



HIS 100 Project: The Tulsa Massacre

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Part 1: Creating a Research Question

1. Describe how your assumptions, beliefs, and values influenced your choice of topic.

I have taken previous classes in social science and history, and have drawn the conclusion that African-Americans have been unfairly discriminated against in the past. Also, I am studying science and engineering, which may influence the means by which I frame questions and approach answering them in the sense that I use a quantitative, empirical and post-positivist research methodology.

2. Discuss the significance of your historical research question in relation to your current event.

The African-American community in the United States has been subject to severe mistreatment. This research question is significant because hopefully by understanding the case study of the *Tulsa Massacre*, this can serve as a “stepping stone” to understanding what causes violent racist behaviour and hate crimes. With an understanding of what causes such behaviour, society can hopefully devise solutions to mitigate the problem.

3. Explain how you used sources to finalize your research question.

I did a non-systematic review of the literature to develop and mature a research question. I started with vague questions like “what was the Tulsa Massacre?” and “why did it happen?” I came across a fine secondary source by Messer (2021) which describes the massacre and tries to work out what caused it. Because of my tendency to prefer quantitative research questions, I looked for economic research jobs, and came across one by Albright et al. (2021) which attempted to work out the economic effects of the massacre. These two secondary sources helped me formulate my research question.

Part 2: Building Context to Address Questions

1. Describe the context of your historical event that influenced your current event.

Greenwich was a district in the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Messer (2021, pp. 34-35) warns against using simple explanations to describe what caused the violence; stating that “there is reason to believe that interracial collective violence cannot be fully understood through a unitary explanatory variable alone.” Messer (2021) then proceeds to list things leading up to the massacre, such as population growth (pp. 35-36), Jim Crow laws (p. 45) and tabloid journalism from the *Tulsa Tribune* and *Tulsa Daily News*, amongst other causal agents.

2. Describe a historical figure or group’s participation in your historical event.

Dick Rowland was the delivery boy who was accused of assaulting a white woman and the central figure who, albeit unintentionally, caused the



massacre. But nonetheless, I will be focusing on two other figures who gave eye-witness testimony at an old age.

The first was regarding a survivor of the massacre called Viola Fletcher (All Things Considered, 1999), who was just seven (7) years of age when she witnessed the massacre. Fletcher is part of a lawsuit against the state of Oklahoma where she stated that the government did not act to protect the Greenwood district. She stated that “[w]e live it every day and the thought of what Greenwood was or what it could have been.” This is evidence that the massacre had severe economic consequences for the African-American community in Tulsa.

Further testimony from her brother, Van Ellis, stated that the government in Oklahoma did not do anything to mitigate the damage or repay the victims, which provides further evidence that the economic peril caused by the massacre persisted longer than it should have.

The second individual that I will be discussing is Olivia J. Hooker. She is another victim of the massacre who survived to give her recollection of the events that took place. She is currently one-hundred and six (106) years of age and was six years of age when she experienced the massacre. She described her father as what I concluded to be a haberdasher, saying that his store “*didn't carry shoddy things. [it] had Arrow shirts, Kuppenheimer suits, Florsheim shoes and Stetson hats. And those were all good names in those days.*”

Hooker also described the events in detail and tried to work out the motivations of the attackers, stating that “*a horrifying thing for a little girl who's only 6 years old - trying to remember to keep quiet, so they wouldn't know we were there. As those marauders came into [our] house, they were trying to destroy anything that they could find. They took a huge axe and started whacking at my sister Aileen's beloved piano - whack, whack, whack. It was a good piano, and they thought that was something we shouldn't have.*” This describes the amount of damage that has been caused by the rioters and looters.

3. Explain the historical figure or group’s motivation to participate in your historical event.

Both Viola Fletcher and Olivia J. Hooker, along with their respective associates and family members, did not want to experience the events that unfolded during the massacre. Nonetheless, the events that unfolded were beyond their control, and the best that they could do at that time was defend themselves and mitigate the damage as best as they could. Fletcher is trying to bring justice to what happened by suing the state of Oklahoma.

Part 3: Examining How Bias Impacts Narrative

1. Describe a narrative you identified while researching the history of your historical event.

I was analysing what happened during the Tulsa Massacre primarily from the

perspective of its victims. I am mainly interested in the economic damage that was a result of the massacre, but for this research job, I ultimately ended up looking at the primary sources of the interviews between news outlets and the victims of the massacre.

The narrative that I was able to assemble from the interviews was that a riot and looting was taking place in the Greenwich district of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and that the police were not able to protect the property rights of African-Americans living there. African-Americans lived in decent homes, which ended up being destroyed by the rioters and looters.

2. Articulate how biased perspectives presented in primary and secondary sources influence what is known or unknown about history.

First off, the testimonies given by the victims of the massacre describe only a small fraction of what happened to the overall Greenwich community. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but hard conclusions cannot be drawn from this information alone.

Second off, many of the people interviewed here were of old age --- literally over a century in age. Scientists have demonstrated that memory conforms to an exponentially decaying function dependent on time (Page, 2018, p. 98). It may be the case that the testimonies given are not totally accurate, as some details could have been unintentionally omitted or misremembered.

3. Identify the perspectives that you think are missing from your historical event's narrative.

I was not able to find any interviews with white persons. I am not sure why this is the case, but one possibility is that the perpetrators feel guilty or ashamed, and because of this, they are more likely to decline interviews (Cathryn Townsend, personal communications).

Part 4: Connecting the Past With the Present

1. Explain how researching its historical roots helped improve your understanding of your current event.

Researching this subject gave me a more complete picture of the African-American community's circumstances and the economic predicament that they find themselves in. The stereotype of African-American persons being "lazy" and slothful is falsified by this counterexample of them able to thrive in a capitalistic society despite disadvantages from past slavery. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that there exists external forces that wish to undermine the work of African-Americans; and the Tulsa Massacre is a fine example of such political forces.

In America today, many African-Americans are in economic peril through no fault of their own. The Tulsa Massacre is linked to contemporary America because it may explain why African-Americans are reluctant to take risks in starting capitalistic enterprises. It is likely the case that their hard work will be destroyed by rioters and looters and the government will not do much to



fix it. Therefore, it would be wrong to blame the low-socioeconomic status of African-Americans on their “self-determination” alone.

2. Articulate how questioning your assumptions, beliefs, and values may benefit you as an individual.

Questioning my assumptions, beliefs and values will benefit me as an individual because doing so will enable me to make better decisions. For example, if I come across a news story suggesting that vaccines cause autism and I assume that I do not want to expose myself to autism, then I should question whether-or-not the science is sound. Therefore, surveying the literature and discussing my health decisions with my medical doctor is the best approach to working out whether-or-not to get any vaccines.

3. Discuss how being a more historically informed citizen may help you understand contemporary issues.

Being a more historically informed person can help me understand contemporary issues better. In the case of my research job regarding the Tulsa Massacre, I now have a clearer picture of why the African-American community is in poverty. I was able to use the interviews to empathise just a little more with the African-American community, and understand why some African-Americans may be reluctant to take risks regarding starting a business or general anxiety they may experience.

References

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