical evidence suggesting a different reality, it was shown that a small group comprised of “black agitators” was initially blamed. This leads one to question, why blacks were blamed for the riot when white rioters destroyed thirty-five city blocks of black homes, institutions, and businesses? This, I believe, is where the

causes of the riot can be linked to the framing of riots. That is, to understand why riots are framed in certain ways also requires an understanding of structural, cultural, and contextual factors and triggering events.

Indeed, a group of perceived “black agitators” were blamed for the riot by local press and the grand jury. It took place in a structure of segregation based upon overt perceptions of biological, social, and economical, and political white superiority. A triggering event, in the form of an alleged assault by a black male upon a white female, served to provide direct and immediate conducive conditions for a riot. In 1921, this type of allegation was often followed by a lynching. In the case of Tulsa, however, the key difference was that a group of blacks were determined to prevent a lynching from occurring by gathering arms to protect the accused. Furthermore, in 1921, such protest was perceived to be blacks “not knowing their place.” Black men and women were expected to be subservient. Therefore, as white frames began emerging about the riot immediately afterward, the event was framed as black militancy. However, this frame alone was not enough to justify the destruction of the black community and resultant plans to permanently remove them. Thus, another frame emerged that interpreted the black community in whole as a social problem, uneducated and prone to criminality. It is also argued that these frames emerged, in part, due to misperceptions among the public about issues related to the black community in Tulsa.

The second phase of this framing analysis examined its current frame, as it has been established through black riot survivors, representatives, and supporters. Currently, frame articulators have sought to replace beliefs and interpretations of the riot that stress black culpability with one that emphasizes black victimization. As legal battles persist,

framing issues related to the riot remain crucial to the process. Thus, framing is never static, but always dynamic. Social changes, recent legal decisions, and even personal experiences have implications for framing. Competing SMOs have not emerged despite the framing alignment of those involved in the Tulsa reparations movement. Constituents of the current movement have successfully transformed the frame of the riot with minimal resistance. However, in drawing upon the larger frames proffered by African Americans in their pursuit of reparations for slavery, Tulsa constituents have encountered resonance problems among governmental leaders and public citizens who feel that injustices incurred decades, even centuries, ago are not deserving of contemporary financial compensation. In addition to the framing tasks and processes, I offered justifications given by frame articulators for reparations. Finally, with a focus on reparations, I also examined some of the reasons cited by Tulsans for supporting or not supporting reparations for black survivors. Certainly, the degree of support is deeply impacted by the very frames that have been established and their respective saliency and potency, and thus resonance among the public.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The first stage of analysis utilized an integrative approach to understanding the causes of the Tulsa race riot of 1921. To a large extent, sociological research on race riots has focused on locating distinct characteristics, often structural, that are common patterns or processes in all riots. I have maintained that these approaches somewhat limit our understanding of riots because they ignore the complexity of riots. Riots take place throughout distinct sociohistorical periods where different structures, cultures, and

contexts interact. However, I have also argued that the macro-orientation of these factors have to be linked to triggering events and other micro-level issues.

Thus, there are implications for future research. First, future work on riots should consist of not only further case studies to better understand the complexity of riots, but also more comparative approaches. For instance, further research that compares much older riots such as Tulsa's or Chicago's with more contemporary riots such as the Los Angeles riots in the 1990s would be advantageous. Perhaps more importantly, research should consider the global persistence of episodes involving interracial and interethnic conflict. I further suggest that these involve in-depth case study analyses to better understand the similarities and differences between these types of riots.

Second, future research concerned with the cause(s) of race riots should use integrative approaches to studying their spatial and temporal persistence. I have argued that riots should be considered more holistically. Thus, future research should focus on arriving at generalizations through integrating more micro- and macro-level factors. My research on the Tulsa riot of 1921 does not necessarily refute the importance of findings from previous research on the causative factors associated with race riots, but rather it integrates some of these debates. Part of the purpose of this study was not to generalize the Tulsa conflict to all episodes of racial rioting, but rather to better understand not only the Tulsa situation itself, but the complexity involved in riots. Therefore, I have developed an integrative model that could be utilized in future research.

Third, future research should begin to look at how riots are framed. Little research has been concerned with the sociopolitical dynamics involved in framing riots. However, it was argued that framing is a very important dimension of riots. Frames help

others to interpret, and thus develop an understanding of, many aspects of riots such as what causes them, who or what is to blame, and steps which should be taken to alleviate their future occurrences. Moreover, this work suggests that community formation is an extremely important dimension of riots both immediately and long after they have concluded. It is argued that media outlets play an extremely important role in how riots are interpreted and understood.

A fourth important implication for future research is to examine the framing of reparation movements in general. Though this has been initiated, the work is purely theoretical with little empirical evidence of the different framing strategies and techniques that are used (Howard-Hessmann 2004). For instance, research should consider how reparation attempts have attributed blame diagnostically and the various legitimization techniques that have been used to prognostically frame reparations. Future research should also focus on contestant frames to reparations. These arguably have a large impact on the unsuccessful attempts for African-American reparation movements, but this needs to be laid out empirically.

### **Limitations**

This research also consists of several limitations that need to be addressed. First, even an extensive case study such as this cannot possibly get at the entirety of riots. In other words, there are arguably other important factors associated with riots that have not been examined in the current research. For instance, when considering cultural factors that contributed to the riot, this research primarily focused on ideologies concerning race. Another factor that might contribute to riots is the degree of individualism in a society or even a community. For example, while researching the Tulsa riot, it appeared that both

the white and black community each had a strong sense of solidarity, only somewhat in opposition to one another, which suggests that the degree of individualism was rather low. Today, race riots in which one racial group is violent against another, with vast amounts of participation from both races, are virtually nonexistent in the United States. However, this hypothesis is empirically unsubstantiated. Similarly, other contextual or structural factors may contribute to riots that were neglected in this research.

A second limitation is methodological. The reliance on archival data created a major dependency on governmental and media representations, which were certainly biased, and at times, lacking in relevant information. This research did not consist of any interviews. It is argued that interviews with those involved in riots or their aftermaths are important to understanding racial disorders. This limitation certainly applies to the reparations movement. Empirical data would be perhaps much richer if interviews were conducted with riot survivors, representatives, and supporters. To alleviate the magnitude of this limitation, this research considered interviews conducted by other researchers in the past. However, these interviews were not directly considered with framing issues, and therefore, serves as a limitation.



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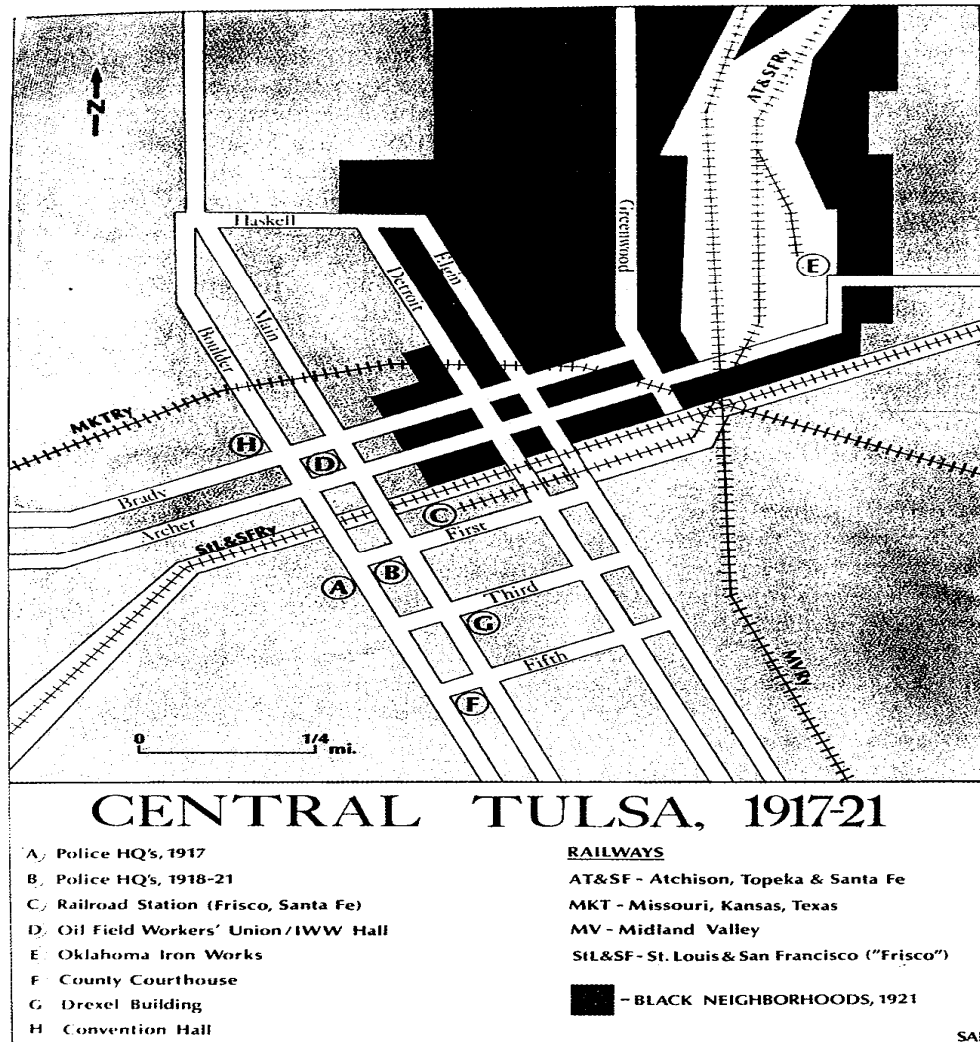
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## APPENDIX

### Map of Greenwood District and Surrounding Area



Source: Ellsworth, Scott. 1982. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. LA: Louisiana State University Press. Pg. 13.

VITA

Chris M. Messer

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE TULSA RACE RIOT OF 1921: DETERMINING ITS CAUSES AND FRAMING

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Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study: This is a case study of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Through the use of governmental archives, census records, narratives, media coverage, and other document and historical analysis, this study examines the causes of the riot as well as how the Tulsa riot has undergone a frame transformation.

Findings and Conclusions: This study concludes that the Tulsa Race Riot was caused by a host of factors including, a racist and discriminatory historical context; various structural characteristics, including factors related to politics, race, and law enforcement; a culture of racism and vigilantism; and a triggering event involving the arrest of an African American accused of assaulting a White woman. In addition, this study concludes that the Tulsa riot, originally framed as a "Negro uprising," has increasingly become interpreted as a "racial injustice." Thus, African Americans have transitioned from being the cause of the riot to the victim of the riot.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Patricia A. Bell

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