

Anneliese Bruner, Tulsa Race Massacre Descendant and Reparations Advocate

From May 31st to June 1st of 1921, a violent and bloodthirsty white mob attacked the prosperous, independent, and self-sufficient Black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Motivated by economic envy and racial animus – and spurred on by inflammatory journalism that levied false charges of attempted assault by a Black teenager on a white teenager – white vigilantes, many of whom were sworn officers of the law, used murder, arson, aerial bombing, and looting to destroy Greenwood, widely known as America's Black Wall Street. White women participated in the criminal looting, and boys as young as 10 years of age participated in the ritual violence.

The memory of this tragic history was suppressed for almost 100 years. Even I, a direct descendant of Tulsa Massacre survivors, was unaware of it until my father shared the story with me when I was 35 years old. One of my ancestors was the notable Mary Elizabeth Jones Parrish, whose contemporaneous narrative, [*The Nation Must Awake: My Witness to the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921*](#), is the definitive eyewitness account of that terrible time.

Today, my purpose before this body is twofold: 1) to affirm my support for the two living survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre, 109-year-old Viola Ford Fletcher, and 109-year-old Lessie Benningfield Randle in their recently argued appeal before the Oklahoma Supreme Court of a previously dismissed case seeking reparations from the City of Tulsa; and 2) to oppose the movement in the United States to institute "memory laws" around the teaching of African American history: strict guidelines about how people are permitted to teach and represent the past -- public memory.

Memory laws, under which public school curricula set by the state would promote the narrative of the state's essential goodness, would be a blow to truth, the most necessary component of healing and repair. People of African Descent would be thwarted in our efforts to achieve reparations unless what has been done to us is truthfully chronicled and remembered. For example, US states like Oklahoma, Florida, and Texas are attempting to silence the truth of the Transatlantic Slave Trade with such obscene claims as enslavement was good for Black people because it taught us skills, and that enslavers were mostly benevolent. Lawmakers say that white children's feelings are hurt by the truth of the brutality and evil of American enslavement of Africans.

These outrageous views, cynically purported to protect the feelings of white children, are debunked by true history. Bills like HB 1775 in Oklahoma want to suppress true history because it casts the country in a negative light. Teachers are intimidated into silence by fear of job loss, and librarians remove supposedly controversial books from their shelves. My ancestor's voice is still being suppressed.

I call on the Permanent Forum to denounce these memory laws and demand the truthful and complete accounting of history in the United States and elsewhere. The truth cannot be erased. People of African Descent cannot be erased.