

2021-K372

Assembly Resolution No. 372

BY: M. of A. Barron

COMMEMORATING the 100th Anniversary of the
destruction of Tulsa's Black Wall Street

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to take note of significant events that represent turning points in our distinctive history, and which are indelibly etched in the saga of our great Nation; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the destruction of Tulsa's Black Wall Street to be observed from May 31-June 1, 2021; and

WHEREAS, Those who wish to recognize and honor the people who lived in the Greenwood District, may visit the Black Wall Street Gallery in New York City; the gallery also serves to educate on social justice, preserve Black history, curate Black culture, and celebrate the work of contemporary black artists from around the world; and

WHEREAS, It has been 100 years since the destruction of Tulsa, Oklahoma's Greenwood section, home of the most magnanimous demonstration of Black self-determination in American history; and

WHEREAS, The Tulsa race massacre, known alternatively as the Tulsa race riot, the Greenwood Massacre, the Black Wall Street Massacre, or the Tulsa Massacre, took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921, when mobs of White residents, many of them deputized and given weapons by city officials, attacked Black residents and businesses of the Greenwood District; and

WHEREAS, The single worst incident of racial violence in American history was carried out on the ground and from private aircraft, destroying more than 35 square blocks of the district, which at that time, was the wealthiest Black community in the United States, known as Black Wall Street; and

WHEREAS, As a result of this tragic event, more than 800 people were admitted to hospitals, and as many as 6,000 Black residents were interned in large facilities, many of them for several days; the Oklahoma Bureau of Vital Statistics officially recorded 36 dead, however, a 2001 state commission examination of events was able to confirm 39 dead, 26 Black and 13 White, based on contemporary autopsy reports, death certificates and other records; and

WHEREAS, The massacre began during the Memorial Day weekend after 19-year-old Dick Rowland, a Black shoe shiner, was accused of assaulting Sarah Page, the 17-year-old White elevator operator of the nearby Drexel Building; after his arrest, rumors spread through the city that Dick Rowland was to be lynched; and

WHEREAS, Upon hearing these reports, a mob of hundreds of White men had gathered around the jail where Dick Rowland was being kept, and a group of 75 Black men, some of whom were armed, arrived at the jail to ensure this travesty would not happen; and

WHEREAS, The sheriff persuaded the group to leave the jail, assuring them he had the situation under control; as the group was leaving the premises, complying with the sheriff's request, a member of the mob of White men allegedly attempted to disarm one of the Black men; a shot was fired, and then according to the reports of the sheriff, "all hell broke loose"; and

WHEREAS, At the end of the firefight, members of both groups had lost their lives; as news of these deaths spread throughout the city, mob violence exploded; that night and the next morning, White rioters rampaged through the Greenwood District, killing men, and burning and looting stores and homes; around 12:00 p.m. on June 1st, the Oklahoma

National Guard imposed martial law, effectively ending the massacre; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, approximately 10,000 Black people were left homeless, and property damage amounted to more than \$1.5 million in real estate and \$750,000 in personal property (equivalent to \$32.25 million in 2019); and

WHEREAS, Many survivors left Tulsa, while Black and White residents who stayed in the city kept silent about the terror, violence, and resulting losses for decades, and the massacre was largely omitted from local, state, and national histories; and

WHEREAS, In 1996, 75 years after the massacre, a bipartisan group in the Oklahoma State Legislature authorized the formation of the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921; the commission's final report, published in 2001, states that the city had conspired with the mob of White citizens against Black citizens, and recommended a program of reparations to survivors and their descendants; and

WHEREAS, The State of Oklahoma also passed legislation to establish scholarships for descendants of survivors, encourage economic development of Greenwood, and develop a memorial park to the massacre victims in Tulsa, which was dedicated in 2010; 10 years later, the massacre finally became a part of the state's school curriculum; and

WHEREAS, On August 18, 2020, the last male survivor of the Tulsa race massacre, R&B and jazz saxophonist Hal Singer, died at the age of 100; and

WHEREAS, Recently, 107-year-old Viola Fletcher, the oldest living survivor of the Tulsa Race Massacre, testified before Congress seeking "justice" a century after one of the most horrific racist attacks in the nation's history; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that when events of such historic significance are brought to our attention, they should be recognized by all citizens of this great Empire State; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the destruction of Tulsa's Black Wall Street.