From Tulsa to Ferguson: Redefining Race Riots and Racialized Violence

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The purpose of this thesis is to reclassify many so-called race riots at the turn of the twentieth century as racial cleansings.
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I. Introduction: From Race Riots to Racial Cleansings

“Even crime has power to reproduce itself and create conditions favorable to its own existence” – Frederick Douglass

August 9, 2015, marked the one-year anniversary of the death of teen Michael Brown at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson. Within that year, Ferguson, Missouri, experienced a level of racial tension similar to that experienced by many towns and neighborhoods in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Then and now, civil unrest, racism, rioting, murder, migration, major property loss, and the presence of a militia were regular occurrences. However, there is one difference: over a hundred years ago these same elements would have resulted in the racial cleansing of many towns and communities. Racial cleansings at the turn of the century were prevalent in countries around the world, often leading to the removal of an undesired group. This was an indication that “the people of the conquered territories were regarded as dangerous, which in itself is an indicator that they shared a collective identity” (Bell-Fialkoff 1996, 7). In the United States at the turn of the century, racial cleansings became a way to control and maintain the African American population by the use of threats and the growing phenomenon of lynching. Often these events were sparked by African Americans’ desire for autonomy through suffrage, jobs, the acquisition of land, and the desire to reject the subservient racial cues imposed on them throughout the institution of slavery. Since then, Jim Crow, and recently, mass incarceration have been major contributors in disenfranchising African Americans. These historical events, which in

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1 Frederick Douglass, in a letter to Ida B. Wells, commended her for her tireless efforts to speak out against the lynching of African Americans in 1892. (I. B. Wells 2008)
some ways set the precedent for our current civil unrest, have been mislabeled, often passing under the guise of race riots, when, in actuality, they were really racial cleansings.

Especially in light of this country’s still unresolved race problem, it is important to reexamine the racial cleansings of the early twentieth century. Such an investigation may shed light on the persistence of racism into our own time, and help explain why it is so deeply rooted in our nation’s psyche. Racial cleansings have perpetuated long lasting social woes such as a lack of wealth in today’s African American community; pervasive stereotypes of African American inferiority in the realms of education, ambition, and work ethic; and amongst African Americans today, a continued mistrust of the government, including its will to defend the African American community within the United States. A true analysis of racial cleansings might be the first step toward correcting some of these contemporary social ills. Acknowledging these events and providing some form of reparations for the victims and their families will also begin the healing process, putting all parities on the path toward closure. Ferguson may never experience a racial cleansing, but at the height of the violence in the aftermath of Michael Brown’s death many were wondering if “there will be race riots in Ferguson,” which suggests that the memory of past racial cleansings is still with us (Lowery 2014). These memories and these concerns, force us to reexamine this event and others throughout history so we can recognize the differences between the race riots and the racial cleansings at the turn of the century, for these cleansings have shaped many of our towns and cities.
“Riot or Rebellion?” was the question posed by Jack Schneider, an Assistant Professor of Education at Holy Cross, after nine days of protests and rioting in Ferguson, Missouri in his article “Ferguson: Riot or Rebellion?” (Schneider 2014). The decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson on Monday, November 24, 2014 sparked outrage across the country. On August 9, Officer Darren Wilson fatally wounded unarmed eighteen year-old African American Michael Brown after an altercation ensued when Brown and a friend were asked to get out of the street. The failure to indict Officer Wilson increased tensions and further strained relations between the police and the black community in Ferguson. The facts of the case have been unclear since the beginning due to the conflicting accounts of Officer Wilson and Michael Brown’s friend, Dorian Johnson. According to Johnson, Officer Wilson pulled up next to Brown and attempted to grab him when his gun discharged. The two began to run with Officer Wilson in pursuit. Onlookers claim to have seen Wilson shoot Brown numerous times in the back “while on his knees in a posture of surrender” (Altman and Drehle 2014). Officer Wilson’s “version of events is more difficult to ascertain” claiming he was injured in the scuffle leading to the shooting” (Altman and Drehle 2014). The failure to release the details of the incident has created a veil of secrecy, which has led many within the community as well as across the nation to call for a federal investigation. One thing that is clear: many African Americans are frustrated and angry and feel that America does not value black bodies.

In 2014 there were several questionable deaths of African Americans at the hands of police throughout the country, and the refusal to indict Officer Wilson after shooting unarmed Michael Brown twelve times was for many the final straw, the most recent instance in a wave of black deaths that year. “We’re ready to die!” was the feeling of one
individual during the height of the rioting (Altman and Drehle 2014, 26). As cars were overturned and tear gas flew, the media sensationalized the pockets of rioting throughout the city. News coverage swarmed to these locations projecting visions of burning buildings and standoffs with the police. With much of the focus on the Michael Brown case, many outsiders may have believed that it alone was the catalyst for the strife, but the internal fires of the city’s residents were sparked long before the failure to indict Officer Wilson. For a long time, the residents within many of St. Louis County’s municipalities had felt the police were targeting the “poor and minority citizens for street and traffic stops – partly to generate fines – which has the effect of both bankrupting and criminalizing whole communities” (Board 2014, 2). The continued exploitation and victimization of one of this country’s most underrepresented and underserved groups have many African Americans throughout the United States fed up. The Mayor of Ferguson “insisted that his city is racially harmonious,” but African American men claim, “they aren’t treated fairly,” and “they feel disrespected by police, harassed and singled out” (Altman and Drehle 2014, 24). In a survey by Pew Research Center, 80% of African Americans polled believed “Brown’s death ‘raises important issues about race,’ but among whites, a strong plurality dismissed the race angle as exaggerated” (Altman and Drehle 2014). Contributing to these results is widespread refusal among whites to recognize how the stereotypes of race play a part in the treatment of African Americans in this country. This wide gap in the perception of the case between the two groups proves there is some form of racial divide lingering in Ferguson, and for that matter throughout the country.
For years, African American complaints of racism have gone unnoticed, similar to racial cleansings. But hopefully with videos of African Americans being killed at the hands of police through the use of deadly force will lead many skeptics to rethink the claims purported by people of color. No longer should it be easy to claim that these issues are isolated incidents. Cases like Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, and Alton Sterling, just to name a few, have shed light on the disproportionate ways in which the criminal justice system, and society for that matter have negatively viewed and unfairly targeted black men and women culminating in the creation of movements such as “Black Lives Matter.” The excessive use of force has led the Washington Post to create a running tally of all the people shot and killed by Police.2 “By culling local news reports, law enforcement websites and social media, and by monitoring independent databases such as Killed by Police and Fatal Encounters,” the Post has been able to create a more accurate account of these incidents, because previously, the Post believed the federal government’s records were “unreliable and incomplete” (The Washington Post). The disproportionate amount of deaths at the hands of police will hopefully lead to a closer analysis of the criminal justice system’s overwhelming mass incarceration rate of African Americans. Currently, there are many issues facing people of color, and in many cases, primarily blacks. People of color “are more likely to become entangled in the criminal justice system, make up more than 60 percent of the people behind bars, face longer sentences than their white non-Hispanic counterparts for similar crimes (especially black males), more likely to be searched than their white counterparts, are extremely overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, voting restrictions on the formerly incarcerated have disenfranchised millions of voters, particularly African Americans,

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2 This is a running tally of people killed by Police. (The Washington Post)
students of color continue to face harsher punishments at school than their white non-Hispanic counterparts” and “the so-called War on Drugs has disproportionately affected people of color” (Hagler 2015). These issues befouling African Americans can be attributed to the ongoing racism and perception of blacks in this country.

Similar to the Progressive Era, racialized imagery has consistently been used “to mobilize the resentment of white working class-voters, many of whom felt threatened by the sudden progress of African Americans” (Alexander 2012, 46). Over the years this same imagery has been used to lead many to believe that those African Americans on welfare cheat the system, passing along these same pathologies to their offspring. With these unfair portrayals of African Americans by individuals who have sought some of the highest levels of office over the course of United States history; how can African Americans be viewed as anything but, criminals or parasites of society? Michelle Alexander in her book, The New Jim Crow critiqued the 1964 election stating, “there is something mighty wrong when a candidate for the highest office bemoans violence in the streets but votes against the war on poverty, votes against the civil rights act and votes against major educational bills” (Alexander 2012, 46). These images were also evident in the 1968 gallop poll, when 81% of the people polled believed that law and order has broken down in this country, and the majority blamed “negroes who start riots” (Alexander 2012, 46). These events and the perceptions of blacks have transcended time, continuing to allow society to control and disenfranchise a group of people while at the same time blame them for the circumstances that befoul them. Scholar Reva Siegel explains this as “preservation through transformation,” which can be explained as a method in which “white privilege is maintained through the rules of rhetoric and change.
As one method of control becomes null and void another method takes its place” (Alexander 2012, 21). Throughout history, methods of disenfranchising an entire group of people may surface in different forms. For example, the Black Codes of 1865 have resurfaced in various forms today, specifically affecting those convicted of a felony. Similar to the mislabeling of racial cleansings at the turn of the century under the guise of so-called race riots, so too, will there be a need to reexamine the modes of policing leading to the death and disenfranchisement of African Americans falling under the guise of an unruly, criminal, inferior race of people.

Unfortunately, Michael Brown’s death and the events surrounding it have slowly faded away, leaving behind an obscure memory of the events taking place that year and of the frequency of black deaths. Over time, other acts of sensationalized violence or evolving social ills will replace the events surrounding the Michael Brown case, further taking attention away from the issues at the heart of the case. But, incidents similar to the killing of Michael Brown take place regularly yet they do not always result in rioting, which means that they are often ignored and overlooked. Clearly, there is a bigger problem here, and it is not restricted to Ferguson. It is entrenched in our understanding of race.

Over the course of the twentieth century, scholars have been searching for a way to classify racial violence and its place within the context of rioting because it “affects how we understand each other” (Schneider, Ferguson: Riot or Rebellion 2014, 2). During the Ferguson incident, Jack Schneider believed the perception of how these events are portrayed correlates to the color of one’s skin. “If whites are involved, uprisings tend to be framed as rebellions…when blacks are involved, however, an uprising isn’t a
rebellion; it is a riot” (Schneider, Ferguson: Riot or Rebellion 2014, 1). African Americans taking to the streets to protest and politicize the injustices within their community should not be recognized negatively, and their actions should not be perceived as an indictment of them or their community. “We act like only black people riot,” ‘it’s like they are violent, they riot, they tear down their own communities.’ When Whites riot, we don’t even know it happened,” argues Beryl Satter (Alcindor 2014, 2). Views like these are not new, but the evolution of these events has forced us to take a closer look at the phenomenon surrounding so-called race riots in American history.

Rioting can happen in any community where racial tension and economic disparities exist between two groups of residents, but the complicity of the rioting seems to fall primarily on the shoulders of African Americans, deflecting attention away from the socioeconomic elements present at play in the situation. “Racism is more than a reaction to problems and difficult passages in the life of individuals and groups,” it comes in “stages of relative economic stability and social equilibrium” (Schirmer and Finzsch 1998, 176). The rioting that took place in Ferguson, in other words, is a result of ongoing mistreatment aligned with being black in a society that refuses to treat people of color as equals to whites. But in the aftermath of Ferguson the rioting, the videos, the fires, and the tear gas flying through the air toward the city’s residents will surely become the bigger issue.

How will the rioting affect those, black or white, who live within these walls? Ron Henry an African American resident of the neighboring town of Florissant, had automatic weapons pointed at him and his family by police, while one resident in the Canfield Green housing complex where Brown was killed, is moving out because “it’s
too disruptive” (Altman and Drehle 2014, 25). With the possibility of residents moving out, will property values drop? Will insurance companies be hesitant to provide coverage to businesses in areas stricken by the rioting? Will the city rebuild using money collected to improve the culture and address the issues of the people and the communities? Or, will the city be abandoned, with vagrancy, poverty, and crime becoming the norm, forcing the city to fade into obscurity? This could be problematic for a city in desperate need of middle class residents who own businesses that could provide jobs and help stabilize a volatile economy. But the memory of police barricades and tear gas shells may be a hard thing to forget. The aftermath of these events can be compared to what Rob Nixon, Professor of English at Princeton, calls “slow violence;” which “occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2013, 2). This form of violence often goes unnoticed because its components “patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans—and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media” (Nixon 2013, 6). In some cases, many of these issues could be resolved without a lingering aftermath, but it greatly depends on how these events are perceived over time. Walter Olson an expert in constitutional studies believes “‘these reputational things become very hard to overcome even if the reality has changed,’ even if the danger is in the past.” Beryl Satter, a history professor at Rutgers adds, “race will always play a powerful role in how people see Ferguson” (Alcindor 2014, 2). All of these questions have been issues facing cities affected by rioting throughout the course of our history, and Ferguson will also be forced to overcome them.
Riots are not new within the borders of the United States, but the landscapes of them have changed drastically over the past century. As scholars are now recognizing, “many of the defining moments in North American history were shaped in profound ways by racial conflict” (Walter Rucker 2007, xlv). The causes and participants, progression and completion, of race riots have taken on a new dynamic since the turn of the century. But the one thing that drastically stands out during the era when rioting was at its peak was the level of racism that stood at the center of these events.

Backtracking through history, we can see that rioting has taken various forms. The 1992 multi-ethnic riot surrounding the Rodney King beating led to an era of urban rebellions “which began in impoverished black communities typically after instances of police brutality” (Rucker and Upton 2007, li). The videotaped beating of Rodney King by four Los Angeles police officers during a routine traffic stop led to days of rioting costing the city over 750 million dollars in property damage. Detrimental social conditions at the time included a rise in “unemployment… female headed households, reduced government programs and numerous police brutality complaints” (Rucker and Upton 2007, xxxii). Once the rioting began, Latinos and whites joined to destroy multiethnic businesses reflecting “multiethnic aggression and interethnic competition” due to white flight and the Immigration Act of 1965 (Rucker and Upton 2007, xxxii). Similarly, between 1960 and 1980, blacks began to express their anger in the form of “commodity riots that became uprisings” (Rucker and Upton 2007, xxxiii). The purpose was to lash out against police brutality and racism.

In the years following World War II, African Americans began to assert their claims to citizenship by meeting white aggression with physical force. These post-war
events were considered revolts, and had much in common with events from an earlier period. During World War I, African Americans got their first taste of freedom from racial oppression while stationed overseas. Interracial dating and shared communal spaces were a couple of the freedoms African Americans experienced overseas during the war. Upon their return, just as philosopher Alain Locke created the term, the “New Negro,” they supported an ideology of African American empowerment that had as one of its primary goals the assertion of citizenship, including demands for the basic rights that had been denied them prior to the war. The returning veterans had a taste of what freedom was really like abroad and decided to claim these rights within their communities. This new mentality was met with strong opposition from whites who refused to acknowledge change. The idea of miscegenation, communal living, and equal pay refuted the belief of black inferiority and threatened the ideology of white superiority. With more and more outbreaks of violence, African Americans defended themselves and their rights as citizens, sparking the most violent and deadliest summer in history. The summer of 1919 was known as the “Red Summer,” when over two dozen race riots spread throughout the country. That summer marked the decline of an era known for social activism and political reform, namely the “Progressive Era.” This era witnessed over thirty years of so-called rioting, during which African Americans were terrorized by whites who wanted to maintain their racial dominance and make sure African Americans remained second class citizens. White violence was considered the “ultimate weapon” to protect white economic advantage, political privilege, and social status by denying blacks true democracy and equal opportunity” (Rucker and Upton 2007, xxxiii).
At the end of slavery, African Americans began migrating from the South looking for an opportunity to create a better life for themselves. Reconstruction attempted to provide equality to African American after years of servitude, but critics such as William Dunning felt African Americans were “ignorant and unfit […] and thrust in political office” (Brinkley 2010, 349). As flawed as Reconstruction was, scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois believed, “reconstruction was an effort by freed blacks (and their white allies) to create a more democratic society in the south” (Brinkley 2010, 349). Whites, noticing their towns and neighborhoods swelling to disproportionate numbers began to recognize an abrupt social change, immediately forcing them to share a level of equality with a race of people whom they deemed inferior. In a desperate attempt to avoid these changes, whites retaliated with the use of violence, as the victims of lynching began to sharply increase. “Since the Civil War, white violence has erupted whenever African Americans sought to advance beyond freedom to first class citizenship” (Walter Rucker 2007, xxxiii). Arjun Appadurai, a social-cultural anthropologist, calls this the “fear of small numbers.” “Small Numbers represent a tiny obstacle between majority and totality or total plurality” (Appadurai 2006, 53). African Americans slowly migrated into these all white towns and over time, as their numbers grew, their presence began to change the dynamic of these communities, supposedly threatening the livelihood of white residents. With the cultures of their communities changing, whites began to find ways to retain their supremacy, to maintain their control over the perceived threat of small numbers infiltrating their towns and neighborhoods.

Often, a single incident, such as the accusation of rape, theft, murder, or even an inappropriate action was the catalyst leading to events that would later be labeled race
riots. These events allowed whites to mask their imagined fear of alleged “Negro Rule,” which ultimately threatened their white supremacy. Social philosopher, Arne Johan Vetlesen dubs this scenario “the logic of generic attribution” (Lancaster, 37). In this situation, a group is blamed for the action of one individual leading to the entire group facing the ultimate consequence, expulsion, which could come in various forms.

Violence, or the threat thereof, was often used to accomplish the mob’s goal: removal of African Americans from predominantly white towns or communities. Once these so-called race riots were complete, many of the towns remained predominantly white, turning them into Sundown Towns. “A Sundown Town is any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus ‘all white’ on purpose. […] Nigger, Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on You” was often posted on the side of the road leading into these towns (Loewen 2006, 4). The signs were used to ensure that African Americans left these towns before sundown. Though many of these signs have been removed, these towns still exist across the United States. James Loewen, an American sociologist and historian, wrote the first book analyzing these towns and their creation. He argues that whites, struggling with the notion that African Americans were seeking equality, began holding on tighter to their ideology of white superiority, and it is this doctrine of white superiority, not African American efforts for equality that has led to violence. Many of the violent outbreaks between African Americans and whites have been labeled incorrectly as race riots giving the reader a false sense that two opposing racial groups are at odds, when in actuality it was white mobs that were terrorizing African Americans. The phenomenon of Sundown Towns was on the rise as race relations in the United States began to decline. Between 1890 and 1930, the United
States saw a surge of these towns, which coincided with the forced removal of African Americans from certain cities and regions, making it imperative to properly categorize these so-called race riots as what they really were: attempts at racial cleansing.

Furthermore, the concept of a “cleansing” is a phenomenon that has existed within and beyond the border of the United States for centuries before the United Nations coined the term in the aftermath of incidents during the fall of Yugoslavia. Andrew Bell-Fialkoff’s definition of a cleansing embodies the subject matter perfectly, stating that a cleansing “can be understood as the expulsion of an undesirable population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these.” It also could “be applied to many other kinds of groups, such as those characterized by,” “race or class” (Bell-Fialkoff, 1). A cleansing is often the precursor to genocide, but it should not be confused with it because it does not have to result in the total extermination of a particular group, focusing instead on just the removal of a particular group, from a particular place. By comparison, a race riot can be defined as an outbreak of violence between two racial groups. Throughout the Progressive Era and shortly thereafter, African Americans refused to be active participants in such outbreaks; instead, they opted to flee, leaving behind all of their worldly possessions while others after a period of time returned. These two definitions vary in many different ways, but the key variant is the word “expulsion,” which is significant in an ethnic cleansing as well as in a racial cleansing.

In the United States, the term racial cleansing did not exist until Elliot Jaspin decided to modify the term “ethnic cleansing” in his book, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: the Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America*. In 1993, the United Nations deemed
the cleansing in Yugoslavia “as the elimination by the ethnic group exerting control over a given territory of members of other ethnic groups” (Jaspin, 13). With the concept of racial cleansing going virtually unnoticed in the United States, Jaspin’s book was the first to analyze ten of the most extreme cases of racial cleansings of African Americans in the United States. Many of the incidents in Jaspin’s book revolved around a non-white person being accused of committing a crime or around some form of labor dispute. These incidents led to violent events that often resulted in the removal of the entire African American population from these towns. Jaspin used four criteria in order to analyze some of the most heinous acts of racial cleansing against African Americans in the United States: the cleansing had to be countywide; it had to occur suddenly; it had to be documented through a form of contemporary account; and, most importantly, it had to be successful. As Jaspin has stated: “I had some pretty strict criteria because I was trying to build an airtight case for the existence of cleansings” (Jaspin, Interview of Buried in the Bitter Waters 2015).

For some, it is hard to fathom that a riot could be compared to a racial cleansing, but the dismay may reflect our failed evolution as a society. It is expected that over time, a society will grow, adapt, and certain levels of intolerance will dissipate due to its evolution. In the case of racism and bigotry, we have failed to realize how these things have held us back, preventing us from evolving into a more united and cohesive nation. In recent decades, non-violence, with its focus on peaceful protesting has brought citizens of all races, ages, nationalities, and genders together to take action against the injustices of society. Race plays a key role in instigating these massive movements. Many riots of our time are sparked due to “the racial disparities in our criminal justice system” with the
belief that African Americans “feel like their government is particularly targeting them” (Altman and Drehle 2014, 25). This notion is not hard to believe with America’s history of unfair treatment toward African Americans. Many race riots during and slightly after the Progressive Era were allowed to escalate due to the government’s failure to intervene when these events erupted, therefore preventing African Americans from seeking assistance from those chosen to protect them because they “reflected the latent and open racism of a city that was as much southern in its culture as it was nation in its function” (Schirmer and Finzsch 1998, 190).

Incidents like those in Ferguson may not have resulted in a full-fledged race riot, but it too, was racially motivated and exudes the same components that make race riots and racial cleansings possible. The landscape surrounding riots at the turn of the twentieth century is no longer our landscape, but there are elements that connect the phenomena of racial cleansings then and race riots today, making them easily comparable. Still, important differences remain. Although some race riots and cleansings share some similarities “there are reasons that racial cleansings should not automatically be dropped under the same category of race riots” (Lancaster 2014, 7). Most importantly, the outcome, once complete, often resulted in white residents returning to their homes, while the “doughnut effect,” simulated the outwardly movement of African Americans from the core of the cleansing to surrounding communities. The doughnut effect often “reshaped the urban-suburban landscape. […] Once prosperous cities became impoverished, mostly black cores surrounded by affluent white suburban peripheries” (Rucker and Upton 2007, li). The influx of African Americans into these communities was critical in the formation of “black ghettos.”
The doughnut effect created by racial cleansing could be compared to the phenomenon of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s. During this time whites left the city for the suburbs to escape an influx of African Americans moving into their communities. For whites, the phenomenon of the white flight, shifted the white population from the center to the outer ring with populations moving from “inner suburbs to the outer suburbs in search of newer, larger or more affordable houses” (Boyle 1992). The difference between the two phenomena; whites did not limit themselves to moving from the core to surrounding neighborhoods, but at times, moved away completely. The result of the doughnut effect and white flight were in many cases the same, the formation of black ghettos.

Political Scientist Ann Collins, the author of *All Hell Broke Loose: American Race Riots from the Progressive Era through World War II*, examines the blatant attack on black bodies during this time period. Collins describes “the race riots of this era as rational, extralegal, relatively short eruptions of white-on-black violence aimed at influencing social change” (Collins 2012, xvi). Collins recognizes the attempt to change the culture of these white communities but fails to label these events properly, grouping them in her book as pogroms and race riots. The significance of her research is to be found in the three elements she uses to create a generative framework for these events to take place, listing them as: structural factors, cultural framing and precipitating events. In some cases, it is easy to group these events under one umbrella, but for others, it is much more difficult. H. Leon Prather, for instance, is not so absolute in the manner in which these events should be labeled. In his book, *We Have Taken A City*, Prather realizes that events surrounding the 1898 massacre of African Americans in Wilmington, North
Carolina, should not be classified as a race riot because they were “largely one sided: a white massacre of defenseless blacks with a macabre mixture of carnage and carnival.” He suggests that “social scientists need a new term for what has been called a race riot” (S. H. Leon Prather, 11). It is my belief that these events should be considered racial cleansings.

The purpose of this thesis is to reclassify many so-called race riots at the turn of the twentieth century as racial cleansings. It is my hope that this might provide insight into some of the issues that continue to plague us as a society, such as the lack of generational wealth in the black community; sub-standard living conditions, health care, and school systems; and, most of all, the inability to be seen as viable candidates in the workforce based on preexisting stereotypes. Using Nixon’s theory of slow violence, we are able to see the “slow and long lasting” effects of these so-called race riots, which were really a form of racial cleansing (Nixon 2013, 6). This thesis also argues that it is important to recognize the systematic exploitation of African Americans due to their lack of representation in the political arena. For the victims of racial cleansings, the reclassification suggested by this work might also provide closure to a tumultuous era in their family’s history, exonerating them from any guilt sustained in their lives.

In many towns at the turn of the twentieth century there was a noticeable growth of middle-class African Americans communities, thriving and creating wealth for themselves and their families. Their removal and their loss of possessions has created a financial void in today’s black community. Upon leaving, their homes were robbed and their properties were seized and sold to white residents. One of the major effects of these expulsions was the inability “to pass land resources to their generations-thereby
perpetuating such lack of socioeconomic resources over many decades to the present day and thereby reinforcing certain white-racist depictions of impoverished black individuals and families in the age-old white racial frame” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 19). This has helped to perpetuate the stereotype that black people are not hard working and ambitious due to their place in society. These issues are some of the reasons why so-called race riots during the Progressive Era and shortly thereafter need to be reexamined in order to be classified for what they really were: racial cleansings. Recognizing these so-called race riots as racial cleansings will allow us as Jack Schneider has stated, to better “understand each other” (Schneider 2). Examining these events could also explain how many cities in the United States have become inept socially due to their lack of diversity.

In Officer Wilson’s testimony after the shooting death of Michael Brown he describes Brown as a “soulless behemoth who was ‘almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad’” (Board 2014, 3). His statement reflects the racist perception of African Americans as soulless, black brutes, as barbaric savages, which has been prolific throughout the course of our nation’s history. Rhetoric like Wilson’s sentiments have reflected many views throughout history which implied that “the Negro, not being human, could have no soul” (Burns 1948, 22). These fantastic theories were advanced to justify the enslavement of the blacks. “It was maintained that whites and blacks were of different species” (Burns 1948, 22). Officer Wilson who grew up in a predominantly white community is a product of many neighborhoods where the lack of diversity often affects his perception, and often results in misconceptions about African Americans. This lack of culture gives citizens a false understanding of those outside of
their environment, but, these issues have a better chance of reconciliation with the amalgamation of diversity into their culture.

Every year more and more survivors of so-called race riots during the Progressive Era will fade away, leaving behind a void in the lives of their relatives. Interpreting so-called race riots as racial cleansings will allow those complicit in the crimes to be punished in hopes of these events never happening again. Reclassifying these events will also exonerate African Americans from their complicity in the outcomes resulting from these so-called riots. Many of the survivors live in fear “unbeknownst even to them in some cases, affecting their health, minds, and bodies as they continue to heal wounds that keep them in a persisting cycle of white imposed victimization” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 4). This feeling and apprehension is passed down through the generations preventing many African Americans from breaking the cycle of fear. These events also provide an argument for compensation outside of the argument related to slavery. Our past, present, and future could be greatly enhanced by understanding the nature of these events, which might begin to change many of the country’s social ills, hopefully preventing events similar to Ferguson from reoccurring.

The repercussions of these racial cleansings have had long term effects on our society. In chapter two, I look at the history of racial cleansings, analyzing the inception of the term and how it relates to the more widely known phenomenon of genocide. Outside of the United States cleansings are often categorized and defined with reference to ethnicity, but with the construct of race weighing heavily on our society, based as it is on the distinctions determined by skin color, it is necessary to replace the word “ethnicity” with “race.” I explore differences between the terminologies of ethnic and
racial cleansing in this chapter. The inferiority attributed to those of a darker hue has perpetuated laws and stereotypes used to prevent the upward mobility of people of color, further allowing whites to maintain their level of white supremacy. Understanding this threat to white supremacy will create an understanding of how racial cleansings, under the guise of race riots, were allowed to go unnoticed throughout the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Understanding the ideology behind their creation will allow us to compare cleansings outside of the United States with the so-called race riots within our borders, proving that they are one in the same.

In chapter three I examine examples of the racial cleansings that took place within the borders of the United States. This research shared some of the same criteria used by Jaspin to label these events as racial cleansings. The events within these towns or communities had to occur suddenly, taking place over the course of a few days. “The cleansing had to be countywide; it had to be documented through some kind of contemporary account” (Jaspin, Buried in the Bitter Waters 2007, 6). Jaspin’s foundation provided great insight into the phenomenon of racial cleansings in the United States, but whereas Jaspin used a broad, countywide approach, I have attempted to look at the event of racial cleansing at a micro level, examining communities within cities that experienced a form of forced removal of African Americans. The racial cleansing had to result in a mass exodus of the black community beginning, during, or shortly thereafter the incident taking place, but it did not have to be permanent. Finally, and most importantly, I suggest that an ultimatum to leave these towns by whites was often not necessary to pressure African Americans to leave.
A rise in white terrorism resulted in great property loss as well as the destruction of African Americans’ livelihoods. Jaspin commented on this particular aspect, saying that “a mob may or may not issue an ultimatum but if someone is burning your home and lynching your neighbors, do you really need a letter telling you, you must leave?” (Jaspin, Interview of Buried in the Bitter Waters 2015) Jaspin began his research based on his curiosity about the absence of people of color in various areas around the country. This thesis takes his research a step further, by identifying racial cleansings that have fallen under the umbrella of race riots. In doing so, this research proves that African Americans have been disenfranchised systematically, resulting in many of the socioeconomic ills of the present. In addition, this research provides the descendants of these cleansing an argument for compensation from the local or state authorities who failed to provide protection to everyone within their borders. It is also important to note that the cleansing that took place within the United States exuded many characteristics of the global cleansings mentioned in chapter one. In order to maintain the integrity of the era, I reverted to using terminology of the time, such as “Negro,” to refer to blacks or African Americans in the recap of the cleansings in Tulsa and Wilmington. 3

In chapter four, I examine the climate of fear perpetuated by racial cleansings. I look at the rise of lynchings and mob violence coupled with the local and state authorities’ failure to defend their citizens and the long lasting consequences. These elements made the choice to migrate the only alternative to death. This chapter also examines the element that contributed to the use of force as well as the white community’s desire to use violence rather than to adapt to societal changes. The actions

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3 Terms such as “Negro” and “Octoroon” were used to maintain the integrity of the Era throughout this paper.
taken by the mob also created a generation of kids who were desensitized to the violence perpetrated against, and the ill treatment of, black communities.

In chapter five, I explore the outcomes and effects of these racial cleansings. I examine the toll that has been taken on the victims, but I also recount the pursuit of some form of compensation, looking specifically at the trial outcomes of the so-called race riots in Tulsa and Rosewood. They are two similar events, but they resulted in two different legal outcomes. I also show why it may be impossible to replicate the legal success of the victims of Rosewood.

To conclude, I look at the long term effects these cleansings have had on our society and suggest that they might help us to understand how incidents in Ferguson, Cleveland, South Carolina, and New York are not only possible today, but should perhaps be expected. These historical events have plagued us over the past one hundred years and have prevented our society from moving forward in terms of race relations. Why does race remain a prevalent divide in our society today, if not also for the foreseeable future? Why aren’t we doing more to confront it?
II. Fear of Small Numbers

“We have been here before—and failed to learn the lessons” – Alex Altman

The murder of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 was the catalyst for 9 days of rioting by the citizens of Ferguson, Missouri. As citizens across the United States took to the streets peacefully, pockets of rioting erupted throughout the city with the words “hands up, don’t shoot” echoing across the world. This slogan originated through witness testimony of Brown’s last words and gesture before being fatally wounded that day, but Michael Brown was not the first to say such a thing before being killed in a hail of bullets. The killing of unarmed black men have transcended time, but under different circumstances. Fourteen miles away, nearly one hundred years ago across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis, at least six African Americans met a similar fate as witness Paul Anderson recounts the horrifying scene of the so-called 1917 race riot: “I think every one I saw had both hands above his head begging for mercy,” “my God don’t kill me, white man” (Rudwick 1964, 46). During the so-called riot on July 2, 1917, the local coroner estimated that thirty-nine African Americans were killed compared to only nine whites. The NAACP estimated that the death toll of African Americans was somewhere between one and two hundred. It is hard to give an accurate account of these facts because “many of the corpses were not recovered” (Rudwick 1964, 50). During these incidents, many victims were refused medical treatment by angry aggressors, further complicating efforts to arrive at an accurate account of the impact of the violence. Those victims who

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4 In an article in The Nation, Alex Altman recognized the events in Ferguson, Missouri, as a reoccurring trend in our society. “Ferguson is no longer just the name of a township. It has become a stern lesson in the value of public trust—the city learned too late that the well was dry—and a painfully familiar one” (Altman and Drehle 2014).
managed to escape feared seeking medical assistance at hospitals due to the mob’s wrath. In many scenarios, massive, anonymous gravesites were created to cover up the extent of the violence. These obstacles prevented relatives from proving that family members were killed in these events, further supporting later, spurious claims that these scenarios were not so extreme as commonly thought. In truth, though, African Americans were randomly murdered throughout these three days on the streets of downtown East St. Louis, all while mobs of whites exclaimed, in no uncertain terms, “colored people should leave East St. Louis immediately and permanently” (Rudwick 1964, 44). Some people living in the vicinity hid outside of the troubled area waiting for the violence to end while others crossed the Mississippi river escaping to St Louis.

At the early part of the twentieth century, East St Louis was experiencing a boom of railroad production and rail-related employment. People from all over clamored to the growing city in hopes of benefiting from the growing industry. With African Americans migrating from the South to take advantage of this opportunity, East St Louis experienced a form of “residential ‘invasion’” (Rudwick 1964, 4). Initially, white residents did not have an issue with the influx of new residents, “as long as they remained a relatively small minority” (Rudwick 1964, 6). But over the course of ten years the Negro population as it was called then, tripled, and with it, the erroneous belief that the Republican Party was shipping Negroes in to increase their chances of stealing elections. Rumors began to populate the local papers about Negroes flooding East St. Louis by train as well as growing incidents of crime supposedly connected to the rise of Negro population. Whites viewed the stories of Negro colonization, fostered by the Republican Party as a “threat to the very foundation of the democratic process” (Rudwick 1964, 15).
Neighborhood associations formed initially to maintain racial harmony, in an attempt to prevent their communities from turning into others that were plagued by riots, began to speak out against Negroes occupying their towns. This “‘is a white man’s part of town… forever restricted’ against Negroes” was based on the idea that Negroes “were driving the white man out of locality” (Rudwick 1964, 24). With rumors looming over the increase in crime, colonization, and the threat of African Americans trying to incite a race war, whites began to believe that “violence was the only effective method to frighten Negroes away from East St. Louis” (Rudwick 1964, 26).

Domestic terrorism, murder, and removal are not elements of a race riot as the title of Rudwick’s book, Race Riot at East St. Louis would lead you to believe, but of a racial cleansing, a term Elliot Jaspin has formulated, drawing upon the ethnic cleansings in Yugoslavia in the early nineteen-nineties. Jaspin’s book, Buried in the Bitter Waters: the Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America discusses the most extreme cases of racial cleansing in American history but fails to analyze the events surrounding race riots such as the one in East St. Louis in 1917. Nevertheless, Jaspin’s narrow approach to the topic has created the foundation for new avenues to be explored. This research steps away from the obvious scenarios of white citizens asking African Americans to leave. Instead, it focuses on how white citizens used various other tactics, including spreading false rumors about Negro domination through politics and jobs, concocting stories about a supposed threat to white womanhood, and fostering fear of small numbers, all of which to incite the racial violence sparked by these so-called race riots. Under the guise of whites’ need to defend themselves or of the ideology of a mutual disdain on the part of blacks and whites, these events have slipped through the cracks of history.
To be clear, a race riot could be defined as a “public outbreak of violence between two racial groups in a community” (Oxford Dictionaries) but a racial cleansing “can be understood as the expulsion of an undesirable population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these” (Bell-Fialkoff 1996, 1). At the turn of the century, roughly between 1890 and 1930, many events similar to the violence in East St. Louis occurred, and almost all of them have been labeled “race riots” when in actuality, they were cleansings based solely on race. To understand the gravity of a cleansing, it is necessary to create an historical timeline of the term “ethnic-cleansing” dating back to the term from which it derives, namely genocide. Raphael Lemkin’s attempt to identify crimes against humanity opened the door for the term “cleansing” to be created, as a stage that could eventually lead to genocide. This term is essential because it allows one to place a name on something that has characteristics of, but is not yet genocide in and of itself.

This thesis shifts the paradigm of research into cleansings by replacing the word *ethnic cleansing*, which often pertains to instances outside of the United States, with *racial cleansing*, which has existed within the United States for over a century but only under the guise of so-called “race riots.” “In ‘ethnic cleansing’ the allegedly threatened purity of the *ethnic* identity constituted the ideological focus,” whereas with racial cleansing “the perpetrator group focuses its identificatory attention upon the race identity of a target group” (Vetlessen 2005, 158).

In 1993, five lawyers, as part of the UN commission committee investigating atrocities in the Balkans, came up with the term of *ethnic cleansing*, which they described as a precursor to genocide. They found that ethnic cleansing was the rendering of “an
area wholly homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given
groups’” (Power 2002, 483). Ethnic cleansing centered on the notion of nationalism,
devastated the former Yugoslavia territories in the nineties. Before his death in 1980,
Josip Tito, the former President of Yugoslavia, attempted to create a form of government
for all of the people of Yugoslavia to follow. With no predecessors, Tito wanted to
implement a rotating presidency that would prevent the various nations within
Yugoslavia from having total power over others. Two models which could describe the
emergence of nationalism within Yugoslavia were the “freezer model” and the “incubator
model”\(^5\). The “freezer model” forced all of the nation’s groups to unify as Yugoslavs,
thus putting old national allegiances on ice. Out of the freezer, thought, the old
nationalisms returned: Tito’s death sparked intergroup fighting similar to grievances after
World War II. In the “incubator model” groups became resentful of each other due to
Tito’s goal of balancing power amongst them. Tito refused for one group to be superior
over the other, so he often gave, and removed benefits as he saw fit to maintain balance
until his death. In this, he effectively incubated nationalist grievances against each other.

Before 1991, Yugoslavia encompassed six republics. Serbia and Croatia stood at
the forefront as the largest groups in the region. With Yugoslavia an already unstable
government, the two largest national groups, the Croats and Serbs attempted to solidify
themselves as the sole leaders of the state, but they failed to agree on how the country
should be led. As a primary target of the Serbs, the Muslims were left defenseless with no
parent protector, which forced them to rely on the international community for support.
The Serbs believed they should rule the country solely while the Croatians wanted to
maintain Tito’s ideology of ruling united. This difference of opinion was not the first

\(^5\) (Naimark 2001, 146)
time the two groups failed to agree on the direction of the country. Between World War I and World War II, their failure to work together further weakened the government, a lack of unity that allowed “the incursion of Italian fascists and the Third Reich into the Balkans at the onset of World War II,” destroying “the fragile country” (Naimark 2001, 140).

Throughout these conflicts, western diplomats and commentators witnessing the rise of violence during the Balkan wars referred to the “atrocities taking place in Bosnia as the discharge of mutual ‘ancient hatreds’” (Vetlesen 2005, 152). This may be an easy conclusion by those looking at this from the surface level, but scholars disagree with the notion that many of the issues in Yugoslavia derive from “ancient hatreds” that somehow transcend time. Instead, they point out that “many of these ‘nations’ were relatively recent creations with little or no pre-modern history of entrenched struggle with their neighbors” (Naimark 2001, 141). According to American historian Norman Naimark, “the widespread images in both contemporary Yugoslavia and the West of an age-old conflict between the Turks and Serbs, Muslims and Orthodox, need considerable revision” (Naimark 2001, 141). In this research, I believe past relationships do play a major role in shaping groups social or political views but should not be categorized as an “ancient hatred.” For groups to come to a resolution there must be a mutual agreement to work toward building a stable relationship. Unfortunately, that can be very difficult because it forces one to ignore one’s history regardless of how positive or negative their past may be.

Therefore, in the scenario of racial cleansings within the United States under the guise of race riots, towns that experienced these cleansings often reported a mutual
respect for their neighbor, either black or white before these events began, even though they shared a turbulent past. Aside from this and the institution of slavery, African Americans have endured a lifetime of oppressive behaviors in the United States, such as Jim Crow, and more recently, mass incarceration. These matters have had, over time, drastic effects on the black community, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. Currently, black men and women are facing a disproportionate level of racism, coming in the form of mass incarceration. As Michelle Alexander explains it in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, “the current stereotypes of black men as aggressive, unruly predators can be traced to this period, when whites feared that an angry mass of black men might rise up and attack them or rape their women” (Alexander 2012, 28). That stereotype is what makes this research important, and a careful analysis will allow us to address the issues that have plagued this country in hopes of preventing events like Tulsa and Ferguson from happening again. There is an overwhelming level of intolerance that continues to transcend time, similarly to the events in the Yugoslavia territories.

In recent history, four incidents in the eighties drove Yugoslavia into war and ethnic cleansing in 1991. The first incident was the Kosovar Albanians’ attempt to increase control over their own affairs, which was met with Serbian violence. The second incident was the growing hostility between the Serbs and the Croats/Slovenes. The third incident was the growing consciousness of Bosnian Muslims. The Muslim elite wanted to have a greater impact on the policies and governing practices of the republics that alienated the Croats and Serbs. The fourth and most important incident was the growing sense of isolation and hostility toward the Serbs from their neighbors. Fear of a growing nationalism among the various republics seemed to jeopardize the Serbian livelihood and
nation. The Serbian fear of a threat to their livelihood and nation were perpetuated by the “Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts” in 1986. The document was drafted by a committee of Serbian writers addressing the need for a change in the ideology of the Serbian nation, prompting a move toward a more patriotic stance. “The memorandum was more important for what it represented than for what it actually said” (Naimark 2001, 149). One thing the document did address was the notion that “not all national groups were equal” (Naimark 2001, 149). The growing autonomy of other republics threatened “Serb minorities everywhere with virtual extinction,” forcing them to take action (Vetlessen 2005, 150). The cleansings began slowly with massacres taking place in towns across the country, often sparked by the rumor that Croats and Muslims were plotting to exterminate the Serbs within these communities. The fear of becoming the “other,” in other words, led the Serbs to become the aggressor, shifting the blame of the outbreak of violence over the course of their history onto the current populations of Croats and Muslims. Cleansings are often prompted by the fear of losing control over others due to a growth or change in population. As the numbers of the “other” grows, so does the autonomy. This seemingly allows the “other” to stray away from the paternalistic control of the dominating group.

While the Serbs were the majority across the region, they internalized the notion that other groups’ desires for autonomy would threaten their livelihood. This perceived threat led to attempts at the ethnic cleansing of any non-Serbian resident across the entire region, which raises an important question, why terrorize the supposed weak? Why this fear of small pockets of people who are different from oneself?? If others do not have the political or military power to physically impose their will, why feel threatened? Michael
Sells in his book *The Bridge Portrayed* addresses this perceived belief of the Serbian people when he states, “the present aggressor portrays himself as the original victim, and the present victim as the original aggressor” (Vetlessen 2005, 152). Serbians saw themselves as the victims, taking on what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai labels in his book *Fear of Small Numbers* a predatory identity. The ideology spawned from groups who lived in close proximity to one another but shared different ways of life, in which one group “turns predatory by mobilizing an understanding of itself as a threatened majority” (Appadurai 2006, 51). Predatory identities do not realize that they need others to survive. This relationship is analogous to Hegel’s “Master-Slave” relationship. In Orlando Patterson’s book, *Slavery and Social Death*, he examines and defines the various forms of the master-slave relationship. In the master-slave relationship there must be “total power from the master and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave” (Patterson 1982, 1). The master also preys on the idea that the slave needs him to function. Ironically, however, being a master is not defined without the existence of a slave. The slave is treated like a child guided through life with the promise that, if he remains in his social and economic place, all is well. The slave is also led to believe that without the guidance of his master, the slave would succumb to a world of lawlessness. The tyrannical master takes on the paternalistic father figure in order to guide the slave down the right path, and as a result, complete freedom is viewed as a hindrance to the oppressed slave’s growth. This belief was especially true from the perspective of the Serbs who viewed themselves as the protectors over all the other groups in the region. These groups seeking autonomy would force the Serbs to relinquish the need to continue to view themselves as the protectors, further removing a certain level of power that
comes from this paternalistic ideology. This loss of power would eventually threaten the identity of the country.

The looming fear also raised the possibility that, over time the Serbs could possibly become the minority, forced to follow the rules of the “other.” Such an imposing fear leads to only one alternative, the elimination or removal of this minority, thus eradicating any possibility that the majority would ever be ousted from their perch of superiority. “Predatory identities are products of situations in which the idea of a national peoplehood is successfully reduced to the principle of ethnic singularity, so that the existence of even the smallest minority within national boundaries is seen as an intolerable deficit in the purity of the national whole” (Appadurai 2006, 53). The further existence of this minority group also prevents the possibility of a total ethnically pure nation. Paradoxically, the smaller the number, the greater the fear, which serves to incite a greater sense of anger toward the minority group because it ultimately represents a defect, a stain on their overall existence, further preventing their wholeness.

One of the greatest examples of this threat to total purity and wholeness could be seen in the anti-Semitism campaigns carried out by the Nazi Party, which ultimately resulted in the Holocaust. What initially begins as an ethnic cleansing, slowly transforms itself into genocide, and the result, in this instance, was the deaths of over six million Jewish people. “Small numbers represent a tiny obstacle between majority and totality or total purity” (Appadurai 2006, 53). Small numbers can turn into big numbers very quickly. The ideology of an ethnically pure nation-state exacerbated Nazi Germany’s national campaign against the Jews. What made this campaign so powerful was the fact that the Nazis not only had to push through an anti-Semitic agenda, but reinforce the fact
that the Jews were non-Germans. This ultimately created the “us” versus “them” ideology. The media played a huge part in spreading this anti-Semitism rhetoric. Scholars now recognize the anti-Semitism campaign as the fusion of “scientific racism and its accompanying eugenic and demographic ideas to earlier forms of religious and social stereotyping” (Appadurai 2006, 54).

As devastating as the Holocaust was, it was not the first example of an ethnic cleansing turning into a genocide in our world’s history. In 1908, Armenian radicals began to join forces with the Young Turks, who wanted to reform and revive the country under a new Ottoman constitution. The Young Turks were made up of junior officers in the army and medical students known as the Committee of Union Progress. The Armenian radicals aided the Young Turks in eliminating counterrevolutionary movements in 1909, removing Abdul Hamid from power and putting a more amenable ruler, Mehmed Reshad, in control. Influenced by a new generation, Turkish nationalism moved to the forefront of this new movement. Even with this new ideology the Young Turks maintained “the traditional multinational empire ruled by Islamic elite with a new dedication to Turkish nationalism” (Naimark 2001, 25). This multinational ideology combined Ottomanism with Pan Islamism and Pan Turanism, ideals that were reflected within the three leaders of the ruling elite, Djemal Pasha, Enver Pasha, and Mehmed Talaat Pasha. Talaat Pasha was viewed as the most dangerous of the three and the key initiator of the Armenian genocide.

After the Albanian rebellion of 1911-12, and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, the triumvirate ended the notion of equality of all citizens and focused on the “domination of Turks in the Ottoman state and society” (Naimark 2001, 26). The ultranationalist Ittihad
wing returned to power after the coup of 1913, and in collaboration with the Young Turks, formulated greater ties with Turkic allies against “the Russians and their Christian allies, including the Armenians” (Naimark 2001, 26). The Greeks and the Armenians made up the largest population of Christians who opposed the Ottoman rule after the Balkan Wars. Though many of the Armenians fought previously on the side of the Ottoman Empire, they were now viewed as traitors because some had sided with the Russians and were therefore targeted for expulsion. Without planning, Talaat explained to an Ittihad party congress that it was necessary “to remove the Armenians from all scenes of the war and the neighborhood of the railways” “[…] to avoid the possibility of our army being caught between two fires” (Naimark 2001, 29). Police went door to door arresting those who did not turn over weapons or failed to identify those who had firearms. Slowly but surely, groups of Armenians were removed from towns and sent on death marches to undisclosed locations. Many died of disease, starvation, and exhaustion. Others were rounded up and murdered, and thrown into mass graves. Some were willing to become concubines or convert to avoid extermination or expulsion while others attempted to bribe soldiers for safe passage, but were often robbed of their remaining belongings and left to a similar fate as the rest of the Armenian people. The removal and extermination of the Armenians at the turn of the century sparked the campaign, years later of Rafael Lemkin to create the word “genocide,” which eventually led to the creation of the related term, “ethnic cleansing.”

At an early age, Lemkin was absorbed by the mass killings of people throughout history. He was “appalled by the frequency of the evil” and “set out to play a role in ending the destruction of ethnic groups” (Power 2002, 20). To further his knowledge, he
often asked his mother to recount stories about these atrocities. By the time Lemkin was twenty-one, he came across the story of Soghomon Tehlirian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide of 1915. Tehlirian murdered Mehmed Talaat Pasha, the former minister of the interior, one of the triumvirates of the Young Turks in Germany in 1921. When Tehlirian was arrested, Lemkin could not understand how one man could be detained for murder while prior to his death Talaat would never serve trial for the mass extermination of the Armenian people. Lemkin’s mother told him, “once the state became determined to wipe out an ethnic or religious group, the police and citizenry became the accomplices and not the guardians of human life” (Power 2002, 20). This propelled Lemkin toward putting an end to crimes of this nature.

When Lemkin heard about the pogroms taking place in the new Soviet Union, he began to draft an international law that would force governments to unite and to prosecute those who committed crimes against humanity. After years of trying to come up with the perfect legal and moral term, Lemkin finally settled on the word *genocide*. Lemkin fashioned the term from the Greek word *genos*, meaning “‘race’ or ‘tribe’, and the Latin term for killing, *cide*” (Vetlessen 2005, 155). Genocide could be defined as an act “committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily harm or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction” (Vetlessen 2005, 155). The major difference between *genocide* and *ethnic cleansing* is the word “whole” in the definition. The goal of genocide is to totally destroy a particular group. Under the auspices of genocide this could come in two phases, the “destruction of the national pattern of the
oppressed group” and the “imposition of the nation pattern of the oppressor” (Vetlessen 2005, 155). Ethnic cleansing, on the other hand, focuses on the removal of a particular group. This removal can come in various forms but it does not necessarily consist of the physical destruction, “in whole or part” as defined by genocide.

When the Genocide Convention, on which Lemkin worked for decades, was brought finally before the United Nations, “it was considered low priority in the United States, and international law offered few rewards to the most powerful nation on earth” to seek convictions of those who committed these crimes (Power 2002, 69). Critics were also concerned that the United States would be seen as complicit in committing genocide against those within its own borders. The extermination of the Native Americans, along with the institution of slavery and the era of Jim Crow, were reasons enough for many to disagree with the ratification of the genocide convention. Supporters wanted to separate America’s history from elements under the genocide convention. “The core American objections to the treaty, of course, had little to do with the text,” according to Samantha Power. The problem was that “if the United States ratified the pact, senators worried they would thus authorize outsiders to poke around in the internal affairs of the United States” (Power 2002, 69). The United States’ unsettling history on race and its fear of being found guilty of failing to protect its own citizens helped to prolong the ratification of the genocide convention until President Ronald Reagan ratified it in 1988, almost forty years after the United Nations had done so. The United States’ delay in ratifying the genocide convention demonstrates apathy toward those who are different from the white founding fathers, who proclaimed America to be based on the hallowed idea of liberty and justice for all.
Eunice Carter, spokeswoman for the National Council of Negro Women, spoke on behalf of women and children, some of the principal victims of genocide, addressed concerns over African American’s possible charge of genocide against the United States government by stating “the lynching of an individual or of several individuals has no relation” to genocide and black people should not confuse the two issues. (Power 2002, 67). The senate subcommittee of 1950, which first took up the issue, also clarified her point by stating that “genocide does not apply to lynching, race riots or any form of segregation” (Power 2002, 68). Once the genocide convention was passed by the United Nations, though, this did not prevent prominent African American activists, such as William Patterson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, from attempting to pass a petition on behalf of the mistreatment of African Americans over the course of United States’ history, using genocide as a key point of reference. During the ratification of the genocide convention, Lemkin addressed the concerns of African Americans regarding the charge of genocide by stating, “in the negro problem the intent is to pressure the group on a different level of existence, but not to destroy it” (Power 2002, 67). As stated earlier “genocide does not apply to lynching and race riots or any form of segregation” (Power 2002, 68). During this time, preventing the use of the word Genocide to label the atrocities against African Americans was plausible, but the term cleansing allows for a reexamination of some of the events that have plagued African Americans over the course of United States’ history.

While Lemkin was campaigning on behalf of people around the world facing genocide and ethnic cleansing, events in the United States exuding characteristics of attempted cleansings based on race had gone largely unnoticed for decades. At the turn of
the century, the United States witnessed two waves of immigration by Europeans seeking a better life for themselves within its borders. The first wave took place at the turn of the century, and the second was after World War I. The migrations allowed over 50 million people into the country, further perpetuating the United States’ complex history of race relations, adding additional layers to an already complex topic. Separated drastically by ethnicity, the new migrants were often grouped into the category of whiteness nonetheless. Whereas ethnicity in other countries divided many people from their own neighbors even within their communities, this notion became irrelevant to a certain extent in the United States. Even if their status within these borders would be determined by their ethnicity, they were still elevated over African Americans because they now lived in a “society in which privilege and pigmentation were closely correlated” (Fredrickson and Foner 2004, 1). Ethnicity is defined as “a group with common cultural characteristics as opposed to one associated with physical traits” (Fredrickson and Foner 2004, 4). Race, on the other hand, was a “socially constructed” term used to distinguish between “human groups or communities that differ in visible physical characteristics or putative ancestry are innate and unchangeable” (Fredrickson and Foner 2004, 2). The term race was used to differentiate European whites from the Native Americans who resided here during colonization and the Africans they enslaved to work the land. The concept of race therefore differs greatly from ethnicity because race is an imposed label placed on a group against its will and “serves to rationalize oppression and discrimination” (Fredrickson and Foner 2004, 2). Race is very different from the concept of ethnicity, which can be imposed on a group from within, in many cases worn as a badge of honor. Ethnicity could also be used to separate individuals from a racial group because of the
negative stigma placed on that race. Such differences helped to create a caste system used to divide “racial groups that were inextricably involved in the same culture, society, economy, and legal system” (Altman and Drehle 2014). They also helped to create a union of whiteness which polarized communities against the racial “other”, sparking racial violence leading into the twentieth century.

As the United States transitioned from the post-Civil War era and into Reconstruction, the white population was facing a dilemma unlike anything this country had ever experienced. Slavery had entailed the disenfranchisement of the black population throughout the course of their existence, but now, as the United States approached the era of Reconstruction, the black population was being provided with basic elements of citizenship. Unfortunately, the continued objection from the South and the Compromise of 1877 removed the last federal troops from the South, therefore, ending Reconstruction after twelve years. Short-lived, the era of Reconstruction changed the dynamic of society, infuriating whites who for as long as they could remember enjoyed an elevated status over people they deemed inferior. “There African slave trade came into being, and there can be no doubt that this trade developed enormously the white man’s pride and his contempt for the Negro” (Burns 1948, 21).

The ability to vote, seek equal wages, own property, and move freely throughout the country created a fear that threatened whites’ livelihood and the identity of the country. The industrial revolution created a substantial amount of new jobs, but with the migration of African Americans throughout the country to cities and urban centers, the unemployment rate was still staggering and jobs were few. Lower class whites were affected the most because now they had to compete with former slaves for jobs that used
to be solely theirs. Poor whites were also plagued by the fact that white elites often preferred black labor for having a more industrious work ethic. Racial disdain grew as African Americans were hired to replace white workers seeking higher wages. W.J. Cash shared the sentiments of many white elites in the South regarding an all-white labor force, “Give them special treatment? We shall do nothing of the kind. We shall give them the same terms we give the Negro” [and] “carry over into our dealings with them very much of the attitude toward labor fixed by slavery” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 26).

Though African Americans were legally entitled to the same rights as whites, whites were “compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage” (Fredrickson, The Historical Construction of Race and Citizenship in the United States 2003, 6). This psychological wage did not always translate to the psyche of white elites who viewed the arrival of African Americans to many towns in the United States as a blessing because it increased the labor pool and decreased wages.

Jobs were not the only thing whites had to compete with African Americans over at the turn of the century. African Americans’ right to suffrage and the ability to hold office provided opportunities to change the political dynamic of many towns as well. “Just thirty-three years out of slavery, blacks had been accustomed to poverty and did not carry their economic status across racial lines. But now, whites were in competition with them for survival” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 26). The ability to provide African Americans with a semblance of equality during the Reconstruction Era overall, “failed in its first serious effort to resolve its oldest and deepest social problem-the problem of race” (Brinkley 2010, 363).
The Progressive Era (1890-1920) was supposed to be a time period of social and political change, but for whom? For an era founded on social and political activism, there were two schools of thought. One ideology, Social Darwinism, believed that African Americans could not elevate themselves because they were racially inferior, while the newer Progressives believed that African Americans as well as the entire country could benefit by addressing the social ills of the country. Many intellectuals responded to William Graham Sumner’s belief that all men competed “in an economic contest bound to be won by those with the largest endowment of business and financial virtues” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 243). As a proponent of Social Darwinism, many equated Sumner’s views with widespread stereotypes about blacks and whites, even though Sumner himself “rarely addressed racial issues directly” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 244). Herbert Spencer was the architect of Social Darwinism; his belief in the survival of the fittest, based on his adaptation of Darwin’s theory of evolution, was “warmly accepted by the people of European stock who saw no reason to doubt that they were the fittest of all” (Burns 1948, 23). Along similar lines, geologist Joseph LeConte viewed the relationship between blacks and whites in comparable terms. In 1892, he exemplified this when he published his views on race in the South. The theory of social Darwinism allowed whites to believe that African Americans “failed to make anything of their freedom,” grounded on their views of “black inferiority in the irrefutable laws of nature” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 244). LeConte stated that “weaker varieties like the Negro, a race ‘still in childhood that had not yet learned to walk alone in the paths of civilisation,’ were destined either to ‘extinction [or] relegation to a subordinate place in the economy of nature’” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 244). The views of Spencer and LeConte exemplified the views of many
white people transitioning from the era of slavery into an era that would supposedly allow African Americans to claim the same privileges that had separated the races for so many years. As a key element to the Progressive Era, many Progressives rejected the form of Social Darwinism maintained by LeConte and Spencer. The new Progressives “were people who believed that the problems society faced (poverty, violence, greed, racism, class warfare) could best be addressed by providing good education, a safe environment, and an efficient workplace” (Department of History at The George Washington). They believed that society as a whole could benefit and be productive, regardless of race, if society’s issues were addressed.

The year 1892 also witnessed the infamous train ride of Homer Adolph Plessy on the Louisiana Railway. Plessy, who was one-eighth Negro, bought a first class ticket and sat in the white section of the train, which the railroad itself did not object to because it saved them from adding additional accommodations for Negro riders. When the conductor asked him to move, Plessy refused sparking the trial that would question “the equal but separate accommodations for black and whites traveling within the state” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 235). Trains traveling within southern states were forced to follow states’ segregation laws. Plessy lost his case but decided to appeal his case in front of the Supreme Court which also ruled against Plessy seven to one. Justice Henry Billings Brown affirmed that the state had the right to pass Jim Crow laws as long as they did not conflict with constitutional laws that interfered with the federal government. Brown also made it clear that it was not the government’s role to enforce communal living among the races. This was a social prejudice that would have to be overcome voluntarily. *Plessy v. Ferguson* allowed southern states to adopt the ideology of the
separation of races, reinforcing Jim Crow laws. “Separate but equal was nothing more than a subterfuge, enabling whites to distance themselves from blacks” (Adams and Sanders 2003, 238). While Jim Crow laws were dominant in the South, it did not prevent the Northern states from exuding their own form of prejudicial rules upon the Negro. This form of legal separation prompted “white generated fear through racial violence and terror” “[and] was used to routinely keep African Americans under social, economic, and political control” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 3).

Throughout the course of history, there have always been societies governed by a dominant group. Over time, some of these societies have incorporated small pockets of people that share some defining characteristic or principle, be it ethnic, religious, or something else entirely. In attempts to maintain dominance over these “others,” violence has erupted leading to ethnic cleansings and in some extreme cases, genocide. Arjun Appadurai’s ideology of the “other” has been encapsulated in his notion of the “fear of small numbers.” This concept has often been associated with the events that have taken place outside of the United States, but unfortunately, this term should be used to describe the dynamics of many communities during the Post-Reconstruction Era. To reiterate, outside of the United States at the turn of the century, these events would have led to the extermination of an entire group, but as Lemkin clarified, the goal was never to totally remove African Americans, but to maintain their status in this country as second class citizens. Maintaining a certain amount of African Americans at that time allowed for whites to maintain their livelihood. The circumstances for maintaining a racial status may coincide with the ongoing debate over policing our borders as the influx of people coming into the country illegally, once again, jeopardizes white supremacy.
Analyzing the motives for these cleansings are essential when attempting to label these events as racial cleansings. It is also the reason why the cleansings at the turn of the century should not be considered as race riots, for they were not random outbreaks between two racial groups, but orchestrated attacks on vulnerable individuals in order to maintain white supremacy. The fear of small numbers reflected a growing panic at the turn of the century, which led to the cleansings of various black towns due to African American migration and African Americans’ growing autonomy. This autonomy was reflected in the competition for jobs, the increased value of the black vote, and a growing number of self-sufficient communities. No longer would African Americans rely on whites to make decisions for them or rely on them for opportunities. Furthermore, African Americans’ growing autonomy was reflected in towns such as Greenwood, in Oklahoma and Brooklyn, in North Carolina. Whites’ fear of losing their supremacy steadily grew in proportion with the swelling number of blacks who flocked to these areas. How would the older generation maintain and pass along their white supremacy to a generation born out of slavery without the racial cues slavery implied? In the next chapter, I examine how those fears led to the destruction of these towns through a growing pattern of racial violence that entrenched the United States at the turn of the century.
III. A Threat More Imagined Than Real

“The Time will come… when the white people will rise as one man and demand emigration or extermination” – Thomas P. Gibbs, 1889 (Georgia Senate)\(^6\)

As the United States welcomed the beginning of a new century in 1900, many communities around the country saw a shift in their social dynamic. African Americans were migrating in large numbers, shedding the physical chains of slavery and the mental oppression it embodied, as they moved from the South to urban areas in the North and Midwest. Unable to avoid the perception their skin color generated, African Americans began to realize they could improve their livelihood by participating in politics, which resulted in a rising interest in Black Nationalism. Recognizing there is a power in numbers, whites began to devise a plan that would continue to enslave African Americans and allow them to maintain their white superiority. When and where Jim Crow laws did not work white populations often relied on violence to disenfranchise black communities, examples of which can be seen in the prevalence of “so-called” race riots during the Progressive Era. This chapter provides examples of two of the most extreme cases of the “race riots” phenomenon, one in a Wilmington, North Carolina, and the other in Tulsa, Oklahoma. These events are indicative to the events that took place in Yugoslavia, Bosnia, and Germany eventually leading to the ultimate crime against humanity, genocide. Therefore, it is necessary to shed the term race riot and relabel these phenomena as what they actually were, racial cleansings.

Both the event in Wilmington and the event in Tulsa have left many sociologists searching for a new term when attempting to describe such acts of violence toward

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\(^6\) Thomas P. Gibbs, a state senator and physician, spoke in favor of repealing the state’s emigrant-agent law at the Georgia State debate in 1889. Gibbs believed blacks were unfit for laboring (Cohen 1991, 236).
African Americans during this era. The political shift in Wilmington prompted white elites to use fear of Negro domination to stage a coup that would return Democrats to office in 1898. Two decades later, in Tulsa in 1921, one of the most historically successful black towns was destroyed, supposedly in the name of preserving white womanhood. In actuality, African Americans began to defy the racial etiquette of servitude as they began to become more affluent and outspoken in their pursuit of a more equal citizenship. The Progressive Era was theoretically an era focused on social change and activism as well as geared toward eliminating political corruption. Many Progressives believed that many of society’s social issues could be addressed by providing better education, a safer workplace, and better living conditions. Many Americans embraced this new era with anticipation and optimism, but for African Americans, the era represented something different. “This unholy trinity of race, rape, and the rope set off many confrontations in the South defined as the era of oppression” (Hirsch 2002, 51). For African Americans, this era was marred with an increase in racialized violence leading to the most lynchings in United States’ history. The meaning of the Progressive Era passed the American Negro by, and in many cases, led many of them to lose all the hope that came out of the Reconstruction era.

“WHITES KILL NEGROES AND SEIZE THE CITY OF WILMINGTON,” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 9) was the headline of the New York Herald after violence and murder erupted in the town of Wilmington, North Carolina. Wilmington at the turn of the century, like many towns during this time, was witnessing an explosion of black migration driven by Reconstruction. In 1897, Wilmington’s predominantly all black neighborhood, Brooklyn, was becoming a mecca for its Negro residents. Negro
businesses were booming, and Brooklyn was home to an increasingly large black middle class. In many cases, the institution of slavery prepared blacks at the time with the ability to thrive in trades like barbering and shoemaking. Lacking resources, Blacks had to learn to make ends meet with very little, this allowed them to thrive in a variety of trades. Whites were forced to frequent many of these businesses, which generated additional revenue for the town and for black business owners.

Toward the end of Reconstruction, unemployment was on the rise, displacing both blacks and whites, but in Wilmington, white employers favored black labor, which highlighted the “acute unemployment within white ranks,” further generating “racial tensions” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 25). Over time, whites began to become envious of the explosion of wealth, and on occasion “night riders would drive away a prosperous black farmer by burning him out” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 24). As the desire for black labor increased, whites began to notice their role in society decrease. Blacks were in high demand and had high “wage rates as brick masons, carpenters, and mechanic at a time when many unskilled whites could not find work of any kind” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 174). As poor whites saw their role in society decrease and their livelihood threatened, they became susceptible to the first of many steps in a planned cleansing of Wilmington by a group that came to be called the Secret Nine. Furnifold M. Simmons, chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee implemented the terms “‘Negro rule’ and ‘white supremacy’ as watchwords in the effort to return the Democrats to power” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 20). He hoped to “enlighten” poor whites about their deteriorating role in society, which was meant to enrage poor whites into taking action against the black town of Brooklyn and lead to the inevitable removal of black residents.
Adding to the dilemma, President William McKinley had appointed twice as many Negroes to office in comparison to previous administrations. This further inflamed white animosity toward Negroes. John Campbell Dancy was chosen as the collector of customs at the Port of Wilmington. Dancy’s appointment to this position outraged many whites; especially because Dancy, a non-native, replaced a white democrat, and because his salary was much higher than most wealthy whites at the time. Aside from this rare appointment, Wilmington had a growing affluent black middle class. Thomas C. Miller, a real estate agent, auctioneer, and pawnbroker was one of the premiere businessmen. Although he was envied for owning various pieces of real estate, he was despised because many whites owed him money. To add to the various black businesses, Wilmington was one of the few cities in the country to have a black newspaper, owned by the Manly brothers: Alexander, Laurin and Frank. Alexander L. Manly was a progressive and militant “octoroon” who would later be at the center of the so-called race riot to hit Wilmington in 1898. The visibility of Wilmington’s black middle class became apparent to many whites within the city.

Brooklyn was similar to many predominantly black towns around the country, with good race relations and a few white businesses within the community. As the population grew, all the money generated was recycled within the community. Though Brooklyn back then looked like a place of harmony, with some whites living within the community, “black violence was there for sure—not against whites, but against blacks,” “it appeared Wilmington whites feared violence from blacks in 1898” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 22). Brooklyn was not without its ills. Violence existed, but it did not leave the black community. However, whites, remembering the days of the violent slave revolts,
felt it was only a matter of time before the violence would swing toward them. This was especially felt by the few whites who lived in the predominantly black town of Brooklyn.

The end of the Reconstruction Era brought about the Jim Crow Era, and with it, laws that disfranchised Negroes slowly took hold of the South. Wilmington was rare and exuded a boost in the Negro presence in politics. “There were three blacks on the ten-member Board of Aldermen, which elected the mayor” as well as one black on the “powerful five constituent Board of Audit and Finance” (S. H. Leon Prather 2006, 22). Negroes were also making their presence known in the voting booth, heavily supporting Republican candidates. With the growing Negro population outnumbering the whites overwhelmingly, it was evident that the black vote would be crucial in deciding the future of the city. This was an important factor leading to the so-called race riot of 1898. Blacks’ ability to vote provided another element to perpetuating the white hostilities, for people thirty years prior were forced to adhere to the paternalism of whites now had the opportunity at least to determine local policy. Blacks now had the ability to implement laws that would change the dynamic of the city; the white ruling class could now be ruled by former slaves.

Black’s participation in government began to be perceived as a form of rebellion, and “such a rebellion sounded the call for white mobilization as clearly as any slave revolt” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 102). The previous elections of 1894 and 1896 saw a united Republican/Fusion ticket that transformed the dynamic of the city since it had undercut “some of the state’s business-friendly regulations, legislation, and privileges; raised taxes; expanded support for public schools; and guaranteed suffrage to all men through an 1896 statute that ended local control of voter registration” (Strobel 2003,
Former mayor S. H. Fishblate attempted to unite the Democratic party in preparation for the 1898 election when he told his supporters, “‘white or negro rule’, he stressed the need for both factions’ ‘to pull together and work in harmony for the rule of the white man’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 38). Democrats knew that whoever controlled Wilmington, controlled the future of a city destined to be financially successful, and that meant “white supremacy cannot be made permanent until the irresponsible Negro vote is removed” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 178). In an effort to reclaim white superiority, a group of whites called the “Secret Nine” began to gather secretly almost a year prior leading up to the November 10, 1898 election. The group was made up of nine of the most influential men in the city. They thought it was in their best interest to stage a coup d’état during the election to replace what they felt was a Negro-driven Republican legislature with a white Democratic one: “‘The Negro began to feel that he was in the saddle,’ ‘he steered the white men when and where he pleased.’ ‘Conditions in Wilmington were going from bad to worse,’ ‘the city had to be turned over to the blacks or taken by the whites’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 52). Needing a catalyst, the Secret Nine decided to use “bigotry and economics as motivation” to trigger their campaign to reclaim the city from the Republicans (S. H. Leon Prather, 99).

In an attempt to incite anger and outrage with the fallacy of “Negro domination,” the Secret Nine used the media to portray all Negroes as criminals. Led by Josephus Daniels the editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, local papers constantly reported crimes by Negroes no matter how minute, using inflammatory terminology to incite racist feelings, foreshadowing the direction the city would go if the black community was allowed to exercise fully its right to vote. Newspapers reported, for example, how “an
elderly man of character was seen being pushed into the street by two ‘raw-buck niggers’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 52). The papers also made sure to report crimes of little white girls being assaulted by young men: “‘two negro boys’ ‘ran after my daughter, with their coats turned over their heads to conceal their identity, and attempted to take hold of her’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 53). Reports of these events even reached newspapers in New York, forcing many people to question the state of the city of Wilmington. Few of those who were familiar with the dynamic of Southern race relations would believe that many of these events were taking place unabated. Nevertheless, they did propel white citizens to arm themselves against these so-called “savages.” The onslaught of the news reports would reach epic proportions with the republishing of the Alexander Manly’s editorial responding to Rebecca Felton’s, “Woman on the Farm” speech of 1897.

In 1897, newspaper headlines raged with reports of black men allegedly raping white women. Headlines read: “In Hot Pursuit. Clayton County Men Will Lynch. The Negro Is Caught,” and “Hunting Him to Death. Several Counties are Up in Arms to Avenge the Crime of Negro Oscar Smith,” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 143). Headlines such as these fostered outrage amongst the white community and allowed the reader to assume that blacks were guilty of these crimes without knowing the full details of the story. With very few women reporters, Rebecca Latimore Felton, a prominent white Georgia commentator, became the voice of women’s issues across the South. At the annual Georgia State Agricultural Society meeting in August 1897, Felton gave a speech in which she addressed women’s issues by focusing on improved education. She also outlined her endorsement of the lynching of “lustful black brutes” for the crime of rape, a
growing misconception due to miscegenation. Felton struck fear into white women all around the country and enraged white men against the perceived threat and uncontrollable lust of these “black brutes” who supposedly preyed on the innocence of white women. She also wrote articles that called for vigilante action if religion or the courts could not staunch the crimes of these individuals, claiming “if it needs lynching to protect woman’s dearest possession from the ravaging human beasts—then I say lynch, a thousand times a week if necessary” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 71). Felton placed a large part of the blame on white men who she believed had “too much ‘love’ for the black man… and not enough love for the white woman” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 150). In the months leading to the election, the media, which would relay and echo Felton’s claims, would prove to be a catalyst in instigating racial tensions in Wilmington. These methods were also used to incite emotions among the Serbs leading to the cleansing of the Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia almost a century later.

In August of 1898, almost a year after Felton’s “Woman on the Farm Speech,” Alexander Manly published a rebuttal to her essay. Manly was the grandson of former governor Charles Manly and took offense to these comments possibly because of his background. Manly agreed with a lot of what Felton had to say about women’s rights, but the local newspapers only republished part of his comments, omitting a large portion of his remarks that actually agreed with Felton. Manly’s article disputed the number of rapes Felton suggested were perpetrated by Negroes. He also questioned her Christian morality, questioning her elevation of one race over another. Manly criticized white men for their double standard toward miscegenation: “‘tell your men,’ ‘that it is not worse for a black man to be intimate with a white woman than for a white man to be intimate with a
colored woman”” (Strobel 2003, 434). Manly wanted to shed light on all the years white men have had relations with black women, through means of rape or intimacy. Manly believed black men should not be denied of the same right to be intimate with white women.

Manly introduced the possibility that white women of class could be attracted to the so-called “Black Burly Brute” infuriated whites across the country. The idea that a white woman of good standing would be attracted to a black man was the spark needed to enrage whites to take action. These were bold statements by a Negro at the time and further perpetuated a fear of Negro domination. The Secret Nine knew comments like Manly’s would enrage whites, especially in light of Felton’s claim that white men failed “to put a sheltering arm about innocence and virtue,” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 149). It was a planned attempt to insight animosity toward blacks in order to remove them and their vote. The ideas of this era constantly questioned white men’s manhood and, with their livelihood threatened, violence often became the only option to staunch these claims and reaffirm white supremacy. Once the so-called riots were over, the New York Literary Digest attempted to place blame on Manly’s article, but “the black man was obviously the scapegoat and the need to protect the white woman was the excuse for Southerners to commit acts of violence” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 74). One of Wilmington’s Light Infantry troops would notice at the height of the riots, “business men were at present” “[…] holding a big meeting to take steps to run the mayor and some prominent Negroes out of town” (S. H. Leon Prather, 107).

Tensions were high in the weeks leading up to the November election. In October, a massive rally was held in Fayetteville, the largest ever in a push for the Democratic
Party. In attendance were the Redshirts, a Klan-like group who wore red shirts and were led by Mike Dowling, and the Rough Riders, veterans of the Spanish American war. For them, if intimidation was not enough, violence was the alternative. Also in attendance was Benjamin “Pitchfork” Tillman, a senator from South Carolina who often spoke out against the civil rights of blacks. He was invited to speak due to his views on white supremacy. Tillman incited the crowd’s response to the Manly article by posing the question, “Why didn’t you kill that damn nigger editor who wrote that?” “Send him to South Carolina and let him publish any such offensive stuff, and he will be killed” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 84). On October 24, another rally was scheduled and Alfred M. Waddell, an unemployed lawyer, was asked to speak. He appeared in Wilmington unexpectedly, but once the city was aware of his arrival he was ready to take the helm and lead the white citizens into this war against a supposed Negro domination. In his speech, he also expressed his outrage at the state of the city: “We are reduced to the pitiful necessity of choosing whether we will live under the domination of negroes led by a few unprincipled white men, and see the ruin of all that we hold dear, or prove ourselves worthy of the respect of mankind by restoring good government at all hazards and at every cost” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 89).

The night before the election, the Redshirts and Rough Riders were gearing up to prevent black voters from going to the polls. Waddell issued a proclamation to a cheering crowd that came to see him speak at the Opera House: “You are Anglo-Saxons. You are armed and prepared, and you will do your duty. Go to the polls tomorrow, and if you find the Negro out voting, tell him to leave the polls and if he refuses kill him, shoot him down in his tracks” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 102). The Democrats were willing to kill
anyone who stood between them and reclaiming their white supremacy. Negroes knew what the fury of the white residents would entail if they were caught at the polls, so many chose to stay home. The low black turnout helped ensure a victory for the Democratic Party. In preparation for the democratic victory the Wilmington Messenger, a local newspaper, published a story requesting all white men to attend a meeting the morning of the election. For this meeting a document called the “Wilmington Declaration of Independence” which “contemplated a government to be carried on by an enlightened people” was read before the crowd in attendance (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 108). The document consisted of eight resolutions, three of which stated: whites would own ninety percent of the property; jobs would be provided to white men previously occupied by Negroes; and finally, the Negro paper, the Daily Record, owned by Alexander Manly, would be destroyed and Manly forced out of town, never to return. “‘Many whites and blacks,’ ‘[…] including members of the Secret Nine’ ‘[…] knew that Manly left town earlier, but this element was needed to excite those in attendance to carry out the remainder of the plot’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 109). An analysis of the declaration was carried out by Hayumi Higuchi, who discovered that 351 of the 442 occupations, equal to “85 percent of these signers were members of the middle and upper classes,” giving a false sense that those who took part in deciding the fate of the Negroes in Brooklyn were predominantly of the white lower class (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 176).
percent of the property to be owned by whites and a larger percentage of jobs turned over to white residents, which could not happen with such a large population of blacks living in Wilmington, especially with a black community the size of Brooklyn supplying a large percentage of the labor force in the city.

That afternoon, thirty-two of the most prominent blacks in the community were asked to attend a meeting with the town’s wealthiest and most powerful white representatives. Cowering in fear, the Negro group listened intently to the proclamation issued by the whites. Given twelve hours to carry out the instructions, the two groups dispersed into the night. After careful thought, the prominent citizens of Brooklyn responded with a letter asking to be exonerated from the charge of seeing Manly removed from the city because they were not “authorized to act for him” and they did not “condone the obnoxious article that called forth your actions” but “in the interest of peace we will most willingly use our influence to have your wishes carried out” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 111). Unfortunately, the letter did not make it to the instructed parties in time for the deadline. A mob of Wilmington citizens varying in status united to answer the call of their leader, Alfred M. Waddell: “‘capitalists and laborers marched together. The lawyer and his clients were side by side’ and ‘men of business interest kept step with clerks’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 112).

Once the mob arrived at Manly’s paper, they burned it to the ground, and the fire department was instructed not to interfere. The gossip surrounding the press being burned sparked rumors of blacks assembling to confront the mob. As is often the case in many racial cleansings, there is often a rumor that circulates depicting blacks assembling to retaliate. These rumors are rarely confirmed. However, it is my belief that such rumors
are often necessary for whites to take the opportunity to kill blacks aimlessly without recourse. Such rumors are often the case in ethnic cleansings as well, as in the case of Muslims at the hands of the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, where the “aggressor portrays himself as the original victim, and the present victim as the original aggressor” (Vetlessen 2005, 152). In the scenario of Wilmington and in many others racial cleansings in the United States, whites were seen as justified in their retaliation under the notion that they were defending themselves. The press also concluded that whites did what was necessary under the circumstances, stating that the “whites had been forced to take drastic steps because of ‘outrageous abuses’ of power under ‘black domination,’” furthermore justifying the all-out assault of the Negro town of Brooklyn (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 115).

Whites began to assemble on every corner. Don McRae, a United States officer recently returned from the Spanish American War, was getting the Wilmington light infantry assembled when he was noticed wearing his U.S. uniform. McRae was immediately instructed to have someone else lead the group, moving him into the ranks because “white leaders did not want to get the federal government involved as it might lead to serious complications or make the whole Revolutionary plan miscarry” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 118). When a white officer asked a group of Negroes assembled to discuss what had happened at the Manly press, a shot rang out and hit one of the whites assembled in conjunction to the blacks. This sparked the immediate eruption of violence. Mobs of whites began killing unarmed Negro men at will. “Bands of whites, Rough Riders, and Redshirts moved into the Negro sections to ‘hunt niggers,’ some with the intent to ‘kill every nigger in sight’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 127). The light infantry,
whose job it was to staunch the violence, took part in it. In one case, orders were given to find a Negro named Halsey, and when they appeared at his door, his fearful daughter told him to run. Halsey was “shot down like a dog by armed soldiers, ostensibly sent to preserve the peace” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 125). Not only were adults involved, but also teenage boys were out in force searching and attacking blacks on their way home. By the time the violence subsided, nobody knew how many people had been killed. Bodies were found in various places around town, but it was difficult to know how many were actually killed in the assault. There were even rumors that bodies were being thrown into the Cape Fear River. In an interview with the town librarian, she “heard the river was full of bodies” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 134). Prather believes the interesting thing about oral history is that it “generally holds some germ of truth” but can never be confirmed because the people who witnessed these events often wanted to maintain some form of anonymity (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 134). There is no way to determine the true numerical account of how many died that day, and unfortunately “historians have unintentionally perpetuated the cover up by concentrating on newspapers explaining the Democrats story, of which no single one was trustworthy” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 133). This was typical for many accounts of racial cleansing. Those who lived to tell the stories were often those who participated in the crimes or those who agreed with the events.

What is undeniable is the fear that Negroes exhibited when they were hunted down by their attackers. Many refused to seek medical attention out of fear of being captured and killed. The injured preferred to tend to themselves or seek refuge until they could leave town. Some residents hid in the forest or swamps, afraid to light fires because
of possible detection. Once the violence subsided, they returned to their homes only to gather what little they could carry before immediately leaving. The Wilmington Light Infantry, the naval reserves, mobs of white men, three companies of state guard from Kinston, Clinton, and Maxton, and one hundred fifty men from the town of Fayetteville were used to keep watch over the whites who slept quietly in their beds. With rapid fire guns pointed at the town of Brooklyn, these units were able to lock down the black town, preventing anyone from crossing over into the white town. The city “was practically being run by the committee of twenty five,” with the city standing as a fortress; “if whites were expecting the blacks, they were disappointed” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 135).

Once the violence finally subsided, newly appointed Mayor Waddell attempted to restore order, but one order of business still remained: “banishment.” All the prominent men of color, as along with the whites who supported them, were rounded up and placed on a train leaving town. “‘A member of the ‘Secret Nine’ gave Taylor a list of prominent Republicans, both white and black’” to be permanently banished from Wilmington (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 139). People from around the city lined up to watch the trains take Negroes from their town, showering them with racial slurs. Frightened by the events that took place and the swift and prompt manner in which Negro jobs were taken from them, a mass migration followed. “‘A Black diaspora was at the center’ of the ‘heart of the racial massacres.’ There are several ways of forcing people to disperse, and racial violence is one way, ‘another way is to eliminate jobs’” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 147). This supposed race riot led to one of the greatest exoduses of African Americans in the history of the nation.
In an attempt to put this event into historical context, Prather searches for the right words to describe what took place in Wilmington at this time. He realizes that events like Wilmington should not be classified as race riots because they were “largely one sided: a white massacre of defenseless blacks with a macabre mixture of carnage and carnival” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 11). With the election approaching, blacks felt tension rising and attempted to buy weapons, but all “the merchants who stocked firearms were white and knew what was in the wind” therefore, “they refused to sell guns or powder to African Americans” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 28). This was also the case in Armenian genocides: “the policemen went door to door, harassing the Armenians, arresting them if they refused to turn over weapons” (Power 2002, 29). The residents had very few means to protect themselves from the onslaught of violence that enveloped their town. A black woman who wanted to remain anonymous in her letter to the president stated that “the Negroes in this town had no arms, (except pistols perhaps in some instances) with which to defend themselves from the attack of the lawless whites” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 156). The woman’s letter is evidence refuting the theory that what happened in Wilmington was a race riot. The attack on defenseless people resulting in the mass exodus of its residents further suggests that a relabeling of this event as a racial cleansing is in order. Indeed, Prather also suggests that “social scientists need a new term for what has been called a race riot” (S. H. Leon Prather, 11).

Prather’s book represents an extremely important contribution to the discourse surrounding the topic of reclassifying race riots and the events that shape them for a few reasons. At the turn of the century, the transition from slavery weighed heavily on whites, especially as they watched their former superiority slowly disappear. Wilmington’s black
town of Brooklyn defied the theory of Negro inferiority, further challenging whites’ belief in their racial superiority. The growing black population, coupled with this questioning of white dominance, also made the paternalism that was reinforced by slavery seem suspect. The fallacy behind the need to guide this inferior race’s every move was destroyed, and with it, the right to vote created a paradigm shift, possibly propelling whites into the category of the racial “other”. In a letter to President McKinley, Robert H. Bunting and John R. Melton, two exiled whites, wrote: “We the undersigned, were driven from Wilmington, N.C, our home for the reason, we were republican and stood up for the Republican Party” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 155). The political aspect was definitely a reason for their banishment, but more importantly, Bunting at the time was married to a light-skinned Negro woman, a recognizable offense in any Southern state at the time, while Melton, as chief of police, supposedly employed white and black men of “questionable character” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 50). At this time in the South, it was also an offense to have black men holding a form of dominion over whites publically.

At various points throughout the text, Prather sheds light on the victims of the events in Wilmington. With no prior knowledge of the role the Secret Nine played behind these events, many blacks wondered why they were being terrorized based on the actions of Alexander Manly. Some believed that “it was right to eject the Negro editor. That is all right but why should a whole city full of Negroes suffer for Manly when he was hundreds of miles away?” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 156). Social Philosopher Arne Vetlessen describes this scenario as an example of the logic of generic attribution. The entire black community in the eyes of the whites needed to be punished for the actions of Alexander
Manly. But it also provided an excuse to remove them under the guise that reducing their numbers would “make certain that African Americans would never again be a force in North Carolina politics,” which was an ongoing characteristic of the racial cleansings that took place during the Progressive Era (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 4).

A representative of the National Anti-Mob and Lynch Law Association compared the events in Wilmington to the massacre of the Armenians at the hands of the Turks stating, “The treatment of the Armenians by the Turks and the cruelties of the Spaniards is nothing compared to the willful murders at Wilmington, N.C.” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 158). The events in Armenia during this decade eventually led to the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Armenian people at the start of the twentieth century. The fact that the events in Wilmington could be compared to the violence against the Armenians speaks volumes about the extent of the violence in Wilmington.

What all the victims of these horrors had in common was the feeling of being abandoned by the government. In a letter to President McKinley, a black woman recounted the horrors and the violence the black community of Brooklyn endured. In her letter she pleaded for government intervention, subtly implying the careful planning necessary to carry out this attack, noting how, coincidentally, the violence began in the morning, right after most men went to work leaving their families at home. “Oh, to see how we are slaughtered, when our husbands go to work we do not look for their return” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 156). Overwhelmed by fear, she refused to sign her name, but what must be assumed about the author is that she was well-educated, possibly a teacher, due to her writing ability. By the end of her letter, she asked several questions. “Are we to die like rats in a trap? With no place to seek redress or to go with our grievances? Why
do you forsake the Negro who is not to blame for our being here? The Grand and Noble Nation who flies to the help of suffering humanity of another Nation and leave the Secessionist and born Rioters to slay us. I cannot sign my name and live. But every word of this is true” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 157). On the day of the election between eight in the morning and three in the afternoon, the entire plot was over, and there would be no recourse for the victims, for whom the President failed to provide any relief and the “federal government would pursue no further action in the affair” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 152). The final outcome of this event was the mass exodus of the black population, and with that, a large percentage of the black elite and businessmen who provided both a voice and leadership to the rest of the community.

As mentioned in my introduction, after the physical violence has passed of a race riot or racial cleansing has passed, there remains what is a kind of “slow violence,” the lasting effects of which are rarely attributed to the prior, catalyzing event in history. We can see as much in Wilmington. In 1971 during the integration of the Wilmington school system, violence erupted leading to “white vigilantes […] spraying bullets at black citizens” and black snipers firing “at police officers from rooftops downtown” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 4). In an attempt to suppress these acts of violence, a white minister called for a meeting of white and black parents in an attempt to find a resolution to the ongoing violence. For a large part of the meeting the black parents sat idle, refusing to participate until they made “references to ‘what happened’ and ‘what caused all this’” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 3). As the minister and white parents sat oblivious, one black mother referenced the events of 1898 and espoused the rumor “that the river was full of black bodies” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 4). For African Americans, the events of 1898
remain a time of horrific memory, but for whites, there has been an ongoing denial of the facts surrounding the so-called race riot. As the details of this event lay shrouded in denial, “school children learned to view the white crusade’s leaders as heroes, and civic boosters honored the white vigilantes by naming public parks, building, and streets after them” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, xv).

The false recollection of these events has “left whites defensive and blacks bitter, creating an explosive racial climate marked by fear, guilt, and misunderstanding” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, xv). However, false recollection has been the case as a rule when it comes to instances of racial violence throughout the course of United States history. As Hitler said in his notorious tutorial in 1939 to his military chiefs, on the history of the past, the “Victors write the history books” (Power 2002, 23). He was referring to the massacre of the Armenians. One white man, reflecting on the events of 1898, believed the act was “justifiable to preserve a woman’s virtue, a man’s honor, and our Christian Civilization…the late unpleasantness was simply a natural evolution, an evil preventing a much greater evil” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 89).

In 1919, Historian J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, who advised the state on its school textbooks, interpreted the events in Wilmington as “the dramatic conclusion of a historical conflict between the forces of good and evil” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 114). His depiction, which would be read by black and white students over the course of years, affirms the negative stereotype of blacks as evil, and the need to handle them with deadly force, not unlike today’s growing trend of black lives being taken at the hands of white officers. Misconceptions like these further prove that the rhetoric displayed by the media and public officials at that time created a depiction of the black body as an inferior being
which has transcended time. Negative depictions of African Americans should be removed, since the only crime African Americans were guilty of during the Progressive Era was the crime of agitating for equal rights.

After Reconstruction, African Americans attempted to take every advantage of the short-lived rights available to them as they created towns, created wealth, and took an active role in the political arena. These efforts are emblematic of a group who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps only to have their livelihood destroyed when they asserted their rights publicly. To further clarify, the violence that took place in Wilmington in 1898 should not be labeled as a “riot.” As the unidentified woman who wrote to McKinley stated, “There was not any rioting […] simply the strong slaying the weak” (Cecelski and Tyson 1998, 88). Aware of the circumstance, blacks attempted to acquire weapons for defense. However, once again, whites fearing what might come, refused to sell blacks weapons leaving them defenseless with old and outdated weapons, further providing insight into the state of blacks and refuting the possibility of aggression towards whites.

The events that took place in Wilmington before the turn of the century as well as those in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921 are just two examples of racial cleansing in the United States. Both events affirm Prather’s contention that there needs to be more analysis of the events, which has been gathered, perhaps incorrectly, under the generic category of race riots. As I have demonstrated, the dynamic surrounding Wilmington did not coincide with a race riot. The residents of Wilmington were defenseless and killed without pause. The events in Tulsa demonstrate characteristics similar to those in Wilmington some two decades earlier, but the outcome of the racial cleansing in Tulsa was slightly different,
with the predominantly black neighborhood of Greenwood, also known as the “Black Wall Street,” due to the wealth within its borders, being completely destroyed. With few places to go, a lack of resources, and thousands of citizens interned at detention camps, many of the victims were unable to reclaim what was lost on the night of June 1, 1921.

In 1880, settlers arrived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a barren cow town, which would one day be labeled the “Magic City” because it was believed that anyone’s dream could come true in its environs. Absent of oil, Tulsa became the hub to surrounding cities for transporting their goods. Postcards were used to promote this “Magic City” and soon it boasted a bustling urban center, especially after the creation of the city’s first skyscrapers, owned by Robert T. Daniels, a wealthy landowner from Miami who envisioned Tulsa as the “Promised Land.” Word traveled fast about the growing prosperity of Tulsa. People began to flock to the city with hopes of striking it rich. The show *Ben Hur* attempted to capitalize on the town’s growth, playing before massive crowds at the Tulsa opera house.

The city’s growth prompted Robert T. Daniels to open Tulsa’s first hotel in 1912. Wealth was not the only thing to flow in and around this growing town, though, as violence and vice began to take hold of the city, too. On Saturday nights, workers from the oil fields crowded into bars, clamoring for entertainment. Often there were fights, and occasionally murders, too, which is why the strip was eventually labeled, “Bloody First.” Sadly, the flow of money was not constant, with the wells at times drying up. This boom-or-bust town was also hampered by disease and poverty. Debates began to arise between the open-door advocates, who “believed in the city’s anything goes mores’ which

In 1890, eighty miles west of Tulsa, Edwin P. McCabe founded a town called Langston with the idea that Negroes could live in a place where they would be free from white oppression and the growing phenomenon of lynching. The area was perfect because it “offered warmer climate, abundant land, and a more tolerant Indian population” (Hirsch 2002, 32). McCabe’s belief in Black Nationalism coupled with the large migration of blacks, would force whites, he believed, to turn over this territory. Twenty nine cities spawned throughout the country based on a similar Black Nationalist model, but, unfortunately, McCabe’s dream was short lived. Recently relocated whites who, fearful of Negro domination and aware of Jim Crow laws, quickly responded to the possibilities of a Negro invasion, and they did so with deadly force: “Dead niggers make great fertilizer,” was one slogan of the time (Hirsch 2002, 33).

Nevertheless, the popularity of McCabe’s model among blacks demonstrated their desire to be self-sufficient away from the paternalism they endured during slavery. McCabe’s dream for Langston faded away, but it prompted O.W. Gurley to buy land and sell it to blacks when he arrived in Tulsa in 1899. At the time of his arrival, whites and blacks shared communal space within a rooming house on Cincinnati and Archer. Around the same time businessman J.B. Stradford moved to Tulsa after hearing about the economic opportunities available there. Stradford was a firm believer that “blacks had the best chance for success by pooling their resources, working together, and supporting one another’s businesses (Hirsch 2002, 30). Stradford as well as other whites and blacks began to buy all the surrounding land, selling it only to the blacks, thus creating Tulsa’s
first black business district. During this time, blacks primarily worked for whites because they were not allowed to work in the oil fields. The town slowly began to increase in size and revenue due to the high wages paid by whites and the frequent visitors who came to drink, gamble, and take part in other illegal activities. The whites did not realize the town’s growth because “whites were too busy making money to be worried about putting blacks in their place” (Hirsch 2002, 31). Whites were beginning to see that blacks had the ability to govern themselves and be successful, which contradicted beliefs about Negro inferiority, which became more evident as Oklahoma approached statehood and a conversation about who would control the decision-making process through the ballot ensued.

Oklahoma’s rapid growth allowed it to claim statehood in 1911, an achievement that forced whites to rethink the idea of a growing, prospering black town. The growing black population also began to affect whites politically. As was the case in Wilmington, North Carolina, local democrats in Tulsa thought “republican success means African domination” (Hirsch 2002, 34). The growing population of blacks with the ability to vote became the motivating factor in the so-called race riot. William H. Murray, “Alfalfa Bill,” was nominated to leader of the Democratic convention and sparked the rhetoric of the inferior Negro. During his inauguration speech he stressed the fact that Negroes should “‘be taught to remain in their place’ and ‘longed for the days when blacks understood their subservient roles.’ He also believed ‘the old-time ex-slave’ were ‘the salt of their race’” (Hirsch 2002, 34). His views were a strong reflection of the times. The year Oklahoma gained its statehood was the first year more blacks were lynched than whites. However, by 1912 there were more blacks living in Tulsa than whites prompting
a story in the *Tulsa Democrat* with the headline “Shall Tulsa be Muskogeeizzed,” referring to a predominantly black town in Oklahoma. The paper concluded: “Tulsa appears to be in danger of losing its prestige as the whitest town in Oklahoma” (Hirsch 2002, 38). The paper also reinforced the ideology inherent in the fear of small numbers, suggesting that whites may one day become the racial “other.”

In August 1916, a Republican proposed ordinance that eventually passed in Tulsa prevented more than one race from living on a street dominated by seventy-five percent of one racial group. Stradford, a Republican “Boss,” and the richest Negro in Tulsa, was outraged: “We are not bothering white Tulsans, so why are we being deprived of our rights?” This new law “made segregation mandatory instead of voluntary” (Hirsch 2002, 41). Stradford exuded characteristics of the “New Negro,” especially insofar as he was educated and outspoken. William H. Murray knew people like Stradford could change the political dynamic, but for blacks, segregation did have its benefits, as any money generated in Greenwood stayed deeply entrenched within the community. Policies like the ordinance that segregated the streets helped to shape the attitudes of the white population.

The racism that slowly immersed the community did not stop J.B. Stradford from achieving his dream, however. In 1918, he succeeded by opening a luxurious hotel. He wanted a hotel that could compete with the Hotel Tulsa, which had opened several years before. Stradford’s hotel at the time cost over fifty thousand dollars to build. The hotel was the crown jewel of Greenwood and was one of the best hotels in the country, often frequented by blacks and whites alike. For Stradford, this hotel represented “a monument of thrift, energy, and business tact of the race in Tulsa [and] to the race in the state of
Oklahoma” (Hirsch 2002, 50). Stradford wanted this hotel to be a symbol for his people as a race as well as himself as a successful black man. Unfortunately, Stradford’s dream would be shattered when the hotel was destroyed during one of the most infamous so-called race riots in this nation’s history. As blacks flocked to Tulsa with the aim to make money, white hatred slowly began to increase. To blacks, Greenwood represented “independence, pride and resilience”, but to whites it represented something else entirely (Hirsch 2002, 43).

On May 30, 1921, Memorial Day, Dick Rowland, an eighteen-year-old shoeshine boy known as “Diamond Dick” because of the diamond ring he wore, was on his way to deliver a pair of shoes to Reneges, a stylish men’s clothing store in the Drexel Building. The Drexel Building was unique because it was one of the few buildings downtown that housed bathrooms for Negroes. Reneges was located on the top floor, so Rowland got on the elevator operated by seventeen-year-old Sarah Page, who claimed she was working to earn enough money for college. Upon entering, Rowland tripped and in an attempt to brace his fall grabbed Page’s arm resulting in her screaming for help. When word got out, Rowland was immediately arrested. The news of this incident shot around town, instantaneously inciting anger among whites. By the evening, the local newspaper was already running the story.

At the turn of the twentieth century, it was normal for towns to invoke their own form of justice through the use of the rope, but this day was different, the black community was determined not to let this happen in their city.

Lynching was on the rise and often occurred in neighboring communities. Initially, after news of the events spread in Tulsa, a small group of white men went to
visit Rowland. They were immediately instructed to go home by Sheriff Willard McCullough. But when the black residents of Greenwood heard about whites trying to see Rowland, O.W. Gurley went to the courthouse. He was assured that no one was going to get to Rowland. As the night wore on, tensions became high as the streets became packed with citizens who were either leaving work or coming out of the local theaters. In Greenwood, Stradford addressed some of the residents: “the day a member of our group was ‘mobbed’ in Tulsa, the streets would be bathed in blood” (Hirsch 2002, 84).

Upon learning that a crowd was growing in front of the courthouse, black residents raced to the aid of Rowland. When the white citizens saw the group of blacks, they were surprised. The fact that Negroes would attempt to confront them only reinforced their belief that Negroes were uprising, sloughing off their former servitude. “For whites at the courthouse, the night was no longer about the chance to watch or participate in a lynching but about defending themselves against a potential black onslaught” (Hirsch 2002, 87). The blacks who came to the defense of Rowland were not threatening white residents but threatening their supremacy, and that provoked a violent response. Whites viewed violence as a necessary evil, one that would be used to teach blacks a lesson. It was used to prove that blacks were still, in their eyes, in a childlike state, one over which whites should continue to hold dominion.

When an elderly white man told one of the young black men at the courthouse to hand over his weapon, a struggle ensued. The gun went off, striking the white man, and then, an all-out assault on Greenwood began.

Soon after the initial assault, white residents robbed stores for their guns and ammunition. By 11:45 p.m., there were rumors that there was a “black insurrection, an
uprising, an invasion of downtown Tulsa by gun-toting, whiskey-drinking heathens bent on conquering its inhabitants” (Hirsch 2002, 92). Walter White, the assistant secretary to the NAACP at the time, who was passing for a white man in an attempt to report on the evolving trend of lynching in the South, was deputized and told by a fellow deputy “Go out and shoot any nigger you see and the law’ll be behind you” (Hirsch 2002, 93). In fact, the deputies became “the most dangerous part of the mob” (Hirsch 2002, 93). When the governor offered assistance, Police Chief John Gustafason assured him the local police department could handle the eruption of violence. By midnight, the National Guard responded and shortly thereafter another mob of one hundred fifty men were assembled in response to police inspector Major Daley’s call for assistance. The American Legion was also issued orders to guard areas of importance. The effort to protest against the possibility of Dick Rowland being lynched boomeranged due to the racism and prejudice, leading to the perception of war. In reports written by the “‘National Guard: one guardsman even referred to the blacks as the ‘enemy,’ as well as labeling the events as a ‘Negro uprising’” (Hirsch 2002, 94).

By 1:46 a.m., the Governor received a telegram requesting more assistance. By 5:00 a.m., reinforcements were boarding a train on their way to Tulsa. More rumors began to circulate that blacks were coming from the predominantly black town of Muskogee to help the Greenwood residents. Rather than attempting to preserve life, the police were often seen helping the mob. There was little “difference between the guard and the mob—both were in Greenwood to fight blacks” (Hirsch 2002, 103). As buildings burned and violence raged on throughout Greenwood, the fire department was ordered to ignore the request for assistance from blacks but “ordered to protect white-owned homes
and businesses located near the Negro district” (Madigan 2001, 144). The failure to protect the property of the black citizens demonstrates the city’s complicity in the destruction of the black community, denying blacks during this event equal protection of life and property under the law.

While some citizens of Greenwood escaped into the forest, others left the city before the violence erupted. Many residents who left Greenwood sought shelter in neighboring communities but were turned away because they “heard that Negroes had tried to take over Tulsa, and they met the refugees on the outskirts with rifles” (Madigan 2001, 192). Neighboring towns were often unwilling to take a chance to save blacks because of lingering stereotypes, which placed a larger burden on the towns who did in fact welcome these groups of refugees into their communities. Thousands of blacks left Greenwood for places like “Chicago, or New York, or San Francisco, or Los Angeles, or smaller towns in Oklahoma and Arkansas” (Madigan 2001, 193). But, for those who could not get away, eventually arrest awaited them. Residents who owned firearms were seen as the “‘bad nigger’ — were the most likely to be executed, but the invasion of Greenwood was less about the mass killing” (Hirsch 2002, 105). The whites in the town would not be satisfied with killing Negroes, or even with arresting them. “They would also try to destroy every vestige of black prosperity” (Madigan 2001, 119). Whites, seeing the growing affluence among blacks, had become envious and wanted to return them to their place of inferiority, their motivation for the attack. The attack was therefore to break their spirit, to destroy their desire to be more than what whites expected, which was subservient. In one account, a black man’s life was spared so he could go back to tell others “what happens when niggers hunt trouble,” referring to the attempt to prevent the
lyching of Dick Rowland (Hirsch 2002, 105). Homes left unoccupied were looted for
valuables, many exuding aspects of wealth that frequently escaped the possession of
white residents. Many even justified the theft of the black homes because of the
perceived inferiority: blacks did not deserve such wealth. The Mt. Zion church, a wonder
often envied by whites, was destroyed under rumors of weapons and ammunition being
housed in the basement. Residents seeking refuge in the church were gunned down when
a tripod-mounted rapid fire gun was used on the church destroying its foundation and
shattering its windows. As the assault of Greenwood continued residents even reported
planes firebombing parts of Greenwood. Walter White, the NAACP journalist, wrote
“Eight aeroplanes were employed to spy on the movements of the Negroes and according
to some were used in bombing the colored section” (Hirsch 2002, 106). Prior to the
terrorist attacks in 2001 this was the only time a U.S. city had been assaulted by planes.

The atmosphere of “total war” did not end there, as men, women, and children
tried to leave the city. Some of the men in these groups were captured and brought back
to town. Whites also went house to house looking for residents of Greenwood. Some
were “lined up on the street, their hands raised above their heads, and slowly marched out
of the district” (Hirsch 2002, 108). Whites watched in the streets as black residents were
arrested and marched to the detention centers. Some whites began to realize that if all the
blacks left there would be a labor shortage, so a pastor was asked to get his congregation
to stay and “convinced seventy-five members of his congregation to hike back into town,
where they were promptly marched to the detention camp at the fairgrounds and treated
like criminals or prisoners of war” (Madigan 2001, 193). As some blacks were detained,
others were smuggled out of the city by their white employees. Reminiscent of the blacks
escaping slavery, one couple fed groups of Negroes then allowed them to hide “in their basement during the day before they escaped toward the Osage hills under the cover of darkness” (Madigan 2001, 192). As jails began to fill, prisoners were taken to the fairgrounds and to the convention center. At one point there were over 6,000 people detained at the fairgrounds. Across three locations more than 8,000 blacks were being detained and treated as criminals, an act that would be a strong argument for the need for reparations based on similarities to World War II Japanese internment camps. In 1988, the survivors of the Japanese internment camps would be awarded reparations while on two different occasions the victims of Tulsa, who experienced comparable internment, would be denied. At the detention centers in Tulsa, prisoners were given identification cards with their information listed, so they could be returned to the camps if they escaped. Whites were then given the option of claiming or vouching for those who they either knew or employed. Claiming many of these residents was difficult because many whites never took the time to get to know the full names of their employees so there was a problem, according to the Tribune, because “‘there are dozens of ‘Annies’ and ‘Lizzies’ in darkeytown” (Hirsch 2002, 122).

In the days after the violence, former Tulsa Mayor Loyal J. Martin gave a speech denouncing the atrocities and admitted that the county was “legally liable for every dollar of the damage which was done. Other cities have had to pay the bill of race riots, and we shall have to do so, probably, because we have neglected our duty as citizens” (Madigan 2001, 225). Martin was commended for his bold statement but it resulted in no better treatment for the refugees. As donations poured in for assistance they were just as quickly turned away, placing the blame entirely on the citizens of Greenwood: “they would bear
the costs of restoration” (Madigan 2001, 227). Hopes and promises for the support of victims evaporated once attention turned elsewhere. This is true for many of the events surrounding so-called race riots. Due to their nature, they may receive short term media coverage but eventually succumb to other news that may take place at the time. In many cases, the lack of ongoing media coverage has prevented these issues from getting the attention necessary to bring about change.

The debate over how many people lost their lives in the violence lasted long after the so-called race-riot itself. Throughout the maelstrom, people recalled seeing carts of dead people being transported through town. Ruth Sigler, who was seven years old at the time, witnessed corpses “stacked haphazardly, as if whoever put them on the trucks had been in a hurry. Negro arms and legs bounced through the slats with each bump in the road” (Madigan 2001, 161). Many whites at the time also witnessed trucks dumping bodies into mass gravesites. Such stories analogous to the ethnic cleansings and genocides that took place in places like Bosnia and Rwanda, have gone largely unnoticed in the United States. The genocide in Turkey against the Armenians remains a “contested legacy, having been met by the Turkish authorities with 100 years of silence and denial” (Arango 2015). Such similarities suggest that events such as the Tulsa racial cleansing should no longer be grouped under the category of so-called race riots. It was far worse than a riot. In some cases, bodies were rushed to be buried, while others sat in white churches, never receiving proper burial services, but there are no accurate records. The debate over the number has fluctuated, at one point even producing “a comical headline in the World: ‘Riot Dead Decrease’” (Hirsch 2002, 118). The Bureau of Vital Statistics in the Oklahoma Department of Health settled the death toll at ten whites and twenty-six
blacks, a number far less than eyewitness accounts suggest. Days after the so-called riot, newspapers were constantly reporting different totals for the dead, but none of these accounts was substantiated. Blacks within the town estimated the death toll to be over two hundred, while most whites placed the death toll much lower than that. “O.T. Johnson, the head of the Salvation Army in Tulsa, said a minimum of 150 blacks were killed” (Hirsch 2002, 118). The exact number of deaths resulting from the attack on Greenwood may never be established, but what is known is that black deaths greatly surpassed white ones. Eugene Lorton, publisher of the World compared “Tulsa’s marauding whites with the German soldiers in Belgium. Members of the superior race… boastful of the fact, permitted themselves to deal their home community the foulest blow it has ever received in history” (Madigan 2001, 202).

What is generally not considered in the death toll statistics is the death of hundreds after the violence, a result of being forced into homelessness and joblessness. For months, those who stayed behind lived in tents with no floors. They were often stricken by disease, starvation, and the cold as fall and winter came and went. Donations poured in for the rejuvenation of the city of Tulsa, only no money was allocated for the help of rebuilding Greenwood. The men detained at various locations in Tulsa were also forced to help rebuild the area that they watched whites destroy. There would no longer be a black section in Tulsa but an area primed for real estate development due to the value of the area destroyed. It was estimated that 1.5 million dollars was lost in property damage alone, sixty-six percent of which was in residential areas. Greenwood residents filed riot-related claims, but in the end would be denied as the blame shifted to the Negro population for inciting the so-called riots that decimated the entire city.
The black residents of Greenwood, the actual victims, were portrayed in the newspapers as the cause for all the violence. Newspaper accounts depicted them as “drunken, divorced, lynched, or murderous” (Hirsch 2002, 123). Well after the violence had subsided, the fear of a Negro invasion of the city still lingered. Checkpoints were placed at the city limits by the city leaders who formed the Business Man’s Protective League, consisting of two hundred fifty men, tasked with patrolling the city against the imagined threat. The checkpoints used to monitor African Americans’ travel resemble modern day racial profiling: “They were instructed to halt any African American who looked suspicious and to fire if the individual refused to stop on command” (Hirsch 2002, 121). “No conflict had resulted in the liquidation of virtually an entire black community and the institutions that held it together. It was reminiscent of the pogroms of czarist Russia and an omen of ethnic cleansing” (Hirsch 2002, 120).

Throughout the course of events in Tulsa, the aggressors portrayed themselves as the victims when they were never a group that needed protecting. At a moment’s notice, the white residents were able to rally various sources to protect their lives and property while destroying the livelihood of their alleged enemy. It is clear that the blacks who went to the courthouse accepted the role of protectors, taking it upon themselves to defy the racial etiquette of the era in their attempt to prevent the lynching of Dick Rowland. In return, they were depicted as troublemakers, and were even compared by Lloyd Jones the editor of the local newspaper to “the Negro Gus from the Birth of a Nation, the blockbuster film endorsed six years before by President Wilson as well as the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court” (Madigan 2001, 215). Jones’ depiction of the blacks who went to the courthouse was totally inaccurate; they were not the ones who stirred the
emotions of the whites. The presence of the most prominent and educated blacks of Greenwood did not start or incite the violence at the courthouse, but Jones’ sensationalized headline in the newspaper’s early addition certainly did, “EXTRA! EXTRA! TO LYNCH NEGRO TONIGHT! READ ALL ABOUT IT!” (Madigan 2001, 70).

Tulsa witnessed not so much a riot but an attempted racial cleansing. James Hirsh’s book on the Tulsa events, *Riot and Remembrance*, suggests similarities between the events in Tulsa and other examples of ethnic cleansing. Dr. Olivia Hooker, a survivor of the Tulsa so-called race riot also refutes the claims that this was a riot and saw it as more of a well-planned attack on the Greenwood residents. “I refuse to call it a riot because it was really Whites decided to burn down the homes of 10,000 people. That was not a riot. It was planned desecration” (V. Wells 2015). The destruction resulting from the so-called riot consisted of 1,256 homes destroyed, with 215 looted. The destruction spanned over 36 square blocks. Those within Greenwood speculated that the attack on the black community was a land grab, an attempt to rezone and build an industrial area due to its proximity to the railroad. The riot had not been a spontaneous outbreak but part of a conspiracy to grab valuable land from African Americans. Two days after the riot on June 2, 1921, real estate agencies approached “the mayor and other officials that an industrial or commercial zone replace the Negro district” (Hirsch 2002, 136). Richard Lloyd Jones, the editor of the *Tribune* prior to the so-called riots, believed that the destruction of the town of Greenwood “represented a net gain for Tulsa” (Hirsch 2002, 124).
What seemed to further support the accusations of the land-grab idea was the city’s concerted effort to prevent blacks from rebuilding on their properties, which was achieved with imposed fire ordinances, a refusal to pay insurance claims, and by preventing residents from selling their property at face value. On June 7, the mayor had extended the fire ordinance into Greenwood, stating that “frame houses could not be constructed – and fire-resistant structures were prohibitively expensive for blacks,” who had very little money and resources to rebuild already (Hirsch 2002, 137). Shortly after the ordinances passed, the Tribune reported “the negro district… now in ruins… will never again be a Negro quarter but will become a wholesale and industrial center” (Hirsch 2002, 137). After several attempts the ordinance would be lifted on September 1, when the ordinances were declared unconstitutional. However, for many, the damage had already been done. For months, many of the residents of Greenwood lived on very meager means, many still homeless, unable to rebuild. The city of Tulsa hired the lawyer who represented East St. Louis during their so-called race riot of 1917 to evaluate the claim of responsibility of the city to rebuild the town of Greenwood. It is safe to believe that this lawyer and many others who won claims like these were often sought to represent cities that faced similar events. Without federal intervention there was no way to regulate these practices, further enabling the disenfranchisement of African Americans in towns enveloped by racial violence. Tulsa never confronted its own liability. “On August 6th the committee reported that Tulsa was not liable for ‘an unlawful uprising of Negroes, unless there is a specific negligence shown’” (Hirsch 2002, 141). Several residents of Greenwood attempted to sue the city for negligence, but no claims were paid due to the riot clause in their contracts. Over the course of the previous thirty years, riots
were instrumental in the loss of property, as African Americans often had to leave 
abruptly or had their homes destroyed during “so-called” riots. Insurance companies were 
thus instrumental in disenfranchising blacks, and without the knowledge or means to seek 
justice, many blacks lost their property to whites. In the following chapters, I examine the 
role insurance companies have played in the history of disenfranchising blacks.

The events surrounding the alleged attack on Sarah Page by Dick Rowland 
sparked an instant fire of hatred that had been smoldering for years within Tulsa. The fear 
of Tulsa’s small but growing black community threatened the very existence of the white 
population with the fanciful threat of an eventual “negro domination.” This was enough 
for many within the mob to take up arms against the town of Greenwood. Whatever 
happened on Memorial Day between Dick Rowland and Sarah Page would later be 
forgotten. Dick Rowland at the height of the attack on Greenwood was removed from the 
jail and eventually found innocent of the crimes against Sarah Page. The story of Sarah 
Page as an upstanding individual would later be refuted, with claims emerging that she 
had a questionable character and was only in Tulsa waiting for a divorce from her 
husband. Furthermore, before the rioting began, she had already dropped the charges 
against Dick Rowland. Many of those who gathered at the courthouse never knew this, 
but with tensions so high, it did not matter. The desire to protect white women during this 
era was a catalyst for a large percentage of racial violence against blacks at the time.

The incidents in Wilmington were the start of a trend of racial violence against 
African Americans that would span the next quarter of a century. The events surrounding 
the Tulsa race riot would create awareness and raise questions regarding the treatment of 
residents within these predominantly black communities but would not be enough for the
United States government to realize that it is partly responsible for the residents affected by these injustices. The events in Wilmington and Tulsa set the stage, perhaps, for American reluctance to pre-empt or stop cleansings worldwide in the twentieth century, as Samantha Power has argued. Perhaps American tardiness to confront genocide is rooted in its unwillingness to confront its own history of racial cleansing. To reiterate, race riots are often considered as two opposing races at odds with each other, these racial cleansings often led to massacres in order to remove the element that threatened their livelihood. This chapter focuses on white America’s fear of small numbers, and on the ideology of perceived inferiority attributed to African Americans in the United States. Together, these notions fostered a tumultuous chain of events in many towns and communities, sometimes leading to racial cleansings under the guise of race riots at the turn of the century. The specific types of violence that ensued during these so-called race riots will be addressed in the next chapter, which has its own place in the conversation of racial cleansings.
IV. State of Lyncherdom

“It is thought, as I have said, that a lynching crowd enjoys a lynching. It certainly is not true; it is impossible of belief.” —Mark Twain

In 1901, Mark Twain made a valiant effort to address the growing phenomenon of lynching in his essay, “The United States of Lyncherdom.” Twain believed all it took was “a brave man in each affected community to encourage support, and bring to light the deep disapproval of lynching hidden in the secret place, of its heart” (Twain 1901). Twain began to witness a rise in lynchings across the country, which increased in prevalence in his home state of Missouri. Struck by the barbarism of these acts carried out by unruly mobs with no moral compass, he tried to rationalize the growing epidemic as a form of “fashion” or “virus;” with every new case it would “spread wider and wider, year by year, covering state after state” but the only thing needed to stop these occurrences, he believed, was one person to champion a crusade against it (Twain 1901).

This “trend” was fueled by the need to be included. Remaining independent meant you would be ostracized. Twain could not understand why anyone would want to witness these events, therefore, the only reason to attend was because “the public seems to approve of it,” and for those in the mob “there are never ten men in it who would not prefer to be somewhere else—and would be, if they had the courage to go” (Twain 1901).

As lofty as such ideas may be, what Mark Twain failed to consider were the fear of change and the grave realities of race. The call for a man to stand up to rebuke lynching

7 Mark Twain wrote this essay in the summer of 1901, in reaction to a newspaper account of the Missouri lynching he mentions at the start. He even thought of using it as the introduction to a subscription book history of lynching in America. He decided, however, not to publish it at all, and told his publisher that if he went ahead with the book on lynching “I shouldn’t have even half a friend left down there [in the South], after it issued from the press.” The essay was published 13 years after his death, by Albert Bigelow Paine, in Europe and Elsewhere (Twain 1901).
was something to which even he could not live up, for he refused to publish his essay. “I shouldn’t have even half a friend left down there [in the south] after it issued from the press” (Twain 1901). Twain’s essay on lynching did not get published until thirteen years after his death. Still, he was right, lynching was an epidemic.

Lynching, as a spectacle, united whites within communities around the country, but it also further disenfranchised blacks by forcing them to migrate out of fear of being lynched. The Progressive Era saw the largest outburst of racial violence, spanning the four decades from “Reconstruction through the wake of the First World War,” a period that would come to be known as the “lynching era” due the growing popularity of lynching (D’Orso 1996, 51). This threat coupled with the refusal of the government to intervene and the incompetence of local authorities to staunch mob violence left few alternatives other than to flee at the first instance of danger. According to author Richard Wright, “to be black in this time […] was to be the victim of a thousand lynchings” (Wood 2009, 1). For many African Americans, lynching was not solely limited to the physical act itself, but also included the psychological terror that loomed over it. The slightest step beyond prevailing racial etiquette could incur death by lynching. Rarely was the phenomenon of lynching related to any actual crime committed by its victims. Lynching was an extension of justice, but a repudiation of it.

One of the most disturbing events in the recent history of the United States was the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 after he supposedly whistled at a white woman. Till, who was from Chicago, was visiting family in Mississippi when he was accused of “wolf whistling.” The penalty for breaking the racial etiquette resulted in “beating and shooting Till and then dumping his body in the Tallahatchie River” (Wood 2009, 265). To mask
the crime, a fan weighing over one hundred pounds was tied around his neck to weigh down his body. His mother’s decision to have an open casket to show what hate and racism looked like became a spark which helped ignite the Civil Rights Movement.

The inability to protect oneself from the physical as well as the psychological toll of lynching exposed victims to other dangers associated with this other practice of racial cleansings. Over the course of forty years, from Reconstruction to the First World War, more lynchings took place in United States history than during any other time in the nation’s history. Many refused to speak out against the violence because they felt “lynching was inevitable” (Wood 2009, 51). During this era it is estimated that over three thousand lynchings took the lives of black men, women, and children. There were a large amount of lynchings in the United States history, but during the Progressive Era “the proportion of black victims to white was much higher; and the lynchings were marked by much greater cruelty and barbarism” (Akers 1999, 150). It is hard to really tell how many lynchings actually took place, for many were not tracked and others were covered up and made to look like accidents. In one case there “was a black man, middle aged, dead, hit by a passing train, probably drunk. At least that was the way it was officially reported” (D'Orso 1996, 19). In one study, Arthur Raper found that out of a hundred cases of lynching at least a third of those lynched were falsely accused. “White mobs often misidentified the black perpetrator they were seeking, and it was common for whites to assault or kill a family member if the alleged perpetrator couldn’t be found” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 88).

Paradoxically, for an era often associated with activism and social change, the Progressive Era was also a period of fear associated with mob violence. It also witnessed
the threat of hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Rough Riders, “a self-appointed vigilante committee” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 96). As commentators have rightly noted, “lynching held a singular psychological force, generating a level of fear and horror that overwhelmed all other forms of violence” (Wood 2009, 1). Blacks did not need to see a lynching to be afraid of the action, for the threat was everywhere. Lynchings could take place at any time and under any circumstance. The rise in the number of lynchings in Oklahoma was one of the factors that prompted blacks to go to the jailhouse to protest the arrest of Dick Rowland. As we have seen, this attempt to stand up against white supremacy led to the devastation of Greenwood. The use of violence by white mobs conveyed the message of a “racial hierarchy and the frightening consequences of transgressing that hierarchy” (Wood 2009, 2). “Mob violence and the loss of life” resulted in a virtual racial cleansing of these communities (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 19).

As the culture of white Americans began to shift due to the end of Reconstruction, whites attempted to incorporate a new method that would maintain white domination in the South. The South experienced major changes after Reconstruction. The first change was defined by the enshrining of segregation between 1877 and 1890, the goal of which was to ensure that no other group would have “cultural, political and economic equality” (DuRocher 2011, 7). Children played a smaller role in maintaining the racial hierarchy because they were used as labor around the house. As the industrial age began to take shape and less emphasis was placed on child labor, children became more involved in maintaining Southern racial cues, which led white society to try to reintroduce the racial etiquette of a youth born at a time when racial cues were changing in the United States.
The second change witnessed a shift in white culture spanning from 1890 to 1939. Studies of children born during the era of Jim Crow suggest that a radical social transformation was underway, and these children would be the ones to create this racialized culture. During slavery, white children knew their racial hierarchy through their parents. They also knew how to maintain their dominance over African Americans. The new generation was devoid of these cues due to the absence of slavery. The older white generation feared the younger generation “would fail to control African Americans” (DuRocher 2011, 10). With this growing shift in racial hierarchy, white men also feared they would lose dominion over their women and therefore decided to use the threat to white womanhood as a method to maintain racial hierarchy as well as reinforce traditional gender roles. “Black autonomy not only diminished white men’s authority over African Americans,” argues Amy Louise Wood, “but threatened their dominion over their own households and women” (Wood 2009, 7). This was clear in the cases discussed in Wilmington, North Carolina and Tulsa, Oklahoma. These threats against white womanhood were some of the fastest methods used to spark instant outrage, leading to immediate action. White Southerners believed social etiquette was the best way to maintain segregation, but “decided to use a system enforced by violence, both in small daily acts of injustice and in large public acts of brutality” to maintain racial norms (DuRocher 2011, 3). White terrorism was used to staunch African Americans’ social, political, an economic growth, perpetuating so-called white superiority.

The Reconstruction era had given rise to a new African American persona: the “New Negro.” This term was created by philosopher Alain Locke and it reflected a new concept of black identity, people who had been born outside the realm of slavery who
were prepared to defy southern racial etiquette. According to Locke, the new Negro would become a “contributor and lays aside the status of beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization” (Locke, 1). No longer would Negroes be “something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be ‘kept down,’ or ‘in his place,’ or ‘helped up,’ to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden” (Locke, 2). At the turn of the twentieth century, blacks saw their opportunity to become the collaborators and participants Locke spoke of during the First World War. Unfortunately, black veterans returning from World War I became a prime target of white hatred across the country because they were more prideful and assertive due to their experiences in the war. As noted scholars have shown, “returning Negro soldiers, their horizons widened through travel, constituted a threat to the caste system” (Drake and Cayton 2015, 65). Veterans in the South were often targets of racial violence because they exuded a level of boldness that escaped prior generations. In four Southern states, nine soldiers were lynched in 1919. “Two were burned alive; others were hanged and mutilated in their uniforms” (Akers 1999, 152). Black veterans also shared stories of killing whites and interracial relationships with white women, feeding into the rise to the stereotype of the Negro rapist. The fantastical idea that white women were physically attracted to black men forced white communities to worry over their supposed sexual integrity, compelling them to hold on tighter to their women out of fear that they would prefer these “black brutes.” As Michael Pfeifer has argued, “the idea of black sexual prowess… helped to establish a complimentary myth of white sexual inadequacy that sentenced white males to a prison of their making” (Pfeifer 2013, 199). As we have seen, this was one of the instigating elements behind the events in
Wilmington and Tulsa. The Secret Nine knew that the city would not stand for a black man’s debasement of white womanhood, making it all too easy for them to light the fire that would propel their coup.

African Americans transitioned slowly from the role of servitude to become a more assertive presence in society after the fall of slavery. Nevertheless, their actions prompted whites to search for ways to hold on tighter to their livelihoods and their former social status. The more “blacks asserted their rights, restive whites grew alarmed” (Hirsch 2002, 56). Two ideologies emerged amongst the black intelligentsia at the time, one led by Booker T. Washington and the other by W.E.B. Du Bois. Washington believed blacks should not focus so heavily on areas such as politics, higher education, and the need for equal rights and focus on careers instead, ones that will always have value; “because without industrial development there can be no wealth; without wealth there could be no leisure; without leisure no opportunity for thoughtful reflection and the cultivation of higher arts” (B. T. Washington 1903, 19). Washington’s sentiments found expression in the “Atlanta Compromise” when he stated that “in all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (B. T. Washington 1977). However, radicals searching for equal rights came to believe this represented a “complete surrender of the demand for civil and political equality” (Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk 1903, 42). The ideology Washington professed provided African Americans with a semblance of comfort, but it perpetuated the “old Negro,” which personified obedience, servitude, and blacks place in society. The old Negro would never step out of line and “humbly submitted to their white saviors”
When the events in Wilmington arose, it was no surprise that Washington maintained his conservatism, remaining silent on the events.

Du Bois, on the other hand, staged protests in various states around the United States, which sometimes earned him scorn. On June 5, after Greenwood was destroyed, Bishop E.D. Mouzon, placed the blame on Du Bois: “[He] was the most vicious Negro in the country, and suggested that his March speech” prior to the riots was the reason for the violence (Hirsch 2002, 127). Juxtaposing the old Negro with the new, the latter would be held responsible for the violence against African Americans during the so-called race riots. Du Bois believed that Negroes at the time should not depend on whites to do things for them, but should pursue careers as lawyers or doctors and not settle for jobs in trade as Washington had suggested. Du Bois felt Negroes lived in a state of double consciousness the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk 1903, 3). Du Bois wanted blacks to break this cycle, transitioning into a new Negro and see that they could live in this world as equals to whites. World War I helped blacks to transition into this “new Negro,” but it would also provide whites with justification for their actions during the riots, for whites “were not violating the law but acting in self-defense” (Hirsch 2002, 129). The persona of the “new Negro” would be the primary threat to white supremacy and needed to be extinguished at any opportune moment.

In addition, competition for jobs and a depressed economy also increased white animosity and often led to the expulsion of blacks from cities and towns across the nation. For decades, whites had access to any job they chose, while blacks were slated for
menial jobs at lower wages. As more opportunities arose, blacks sometimes “intoxicated with higher wages than they had ever known” began to take jobs as strike breakers, crossing union lines, willing to fill jobs left by unionized whites (Collins 2012, 76).

Samuel Gompers, founder and president of the American Federation of Labor expressed discontent for the various businesses which imported labor from the South to be used as strikebreakers, which further created “the element of racial industrial competition” (Collins 2012, 76). This was one of the contributing factors leading to the so-called race riot in East St. Louis in 1917. For an economy already depressed, whites became financially hampered by the bleak possibilities of tending to their families, further destabilizing their place in society. Similarly, the promise of more jobs and higher wages were made to whites once blacks were removed from Brooklyn during the Wilmington riot of 1898. However, when whites were allotted more jobs in the absence of blacks’ labor competition, the wages and the wealth they thought would follow still escaped them. “Promises had been made to them for their assistance in the killing and banishment of the blacks from the city,” but, in the end, the elites would “renege on that promise, and this disappointment helped to intensify further the hatred between blacks and whites” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 144).

The feeling of helplessness against the perceived threat of Negro domination influenced many poor whites seeking to elevate their economic status to join groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. The forced removal of blacks allowed whites to grab vacated land, acquire jobs, and remove the threat of blacks rising in status and challenging the caste system protected by Jim Crow legislation. The logic of generic attribution also encouraged whites to blame blacks as a race for the possible actions of one individual. In
many cases, Negroes were used as the scapegoats for the most heinous crimes against whites, and habitually without investigation. This was an overwhelming characteristic of many so-called race riots leading to the cleansing of black communities. The logic of generic attribution was the philosophy used in Tulsa in the alleged assault on Sarah Paige, and would be used again in the alleged attack on Fannie Taylor in Rosewood, Florida in 1923, resulting in the total annihilation of the predominantly black community.

Analyzing the events of the attempted racial cleansing in Rosewood provides a glimpse of the violence carried out by mobs, and the fear that was generated by these events in the hearts and minds of blacks precisely at the time when prosperity was at least within their reach.

Rosewood was settled by both white and black citizens until it became predominantly black around 1900. Rosewood was a closely knit community, with the majority of the people being related to each other in some way. The two largest families were the Goins and Carriers. The Goins family was involved in the turpentine business, while the Carriers made their living in the logging industry. Rosewood was a self-sufficient community parallel to the white town of Sumner. Though small, Rosewood was prosperous, with comfortably-sized middle class homes. The town was composed of three churches, a school, a masonic lodge, a general store and also had a baseball team. Like many cities at the time where blacks and whites lived in close proximity, there were a few reported race-related issues; but with an increase in black prosperity and autonomy came an increase in disdain from whites. Rosewood was, as one historian put it “a black town in a white place, in a white time” (D'Orso 1996, 3).
In 1923, Fannie Taylor, a white woman, claimed to be raped by a black man after her husband found her with bruises on her face and body. Unable to tell her husband she was beaten by her lover, Fannie fabricated a story that she was raped by a black man. During the trial, and leading up to the story of Rosewood that was reported in the media, several accounts claimed the man was actually white. Sarah Carrier, the Taylor’s housekeeper, and her granddaughter Philomena Carrier were working outside the Taylor house when they saw “a man slip through the back door. It was a white man, but it was not the woman’s husband” (D’Orso 1996). He was an engineer for the railroad and they claimed, “She and the unknown person were secretly having a romantic affair, and that morning they got into an argument and he physically assaulted her” (Rucker and Upton 2007, 573).

When Fannie’s husband James Taylor ’heard of the assault, he assembled a group of men and set out to find the individual, using bloodhounds to track down the assailant. The dogs led the mob to the black town of Rosewood and to the home of Aaron Carrier, a World War I veteran. Out of fear, he directed the mob to Sam Carter, the town blacksmith. When the mob found Carter, they strung him up to a tree just long enough to suffocate him and gather information. Once he was taken down, he was tortured as members of the mob cut pieces of flesh away from his body. Barely alive, he agreed to show the men where he transported the person they were looking for and led them to a swampy area where he admitted to dropping off the fugitive. With the information in hand, Sam Carter in his last words told the men, “You can kill me” “[…] but you can’t eat me” (D’Orso 1996, 5). The phrase was often used by hunters who needlessly killed animals that could not be used for food or clothing. Sam Carter was shot in the face with
a shotgun, hung from a tree, and riddled with bullets. In many lynching cases, photographs were taken shortly after the victim was lynched: “Mobs often riddled these bodies with bullets or cut them down to be burned after the pictures were snapped” (Wood 2009, 86). In April 1902, for example, a black man was accused of attempting to assault a thirteen year old girl. When a mob of 150 men captured the alleged assailant, Walter Allen, he was “hanged from a telephone pole, and riddled his body with bullets, all under the glare of an electric streetlight” (Wood 2009, 54). This ritual was normal for victims of mob violence.

The day after Carter was lynched in Rosewood, a group of whites went to Sylvester Carrier’s home after hearing a rumor about a large gathering taking place there. Whites believed Sylvester was stockpiling weapons for a possible attack on the white town of Sumner in retaliation for the killing of Sam Carter. The rumor was easy to believe since Sylvester was never one to shy away from confrontations with whites. When the whites arrived at his house, Sylvester’s mother went outside to address the mob because she was known to many of the families through her work as a nanny. After addressing the mob, she was shot in the head and killed. The mob flooded the home with bullets, injuring many of the occupants while others escaped out the back door into the woods. When whites heard about the shooting at the Carrier home, hordes of them stormed the town, shooting “not just into the air but anything that moved” (D’Orso 1996, 11). In the words of one account, “Rosewood was a ghost town now, its streets crowded with outsiders, its residents scattered into the surrounding swamp, some wearing nothing more than nightshirts, shivering and huddling as they heard the crackle of gunfire and saw smoke climbing toward the clouds” (D’Orso 1996, 11). Wilson Hall, nine years old at
the time, remembered his mother gathering his eight siblings and heading them all toward the swamps once she saw the lights from cars coming up the road. While preparing to go into the swamp, “she started counting her kids and found out one was missing.’ A family friend ran back to the house and rescued Hall’s sister” (Dye 1996, 617). They traveled fifteen miles through the swamp to the town of Gulf Hammock. A mob of two to three hundred returned the following Sunday and burned the remaining buildings in Rosewood, but the two white homes within the town were not touched. “The Florida Times – Union reported, ‘The burning of the houses were carried out deliberately’” (Dye 1996, 618).

After a week of violence the town was cleansed, never to be occupied by black residents again. It currently sits absent of homes, its buildings now covered by forest. The ritual of violence that took place in Rosewood was a common occurrence during this era. A few months before the incident in Rosewood, there was the murder of a school teacher in Perry, Florida. The accused black man was executed in December of 1922 sparking another so-called race riot, in which “all black public buildings in Perry, including a church and school, were destroyed” (Dye 1996, 612). This incident assisted in elevating the racial tension leading up to the destruction of Rosewood the following month in January.

The events that triggered the death of Sam Carter and the desolation of Rosewood would have been difficult to prevent once the chain of events was put into motion. Lynching and mob violence used consistent and unmistakable tactics and symbols. The use of the rope was not only a deterrent against crime but also a social signal, part of an effort to “maintain a strict racial hierarchy ensuring that white male authority held sway in their communities” (Wood 2009, 8). Once Fannie Taylor accused a black man of
assaulting a white woman, the mob ritual had to be carried out and enforced, beginning with the capture of the accused. In most cases, the assembling and tracking down of the alleged criminal was a form of “ceremonial dance of power between man and animal” (Wood 2009, 94). Carter alluded to his treatment as an animal before his death. The act of hunting down and killing something that you could not eat or use for clothes only perpetuated whites’ perception of blacks as savage beasts who had to be conquered, with or without just cause. This ritual helped them to relinquish their “fear about their own personal and social vulnerability” allowing them to “strike out viciously and excessively against the objects of their terror” (Wood 2009, 8). The ritual of the hunt legitimized the action of the lynchers, it made their work a necessary evil, justifiable for the protection of the white family.

Sam Carter’s death was carried out amongst a small group of men, but the more heinous the act, the greater the potential for larger crowds to be present. As scholars have shown, the lynching ritual was used to restore order, “and allowed white men, women, adolescents, and children to realize their roles as protectors and dependents” (DuRocher 2011, 3). Blacks also had a role in the ritual, for it helped to incite fear, reinforcing their subservient role in society. For white men in the North, race, gender, and class were necessary to claim superior manhood, but in the South, white men were only required to uphold two requirements: he must be white, and he must be willing to uphold the culture of white masculinity in a public forum (DuRocher 2011, 4). This allowed the lynching ritual to unite the community across caste lines. Gender roles also played a major part in legitimizing the lynching ritual. “For white men to restore white male power and authority not only over black men but over white men’s household and their women, it
needed to be witnessed and appreciated by white women (Wood 2009, 97). The wife of a
local real estate agent believed “women who shut themselves away from the atrocious
sight of the lynching were physical cowards” (Wood 2009, 101). White women thus
proved to play a major role in the criminality and dehumanization of black victims.
Though most accusations of rape did not lead to the desolation of an entire town, the
Fannie Taylor scenario was a recurring theme in the initiating of violence against blacks
during this era. The accusation of rape was one of the severest infractions against white
womanhood, and in the context of time it often sparked a chain of events that led to
lynchings, which in turn led to wider attempts at racial cleansing. All of it revolved
around race and gender: the ideology of white men needing to protect white womanhood
reinforced “the cultural representation of white females as submissive and deferential to
white men” (DuRocher 2011, 4).

The lynching era had a great impact on white children, too, which in turn had a
profound impact on events leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. Children often took
part in the tradition of hunting the “black beast.” Framing the search and capture of
blacks as “hunting,” proved to be a transitional “marker and privilege of white manhood”
(Wood 2009, 98). The involvement of young children, boys and girls alike, created a
space for them to become desensitized to the barbarism of racial violence. One adult
witness who refused to watch a lynching could not understand “how they could bear to
stay and witness such a terrible scene” but attending the events helped to strip the
children of their innocence and perpetuated the ritual of violence (Wood 2009, 100).
Having children present also instilled racial cues of domination and servitude, which was
connected to a form of ownership over the black body. White males who feared the
younger generation would not know how to maintain control over blacks, shied away from sheltering them, and therefore “encouraged white children to participate in the lynching of blacks in order to maintain white domination” (DuRocher 2011, 8). At the lynching of Lloyd Clay in 1919 “in Vicksburg, Mississippi, the Chicago Defender sardonically noted that the dainty hands of young girls, who will represent the future mothers of Vicksburg, Miss., were seen with guns pointing at the victims eager for a chance to be a party in furthering this gruesome [sic] methods of cannibalism” (Wood 2009, 100). Desensitizing children at an early age allowed them to take an active part in maintaining these racial divides for generations to come. The practice of raising racists was apparent in the case of the Wilmington riot. Children were used to patrol the streets and stop blacks at gunpoint. “White soldiers and citizens, including boys as young as twelve years old, held up all blacks that passed on any street and all who went toward Brooklyn” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 130). Grooming children to believe they were racially superior perpetuated the racist circumstances, against which the Civil Rights Movement would be launched. This further refutes Twain’s belief that most children and adults preferred to be anywhere but involved in these events. Often, children were more than willing participants, choosing to put themselves at the center of these events.

As lynchings became more popular in the South, a growing need developed to capture the event through the use of photographs. Photographs served multiple purposes. For men, the photos commemorated the hunting and killing of the alleged beast, as they posed alongside them with pride. Pictures of the slain beast underscored “the ways in which lynching photographs bore within them both white supremacist ideology and the gendered elements of that ideology (Wood 2009, 97). One might think that with lynching
there might be growing need to hold these events in secrecy to avoid the kinds of attention that were being drawn to them. The pictures were proof of guilt but “few lynchings were prosecuted, and if they were, as the Crisis noted regarding an Oklahoma lynching in 1911, ‘we are sure the jury would acquit’” (Wood 2009, 94). In many of these towns where lynchings took place, those with the power to prosecute the offenders often did not do so because in many cases they shared similar views to those committing the crimes.

Photographs were also used as souvenirs to validate the event. In many circumstances, pictures were turned into postcards and mailed to friends and family across the country who were curious about the lynching phenomenon. Pictures were not the only things used as souvenirs: chains, pieces of rope, and in many cases, even body parts were collected to memorialize the events. “One in three lynching victims was emasculated, a practice reserved for the worst alleged crimes and assaults” (Wood 2009, 98). The mutilation and castration was a way of conquering the perceived hypersexual beast. “Lynchers robbed their victims of their sexual and reproductive capabilities, removing the perceived threat to white womanhood” (Wood 2009, 98). Whites’ anger and frustration were acted out in torture and mutilation. Body parts cut from victims were sold in shops and stores around the lynching area. Sam Holt, a Georgia man lynched for the suspected death of his employer, was lynched and pieces of him were cut up and sold in neighboring stores. W.E.B. Du Bois, while walking down a Georgia street, saw in a store window the advertisement of Sam Holt’s ear. This propelled Du Bois to take up the anti-lynching campaign and speak out against the mistreatment of black people. Du Bois believed it was not enough for “Negroes to declare that color-prejudice is the sole cause
of their social condition, nor for the white South to reply that their social condition is the main cause of prejudice” (Du Bois 1903, 87). Du Bois believed both of these are intertwined, and both must change in order to achieve a mutual understanding. “Only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line in this critical period of the Republic shall justice and right triumph” (Du Bois 1903, 87).

In the case of Rosewood, the threat to Fannie Taylor’s womanhood seemed to call for immediate action. The act of interrogating Aaron Carrier, and the kidnapping, torturing, and killing of Sam Carter without fear of repercussion were examples of the mob’s power. Any act of resistance similar to what happened at the Carrier home invoked an immediate call to arms from any white presence within traveling distance to reinforce white dominance. The mob’s ability to take matters into their own hands with no recourse in the name of justice was part of the ethos that prevented black’s from seeking help, effectively rendering them helpless under the circumstances. Such rituals of violence was not only accepted, but legal, and welcomed by whites in the name of preserving their livelihood. “It is perfectly safe to at any time at any place for any considerable number of men to take a [black] prisoner from the hands of any officer and inflict the penalty of death” (Hirsch 2002, 52). White mobs often believed that blacks were being protected from being penalized by the legal system and the only way to guarantee justice was to take matters into their own hands. Whites saw themselves as possible victims and were eager to enact punishment on “what they saw as widespread, savage black criminality” (Wood 2009, 23). This form of white terrorism was real and felt by black communities around the nation. Blacks did not need to see a lynching to be
afraid of the action, for lynchings could take place at any time and under any circumstance with no recourse for those involved.

For whites, there was a belief that the government was depriving them of the opportunity of properly removing criminal elements from the communities. Blacks, on the other hand, often felt that the government was doing very little to ensure their safety. This was the norm during this era; the oppressor blames the victim to justify their need to initiate mob violence. During the height of America’s growing racial violence, which led to the cleansing of many towns throughout the country, blacks’ views of government negligence toward their plight was heightened during the Woodrow Wilson presidency. Wilson-appointed Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels was an active participant in disenfranchising blacks and promoting white supremacy. Prior to becoming Secretary of the Navy, Daniels wrote for the Raleigh News and Observer in Wilmington, North Carolina. Daniel’s rhetoric was hugely responsible for instigating whites’ fears leading up to the 1898 coup and the removal of Alexander Manly as well as other prominent African Americans within the community. As editor of the paper, Daniels was the “Democrats’ voice and publicity organ, which was relied upon to carry their theme and was the militant voice of white supremacy” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 55). Misrepresenting blacks in the media was a large proponent to instigating racial tensions. Using terminology to insight anger was common in leading to the violence against blacks. “Newspapers served as the medium for spreading this white fear and paranoia,” and cultural framing played a large part in “creating an environment ripe for violence” (Collins 2012, 7). Cultural framing can be understood as “ideas, values, and beliefs,” coupled with “selectively punctuation and encoding objects, situations, events,
experiences, and sequences of actions in one’s present or past environment” that bonds a
group together (Collins 2012, 6). Rallying whites under a common goal increased their
sense of community regardless of class. Black’s desperate desire for equality and
protection welcomed the arrival of a new president, but slowly realized Woodrow Wilson
was not going to relieve them of their plight, but intensify their feelings of second class
citizenship.

Woodrow Wilson’s rhetoric during the First World War of making the world safe
for democracy gave blacks hopes that things would be better for them at home as well.
Instead, Wilson proved to be intent on preserving white superiority. When William
Trotter, and various members of the National Equal Rights League (NERL) wanted to go
to France to make sure the treaty of Versailles included racial equality, Woodrow Wilson
forbade them from going. Wilson also refused to prevent or provide any aid to those who
were suffering the effects of so-called race riots around the country during his presidency.
After the so-called race riot in East St. Louis in 1917, Wilson “failed to get involved” and
showed a “lack of interest” to those suffering during the aftermath (Rucker and Upton
2007, 190). Congress later got involved after businesses reported that the riot had
affected the interstate commerce. It was also during Wilson’s presidency that over two
dozen so-called race riots gripped the summer of 1919. During his tenure as president,
over two dozen anti-black bills were introduced to the senate ranging from “Jim Crow
transportation, regulation of armed force enlistment to prohibition of miscegenation,
civil, and repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 182). Wilson
and members of his cabinet also “pushed for departmental segregation in civil services”
(S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 182). Booker T. Washington, after visiting the capitol in an
attempt to speak on the behalf of disenfranchised blacks, left disappointed: “I have never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time” (S. H. Leon Prather 1984, 182). In 1915, Wilson would further align himself with white superiority upon the release of the D.W. Griffith’s film, The Birth of a Nation. At a screening in the White House, Wilson, a former history teacher, felt it was “like writing history with lightning [and] all so terribly true” (Hirsch 2002, 57). Many within white America became enamored by this movie leading to the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.

The movie glorified the Ku Klux Klan and depicted the south as being overrun by black legislatures. It also depicted the raping of white women by the so called “black brute.” This movie reinvigorated the Ku Klux Klan which at the time was dying out, bolstering numbers of membership and sparking an increase in violence across the nation. The Birth of a Nation affirmed and legitimized white supremacy but it also helped to spur on the anti-lynching movement led by the NAACP. Negro domination and the perceived threat to white womanhood were the key excuses used to mask whites’ fears of losing their place in society, and they prompted the racial violence against blacks in places like Greenwood, Brooklyn, and Rosewood. But more often than not, they were not rooted in reality. Nevertheless, they resulted in the destruction of these towns and proved that the government and local authorities’ views were in line with promoting both white supremacy and black disenfranchisement. The rising numbers of deaths through the use of the rope and the phenomenon of lynching as a spectacle unified whites as the government sat idly by, refusing to prosecute those committing these horrible crimes. Twain’s disbelief in the State of Lyncherdom was alive, and well. The failure to protect
black lives creates yet another argument for the compensation of the victims of lynching and other racial cleansings, a topic I explore in more detail in the following chapter.
V. How much is that Footstool Worth?

“Every society must have a footstool to place their feet on, and black people have traditionally been the footstool in America”
—Fmr. Assistant Secretary of the State Currie Ballard 2009-10\

Racial cleansings at the turn of the last century have had long-term effects on this country, most especially on its victims and the families of victims. This chapter will take a look at the consequences of racial cleansing, which include, but are not limited to the following: how the landscape of American cities has changed due to these cleansings; the social, cultural, and psychological effects these events have had on victims; the debate about and the need for reparations; and, finally, how the mislabeling of racial cleansings as race riots has resulted in the creation of two different discourses regarding the African American experience in this country. It may be difficult to fathom that events from so long ago continue to have such a drastic impact on society today, but any time the topic of reparations arises, strong feelings materialize, only furthering the racial divide.

The initial response to the topic of reparations is usually ‘Why should society pay for such debts?’ A similar argument contends that “the victims of oppression are supposedly ‘long dead’ and, thus, that living black Americans do not deserve such reparations” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 224). This shifts the focus of the reparations debate solely to the topic of slavery, thereby omitting the phenomenon of race riots, which were far more recent. For the victims and descendants of so-called race riots, the violence which was immense and has haunted them and their families for decades, is still a vivid memory.

\[8\] Currie Ballard, a professor of History at Langston University (1993-2006) and Former Assistant Secretary Of the State of Oklahoma (2009-2010), condemned the treatment of the Tulsa survivors and supported the reparations bill. (Hirsch 2002, 266)
The mass expulsions of blacks from towns and cities across the country during the Progressive Era were not rare occurrences that can be placed under the ambiguous umbrella term of race riots. For example, Greenwood might be the only community to witness a so-called race riot, but it was not the only town to witness mass expulsions in Oklahoma at the turn of the century. “Lexington, Sapulpa, Norman, and Shawnee; from Lawton and Claremore; from Perry; from Waurika, Dewey and Marshall, in each of these, entire black communities – every child, woman, and man – already had been driven out in effect, rubbed out” (Hirsch 2002, 317). Beyond the institution of slavery, the claim for reparations could be made for two reasons, both of which are linked to the aftermath of racial cleansings. First, the physical loss of property coinciding with Jim Crow laws made it almost impossible to reacquire what was lost during the cleansing, which has in turn created a wealth gap today between black and white Americans.

Second, the psychological trauma of racial cleansings kept many from seeking justice, which ended up passing along a distinct form of fear to their offspring. These two factors provide a substantial claim in support of reparations. But the claim has been ignored, and attempts have been made to wipe these events from the historical record. “Strikingly, whites in these communities today have mostly hidden, suppressed, or destroyed records of these substantial ‘racial cleansings’” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 226). Therefore, oral accounts as well as newspapers will have to serve as a limited testimony of the befouled victims, proving that these events did in fact occur. It is not impossible to ascertain what was lost by those victimized by these racial cleansings, but to do so would require an extensive investigation into local histories of property ownership. In many cases, there are significant gaps in the necessary documentation. Still, qualified
researchers could find the true owners of these properties, therefore providing further proof that these properties were gained unlawfully.

But reparations alone will not right the wrongs of racial cleansings. The traumatic experience of being a victim of white terrorism produced, for many survivors, dire psychological effects. It instilled a fear “felt in all African Americans communities across the country” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 4). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder which is commonly diagnosed in soldiers returning from war, but it could also apply to those who watched as their property was stolen and the lives of their loved ones were taken from them. As similar as the events in Brooklyn, Rosewood, and Greenwood might have been, Greenwood was slightly different because the population was so massive, and therefore, the methods used to terrorize this community were slightly different. Many residents of Greenwood described the attack on their city as something similar to war. Mabel Little, a survivor, had this to say about the experience in her book, *Events of the Tulsa Disaster*: “It then dawned upon us that the enemy had organized in the night and was invading our district, the same as the Germans invaded France and Belgium” (Ellsworth 1982, 63). “It was a war followed by an armed invasion” (Hirsch 2002, 234). When the events were over, the men and women were involuntarily placed in detention camps. While awaiting whites to vouch for them the men were forced to work for twenty-five cents an hour to rebuild the city that the white mobs had destroyed.

In reference to the Jim Crow era, another term has been used occasionally, one analogous to PTSD, namely Segregation Stress Syndrome (SSS), which is defined as a collective of “psychological and physical consequences of Jim Crow” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 12). These traumas were caused by the “individual, collective, and
institutionalized actions of whites that were physical, written of spoken” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 12). Many of the traumas came in the form of a threat to do physical harm to those who resisted. Once the initial experience of the events had passed for the victims, the trauma of the effects was perpetuated by the Jim Crow laws they continued to live through with their families. The level of exposure, the age in which they experienced these events, and the frequency of them, determined the degree to which the victim suffered from PTSD or SSS. Both terms were used during the hearing for reparations for the victims of Rosewood in 1994. During the trial, an economist was used to translate their “value of living, losses from years into dollars” (D'Orso 1996, 214). The economist’s goal was to prove that the requested dollar amount was a mere pittance compared to the psychological damage the survivors sustained during this so-called race riot. By the end of the trial in 1994, the Rosewood bill passed allotting one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to those who could prove they lived in Rosewood, as well as an additional five hundred thousand dollars for proof of materials lost during the so-called race riot.

As previously stated, PTSD or SSS did not only affect the victims who experienced the violence of racial cleansings directly, but also their descendants. Children growing up in the homes of victims often picked up racial cues while watching their parent’s interaction with whites. If a child was treated unfairly by a white child, the parent would try to get the child to look the other way, in hopes of avoiding any conflicts, which made the children aware that their “parents could not help their children fight back” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 72). It also helped the child to assume a similar fear of white authorities. Children were being taught to be subservient based on these racial
cues. They were often forced to use terminology, such as “sir” and “ma’am,” which further elevated the status of whites over blacks. After all, responding inappropriately could lead to some form of retaliation. These effects have created “long term damage that occurred in the psyches of those who as children and younger adults” who are “now are often fearful, hurting, elderly adults” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 73).

Furthermore, the effects of racial cues are not just related to the black experience, but inform the actions of whites as well. White families who refused to discipline their children for their actions toward black children were also sending racial cues that reinforced the notion that this was a proper way to treat people of color. White children who were in contact with children of the black victims established a racial hierarchy that followed them into adulthood, continuing to perpetuate and reinforce unjust racial roles. Many survivors made the decision to ignore or to hide these events from their children because they did not want them to grow up angry at all whites for the actions of some. Robie Morten, a survivor of the Rosewood cleansing, explained her reason for her keeping silent: “I didn’t want my children to grow up hating people. Hate destroyed Rosewood. Why should I let it destroy me? Or them?” (D’Orso 1996, 302). Similarly, Mabel Little a Tulsa survivor, “avoided telling youngsters about the riot because she didn’t want to anger them. […] She feared that knowing about the riot could dash their dreams” (Hirsch 2002, 297). For the survivors, maintaining the secrecy of these atrocities not only sheltered generations of children to follow, but shielded the victims from reliving these events.

The trauma of losing everything weighed heavily on the victims of these riots. Prior to them, many black communities were self-sufficient, allowing African Americans
to acquire a level of wealth that has since escaped them. After the events in Tulsa, the city prevented many African Americans from rebuilding due to the city ordinances placed upon them, therefore many victims had to start from scratch. In some circumstances, they were too old to endure the hardships the riots had placed upon them. Mabel Little owned a beauty salon while her husband Pressley ran a café. After the riots, they were left with nothing and were forced to clear debris in order to build a three room shack. Her husband, unable to rebuild the café, was forced to do carpentry work and construction. Between the hot summer and the winter cold, Pressley came down with tuberculosis and died in 1927. “He was forced into outdoor work to which he was unaccustomed, cleaning up debris which undoubtedly exposed him to the tubercular germs so rampant those days” (Hirsch 2002, 147). Her husband, Pressley, was not listed as a victim of the so-called riot, but “Mabel believed, that killed him” (Hirsch 2002, 147). The coping methods, such as silence and denial, used to help them through these events may have had detrimental long-term effects. However, caution should always be used when attempting to critique the actions of those in this situation. For them, survival was the main objective, and it should be remembered that they lived in an era during which they were treated as second class citizens. The trials and tribulations they endured are not a reality with which our society can easily identify. This is precisely why we should be suspicious of, discourses that blame the victim for the physical and psychological outcomes that have plagued generations of African Americans in the United States.

The middle class population of Greenwood was decimated by the so-called riots, but perhaps no one was more affected than J.B. Stradford. After the destruction of Greenwood, a theory of a black insurrection was concocted with J.B. Stradford at the
center of it. J.B. Stradford was the most familiar black man within his community, and he was Greenwood’s Republican boss. As one newspaper put it, “Who better to be the ringleader than one of Tulsa’s wealthiest, most outspoken, most defiant black men?” (Hirsch 2002, 156). On June 2, after spending a day in the detention center, Stradford was arrested on the orders of General Barrett, supposedly for his role in the uprising: “It was believed that carloads of armed blacks had left from his hotel and that he had encouraged them” (Hirsch 2002, 154). That evening, Stradford boarded a train to Kansas, where they arrested him with the intent of returning him to Tulsa. Having a law degree, he knew they did not have the authority to do so without filing for extradition. By June 6, the papers were already charging him with “abetting a riot.” Stradford called his son, Cornelius, a Columbia Law School graduate, who filed a writ of habeas corpus, allowing his release. Before Stradford could face extradition, he fled to Chicago where the chances of extradition were more difficult. The newspapers reported his escape from the law, thus reinforcing the belief that he was guilty of inciting the riot. At the time of the so-called riot, Stradford was the wealthiest black person in Greenwood, but he lost everything. His property losses totaled over “$125,000, 32 percent more than the person with the second highest losses,” who was O.W. Gurley. (Hirsch 2002, 157). For decades Stradford was on record as the root cause of inciting the riot. Exonerated October 18, 1996, his loses were never rectified, as a riot clause exempted insurances companies from paying any of the victims for their losses. The ceremony exonerating him was held across the street from where his hotel once stood.

The story of J.B. Stradford is important to recall when discussing the effects of so-called race riots. J.B. Stradford was a wealthy black man at a time when the black
middle class was growing. In many small towns around the country there were growing pockets of black affluence, many of them based on Edwin P. McCabe’s notion of Black Nationalism. Places like Greenwood in Tulsa, Brooklyn in Wilmington, and Rosewood in Florida are examples of the hundreds of similar neighborhoods that spawned across the nation, only to be ravaged eventually by white mob violence. At the time of the Tulsa riot, Stradford was the most familiar name because of “his lawsuit against the Midland Valley Railroad and his opposition to the segregation ordinance, both which placed him squarely against the values of white Tulsa, and his eponymous hotel cemented his profile as a man of ambition” (Hirsch 2002, 156). Stradford thus epitomized the feared possibilities of “Negro dominance.” Educated, he also refuted the theory of black inferiority. Fortunately, his descendants were able to achieve a level of success for themselves, but it is worth speculating how wealthy he could have been had he been able to live out his dream. It is hard to measure one’s outcome by his or her beginnings, but if we juxtapose the Stradford hotel with the famous Hilton franchise, it is possible to speculate that Stradford could have produced similar results.

Conrad Hilton bought his first hotel in 1919, and today the Hilton franchise symbolizes success and longevity, promoting “stylish, forward thinking” and a “global leader in hospitality” (Hilton Hotels and Resorts). J.B. Stradford built his hotel in 1918 for fifty thousand dollars, and it “symbolized the affluence and sophistication of a prairie city” (Hirsch 2002, 50). According to his family, and those who knew him, Stradford believed “he was on his way to building a dynasty, but he did not get the chance” (Hirsch 2002, 236). Stradford’s success could have supported and uplifted those within his community for decades by providing jobs and skills to his employees. Stradford also
represented the blueprint for success based on hard work and ambition, characteristics he embodied. His removal, along with the removal of other prominent businessmen, left a void in the community at a time it was most needed. The forced migration of a large portion of the middle class left the remaining citizens to rely on those who destroyed their community. J.B. Stradford was not a rarity of the time as some may still believe. He was part of a growing class of black affluence that W.E.B. Du Bois dubbed the “Talented Tenth.” The Talented Tenth were the brightest and most ambitious black men in the country who believed in elevating their race, and Stradford’s demise, along with thousands of other middle class blacks who were terrorized and traumatized by white mob violence, helped to create an intergenerational void in wealth and leadership in the black community, one that continues to this day.

Six months after the cleansing in Greenwood, sixty percent of the victims were still sleeping on cots and suffering from a variety of afflictions. After the fire ordinance was finally lifted, shacks and some cement buildings were erected, but the damage was already done, and the affluence of Greenwood was gone forever. So too was Greenwood’s large black population. Still, for some white residents, it was not enough. Caleb A. Ridley, an Atlanta Klansman, felt the “riot was the best thing that ever happened to Tulsa judging from the way strange Negroes were coming to Tulsa, we might have to do it all over again” (Hirsch 2002, 164).

Over time, the black population gradually increased, but the affluence remained absent. In 1960, black Tulsans saw an increase in political progress but also witnessed a collapse of Greenwood’s economy, which paralleled the attempts to rebuild after the riots. The desegregation that came with the Civil Rights Movement paradoxically took
dollars out of the community. It also marked the building of expressways through the community destroying “330,000 housing units, mostly in black and poor areas” (Hirsch 2002, 195). Urban renewal projects created to revitalize the community did the opposite: they pushed much of the black population out. They never returned. The notion of urban renewal was thus a kind of “urban removal.” The project destroyed businesses and homes, a large percentage of them in Greenwood. By 1970, the once primed Negro business district, desired for warehouse, commercial, and industrial development, was now home to “boarded storefronts, parking meters, winos and vacant lots” (Hirsch 2002, 195). All that remained was the Oklahoma Eagle newspaper and the Mount Zion Baptist Church, which was enclosed by the arm of the expressway. In 1971, the Tulsa, the Chamber of Commerce magazine published a story, “Say Goodbye to Greenwood Avenue.” “There is no place in a modern city for a Greenwood, where the poor spend their time starving. [...] Greenwood, once reborn, is settling into its grave again” (Hirsch 2002, 196). Greenwood was fortunate and it managed to rebuild and survive much longer than other places stricken by racial cleansings. Brooklyn in Wilmington faded away into obscurity, and Rosewood in Florida, after a week of violence, was barren. Eventually, with time, it was covered only by trees.

The effects of racial cleansing in this era will take generations to repair but reparations are an appropriate starting point.

In the early 1990s, after seven decades of silence, the state of Florida allocated two million dollars to the descendants of victims of the so-called race riot in Rosewood. In January of 1995, the Rosewood bill passed, allotting one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to those who could prove they lived in Rosewood at the time of the event, and an
additional five hundred thousand dollars to those who lost property during the attack. Nine descendants in total were awarded money for their losses in Rosewood. The amount was much lower than the seven million dollars the Rosewood claimants requested initially. Richard Hixson, a “special master” for Florida’s House of Representatives, decided to review previous claim’s cases that were approved because he knew, the amount attached to the bill would not pass. He found a claims bill for a little girl who was abused in the foster care system which the state was found negligent, and the girl was awarded three times the fifty thousand dollar amount asked. According to Hixson, “it doesn’t happen often, but it happens” (D'Orso 1996, 259). That propelled him to ask for one hundred and fifty thousand, with the possibility that they would be awarded three times that amount. After the trial, fifty thousand was awarded to the victims in advance by the Attorney General’s office due to the ages of the victims, the only case of compensation ever given to the victims of a so-called race riot. For many of the descendants of this tragic event, no amount of money could ever replace the lives of loved ones they lost. However, the goal for filing the claim was to “break the cycle of poverty in our entire family, the cycle that goes straight back to Rosewood,” the sentiment of Arnett Doctor, a descendant of one of the victims, and the spokesmen for those seeking reparations for the events leading to the destruction of Rosewood (D'Orso 1996, 126).

The Rosewood claims bill generated media coverage due mostly to the financial implications of the motion for reparations. Steve Hanlon, the lawyer for the claimants, knew the wording for the claims bill was very important, and therefore decided to use the word “compensation” rather than “reparation.” Compensation “is strictly a judicial term,
involving payments for specific loses or damage identified and measured through legal procedures” versus reparations which “involves payments to make amends for more general wrongs and injuries, such as devastation done during war or the suffering inflicted by a system such as slavery” (D'Orso 1996, 206). Harlon and his team knew the terminology used would determine the success of the bill. Avoiding the term “reparations” would prevent groups like the Native Americans or the descendants of slaves from coming forward, but what about others who faced atrocities similar to those in Rosewood?

It was evident that the violence that engulfed Rosewood was not uncommon at the time, and therefore, claimants had to demonstrate that the events of Rosewood did not compare to any other so-called race riots. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to them at the time, they were making it hard for other victims of these events to seek some form of compensation of their own. Hanlon’s tactic of differentiating the events in Rosewood from other instances of racial cleansing hinged on his claim that in other cases, whether “it was an isolated killing or a large scale ‘race riot,’ the incident took place over a relatively short period of time – a day or two at most – and the authorities could conceivably claim that they did not have adequate time to respond before the deed was done” (D'Orso 1996). The attack on Rosewood lasted a week. In the study team’s account, “Rosewood was a tragedy of American democracy and the American legal system. […] By their failure to restrain the mob and to uphold the legal due process, we can only conclude that the white leaders of the state and country were willing to tolerate such behavior by white citizens” (D'Orso 1996, 208). Furthermore, in an attempt to remove blame from the state, an argument was made that Governor Cary Hardee was not
at fault, and instead, it was the local authorities which failed to protect the citizens. However, during many so-called riots at the time, the governor almost always failed to respond until it was too late. Additionally, sometimes those who responded with instructions to restore order often ended up assisting the mob, for the responders often shared the same beliefs as the mobs attacking the black communities. There was also a constant shifting of responsibility and authority. In the Wilmington case, for example, President McKinley claimed he could not intervene unless the Governor requested assistance, and the Governor claimed he could not request help until the violence began. Regardless, in any disaster, the victims were citizens and are “created equal and that all citizens are entitled to due process and equal protection of the law” (D'Orso 1996, 227).

During the Rosewood hearing, attorneys for the state attempted to shift blame to the victims, insinuating that, as one account has put it, “The people in Rosewood might have caused their own destruction” (D'Orso 1996, 248). Maxine Jones, a Rosewood survivor, was appalled by the line questioning by Assistant Attorney General Jim Peters, because he was doing what “so many whites have done throughout this nation’s history, rewriting it in their own terms, either ignoring the victims or making the victims at fault” (D'Orso 1996, 249). In the so-called race riot in Wilmington, as we have seen, Alexander Manly’s article was the supposed catalyst for the fury leading to the destruction of the town of Brooklyn. But in actuality, it was the fact that blacks stepped away from the social norm, which threatened white superiority. Arguments similar to those made by the state lawyers also reinforce the ideology of generic attribution, which suggests that it is somehow acceptable to remove an entire group based on one individual’s action.
During the hearing, the survivors of Rosewood were asked why they waited so long to come forward. It was suggested that they were only in it for the possibility of getting free money, which further reinforced the discourse of blacks being lazy and unambitious, seeking to capitalize on the possibility of getting money without actually earning it. Survivor Minnie Lee Langley responded to such insinuations by stating, “I didn’t know how to file no claims, and I wouldn’t try to file no claims because I was scared those crackers might come up there and find me and kill me” (D'Orso 1996, 234).

This was often the case for many of the victims of these events: fear prevented them from not only seeking restitution but also from pursuing the convictions of those who committed these crimes. During her testimony, Langley exuded the characteristics of someone stricken by PTSD. Seven decades later she still feared that the people who committed this crime would do her harm. The lawyers had debated whether to provide the victims with armed guards, eventually dismissing the idea for they felt the “sight of white men with guns meant something to the people of Rosewood that no one could possible fathom” (D'Orso 1996, 225). Like many survivors of white terror, Langley had already lost so much: “they killed them and everything”, [they] “took everything we had” (D'Orso 1996, 233). For her and for the other Rosewood survivors, being awarded a mere semblance of what they lost helped to somewhat close the chapter of the events in 1923, but for the victims in Tulsa, who sought compensation using Rosewood’s model, the outcome would not be the same.

The so-called Tulsa race riot of 1921, for many within the city, has gone largely unremembered, escaping the city’s official history accounts due to the “silence and denial that surrounded the riot” (Hirsch 2002, 202). In 1992, a commemoration ceremony was
held for the surviving members of the riot. Seventy-one years had passed before the first formal apology was issued on behalf of the state for the destruction of the black business district in Greenwood. After the verdict had been delivered for the survivors of Rosewood, Don Ross, a columnist and former state legislator in Tulsa, “submitted a joint resolution to the Oklahoma legislature calling for six million in compensation for riot survivors” in January of 1997 (Hirsch 2002, 238). As a Tulsa native, Ross as a child was unaware of the events that plagued the city decades before his birth. The victory in Florida provided a blueprint for making a case for the survivors in Tulsa. For him, the two events had many similarities: a falsified assault, the destruction of a black community, and the failure of the government to protect its citizens. The biggest difference between the two historical legacies was defined by the “different political cultures of the two states. Florida was far more urban, liberal, affluent, and multicultural than Oklahoma, whose five black state representatives had little leverage in a legislature dominated by conservative rural interests” (Hirsch 2002, 239).

In February of 2000, Don Ross helped to draft a bill leading to the creation of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, which consisted of six blacks and five whites. After several years of debating the facts surrounding the so-called riot, the commission could not come to a conclusion about the awarding of reparations to victims. They were a largely liberal committee that did not share the same sentiments as the governing body of the state, which meant, that coming up with a plan of action that the state would approve became an arduous task. At the end of the month, their charter was going to expire, and many did not think that it was going to be renewed.
The topic of reparations for the survivors sparked nationwide debates, but for many, it merely further confirmed whites’ preexisting stereotypes about black laziness. Some people were outraged over the possibility of their tax dollars going toward “blacks looking for handouts.” “So we should just give them money for sitting around doing nothing” was one remark (Hirsch 2002, 242). “Taxpayers have in effect been paying reparations for blacks for many years in the form of welfare and various government subsidies” was another (Hirsch 2002, 239). This discourse perpetuates the stigma of African Americans as lazy and unambitious. It also places the blame on the race as a whole for their position in society, denying the fact that other circumstances could have been the cause. The compromise for the failure to award compensation for the victims of the so-called Tulsa Race riot came in June of 2001 in the form of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Reconciliation Act. Many public officials were outraged. Currie Ballard the Assistant Secretary of State initially proposed thirty-three million in a reparation package, he believed it was “an appalling nightmarish shame that people who lived through that could not be given $10,000, or whatever token amount” (Hirsch 2002, 328).

Furthermore, those in support of reparations for the survivors of Tulsa felt compensation was warranted after so many other groups were similarly awarded compensation. Eddie Faye Gates, a retired teacher on the Tulsa Race Riot Commission board in favor of reparations stated, “You did it for Japanese Americans. You did it for the Native Americans. The German people are doing it for Holocaust survivors. I don’t know why this brings up so much controversy when it’s time for people of color. We didn’t get forty acres and a mule either” (Hirsch 2002, 263).
For Tulsa and for the nation, any discourse on the topic of reparations often refracted through discussions related to the legacy of slavery. It could be that form of racism resides behind attempts to halt compensation for the victims of these events. It might be an attempt to keep a lid on an inflammatory topic. For one look at the United States’ oppressive history would show that a large percentage of the population has been systemically disenfranchised for centuries. Providing reparations to African Americans would force the United States to acknowledge that a race of people has been systemically disenfranchised, which would open the country up to the scrutiny of other nations around the world, which was a major concern, as we have seen, during the ratification of the Genocide Convention. The United States’ treatment of Native Americans and the institution of slavery were topics that might allow other countries to charge America with committing crimes against humanity. Ironically, in an attempt to win compensation for the Rosewood survivors the lawyers removed blame from the United States government, claiming that Native Americans and the descendants of slavery were not entitled to reparations because “America was at war with the Indians” and “slavery, as heinous as it was, was legal” (D’Orso 1996, 207).

Awarding African Americans compensation for the injustices of the so-called race riots would also affect those who benefitted from past crimes. Groups found guilty, could either be sued for compensation, which might or result in tarnishing their business’ reputation. During the hearings in Tulsa, for instance, the debate over reparations became a nationwide campaign which forced many to look back at the institution of slavery. Aetna Insurance Company of Hartford and the *Hartford Courant* came forth, both admitting to their connection to slavery. “The Aetna Insurance Company of Hartford,
after discovering that it had insured slave-owners against the loss of their human chattel, apologized for its actions. […] Three months later the Hartford Courant […] offered its own page 1 mean culpa for publishing ads for the sale and capture of slaves” (Hirsch 2002, 272).

The stigma surrounding reparations has prevented our society from looking at the details of racial cleansings and from coming to an objective decision about our obligation to the survivors of these events. The purpose of compensation is always to recompense victims for their losses, but no financial award could ever compensate the victims for what they had endured, or lost. What compensation can do is provide the descendants with a pittance of what could have been achieved if their parents had been allowed to continue to work toward their goals, or allowed to continue the lives and businesses they had already built for themselves. Geffery, the son of survivor Robie Morten, says this of the Rosewood race riot: “I watched my mother and father struggle their whole lives” “[…] It hurts me so much, […] to realize that my mother could have been so much more, that I could have been so much more than I am today” (D’Orso 1996, 302). For others, such as Otis Clark, who until his death at the age of 109 in 2014, was the oldest living survivor of the Tulsa riot, felt his life could have been much different as well. “In my own operation it broke up my schooling, cut off my education, and got me into the wrong life, the sportin’ life. I forgot what it means to be right and wrong” (Hirsch 2002, 296). He also addressed the issues of silence and denial and the effects these events had on blacks as a whole: “A lot of folks don’t want to realize it ever happened, but it did set poor little colored folks back a long time” (Hirsch 2002, 296).
The victims of these riots were thrown off course and sent down different paths and in many scenarios they were never able to attain what they lost or able to pick up where they left off. Tulsa survivor George Monroe’s father lost his business and home after the riot and the only job he could find was as a janitor making fourteen dollars a week. Monroe believed the victims were entitled to something. “You’re on the face of this earth and there’s only so much you can do, but every so often a little light will shine. […] It’s the only chance you’re going to get of being somebody” (Hirsch 2002, 291). Many of the survivors after their communities were destroyed, were left penniless or homeless, which only added to the psychological damage already done because of witnessing the murder or loss of loved ones. “Witnessing acts of violence as a child, particularly in one’s home, which is usually perceived as a safe haven, is associated with a greater likelihood of developing problems related to PTSD, including behavioral, social, emotional, cognitive, and attitudinal problems” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 94). The tragedies of so-called riots have also created a racial disconnect toward whites who they watched terrorize them, many, by their own neighbors and former friends. These effects take generations to repair, and the era of Jim Crow prolonged the recovery of the victims and their families who learned these racial cues of coping as well as continued them by passing them down to the generations who came after them.
VI. Conclusion

“Whatever solution there is on the race question in the South and in the North, it is not going to be solved by white people. It has to be taken up and handled by the Negro himself. As Far as I can see, there is no hope that the white people of the South will even give the Negro any assistance in solving the race problem or in securing himself even the physical rights of his civil liberty and personal security” – Dan Kelly 1922

Racial cleansings at the turn of the century, which have hitherto gone under the guise of race riots, not only had an immediate effect on the lives and livelihoods of their black victims, but have also constituted a form of slow violence that took years and in some cases even decades, to fully manifest. At the onset of these cleansing there was a “doughnut effect” centered on the initial event, which were the result of mass exoduses, as victims were forced into nearby towns and cities. In some instances, victims were forced to flee further because neighboring towns shared the same philosophy as those the victims had just escaped, but for those adjoining communities that accepted new residents, a new problem was created. This new migration changed these communities’ social dynamics, putting pressure on the resources within them. Faced with more residents and not enough resources, many areas, often with the help of the government, created segregated ghettos. “The federal government purposefully placed public housing in high-poverty, racially isolated neighborhoods to concentrate black population, and with explicit racial intent, created a whites only mortgage guarantee program to shift the white population from urban neighborhoods to exclusively white suburbs” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 227). Largely segregated, these communities faced

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disproportionate outcomes in terms of wealth, education, health care and employment especially when compared to white neighborhoods. The Internal Revenue Service also assisted in this ghettoization by providing tax exemptions to “community-segregation organizations, and state licensed real estate agents and mortgage agencies” (Ruth Thompson-Miller 2015, 227).

Families trying to improve their status often were missing one thing: “a home, that final badge of entry into the sacred order of the American middle class of the Eisenhower years” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). Black families with the means to escape these impoverished areas were forced to find homes in predominantly white areas when they could, but these migrations also created a perceived threat. Neighborhoods that attempted to remain white reverted to old habits, whether due to racism or out of a mistaken worry about the declining property values. A black family trying to move into a predominantly white town in Levittown, Pennsylvania, was “greeted with protests and a burning cross. A neighbor who opposed the family said that Bill Myers was ‘probably a nice guy, but every time I look at him I see $2,000 drop off the value of my house.’” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). Many of these towns would remain white, effectively becoming Sundown towns. But for those towns willing to allow black families in, another issue arose: white flight. White families who wanted to get out before alleged crime or poverty invaded their communities fled, leaving their homes in the hands of sellers who often sold mortgages in the form of predatory loans. Under contract, families who missed a payment risked losing everything they had already invested in their homes. Some of the homes exchanged hands three or four times. These methods further bankrupted large groups of black families preventing them from ever
acquiring a semblance of wealth and guaranteed that whites and blacks would continue to be segregated. By the time the government banned these discriminatory housing practices in the 1960s, it was already too late, as the damage had been done. Housing regulations helped to quell some of these practices but they did not eliminate them. As recently as 2010, banks such as Bank of America and Wells Fargo were forced to pay millions of dollars to victims of predatory loans. Preying on people of color’s desire to build wealth for themselves, “affidavits found loan officers referring to their black customers as ‘mud people’ and to their subprime products as ‘ghetto loans’” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014).

The elimination of neighborhoods by policies and practices of racial cleansing often allowed cities to rezone the areas, further ghettoizing their former residents. With all of the black districts destroyed and a large portion of Greenwood’s black population in flight led by the exodus or murder of the black elite, the city was able to rezone the entire community. At its peak, Greenwood, like many black towns, had a large percentage of blacks involved in the voting process, forcing candidates seeking election to speak to these communities directly. The removal of prominent leaders and a growing focus on survival combined with the disenfranchisement of blacks in these now impoverished neighborhoods forced candidates to find new ways of getting the votes necessary to win their elections. But it was not an easy task. Over time, many elements contributed to the decline in voter turnout after the cleansing: the lingering threat of violence, coupled with the belief that those running for office did not have the community’s best interest in mind were major factors in cases like Greenwood, Tulsa and Brooklyn in Wilmington. At the outset, state and government officials often made empty promises to rebuild and put a
strong emphasis on equality. Over time, however, voter restrictions, a growing lack of faith that their circumstances would change, and a criminal justice system built around mass incarceration would hinder the black vote.

What became all too apparent during the height of the Michael Brown case was the undeniably low level of black voter registration in Ferguson. Black residents were scrutinized and once again victimized insofar as they were blamed for the circumstances that befouled them. However, the experiences of the disproportionately ticketed and fined citizens of Ferguson reinforce the theory that whites have become wealthy by continuing to oppress blacks. It is worth recalling that Ferguson is only 14 miles away from East St Louis, the home of the 1917 so-called race riot. Without considerable research, it is impossible to know if the violence that took place a century ago has had a direct impact on this community and on those in neighboring vicinities. But what is surely undeniable is the ongoing disenfranchisement of black people based on race at the hands of the government and local authorities elected to protect them that defines both cataclysms.

In June 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates, correspondent for The Atlantic and author of The Beautiful Struggle and Between the World and Me, published a cover story for The Atlantic entitled “The Case for Reparations.” In this article, Coates presents an argument about the need for the issue of reparations to be revisited based on the history of African American suffering in this country. As I stated earlier, many Americans equate reparations only with the institution of slavery and refuse to venture out of this discourse, but Coates creates a timeline throughout American history that provides ample evidence for the necessity of reparations beyond the injustice of slavery alone. Still, the historical fact of slavery cannot be avoided. As important as the production of commodities was to
the wealth of this country during slavery, it is essential to note also that “slaves were the single largest, by far, financial asset of property in the entire American economy” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). The buying and selling of slaves not only created vast amounts of wealth but began the process of destroying the black family and disenfranchising blacks as a whole. Coates tells the story of Henry Brown, a slave, who pleaded profusely to be sold as a unit in attempt to maintain his family structure, but to no avail—his wife and child were sold separately. Stationed on the side of the road, this would be the last time he would ever see his family again: “I seized hold of her hand, intending to bid her farewell; but words failed me; the gift of utterance had fled, and I remained speechless” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). After only a brief time in this country African Americans were faced with the inability to protect their family from the slave trade, initiating the cycle of post-traumatic stress disorder that has had lasting effects to this day.

Robbed of their families and livelihood, African American sharecroppers also became prey to landowners who repeatedly cheated them out of the value of their hard work and labor. Agreeing to split the profits of the commodities produced, sharecroppers found it hard to sustain themselves and pay their share to the landowners. Uneducated and poor, with the inability to recognize this deception, these victims lost valuable land which if sustained could have proved profitable over time. According to a 2001 report, the Associated Press published a three-part investigation of the theft of African American land, proving that “some of the land taken from black families has become a country club in Virginia, [...] oil fields in Mississippi and a baseball spring training facility in Florida.” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). This has been a habitual strategy, in
other words, to acquire wealth over the course of this nation’s history. In his article, Coates also addressed the events of Jim Crow, housing discrimination, the GI Bill, and the phenomenon of predatory lending loans. The ongoing plunder of African Americans has created an enormous gap in wealth across this country.

Time has not stopped the proliferation of negative stereotypes of African Americans as criminals, shiftless, lazy, and unambitious, though they were in fact instrumental in creating the various forms of wealth within their self-sustained communities that would eventually be stolen from them during the racial cleansings of the early twentieth century. In 2011, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, tried to place the blame on the family for the ongoing violence against blacks: “Too many men making too many babies they don’t want to take care of, and then we end up dealing with your children” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). But, this is just more misleading rhetoric, which is used to portray African Americans in a negative light without addressing the overall structural issues the black community face today. Such issues include not just a large population of adults in single-parent households working longer shifts for lower wages, but also a lack of after school and extra-curricular programs for youths, as well as poor education and a steady growth in poverty rates, which in many cases lead to higher crime rates. There is also a disproportionate unemployment rate within the black community, which ensures that many men and women find it difficult to support themselves and their families. According to the United States Bureau of Labor, unemployment rates among African Americans are twice as high as whites in this country. In 2015, whites had 4.1% unemployment rate, while African Americans were at 8.8%. This percentage is slightly lower than in previous years, for both groups, but there
are many additional factors that make this statistic all the more dire for African Americans. Mass incarceration has removed an enormous amount of black men from the labor pool and has effectively created a group of men and women ineligible for the job market and for voting rights. Over time, many men and women, stop trying to find work, unfortunately. Mass incarceration removes black workers from the labor pool, but it also breaks up black families. In the eyes of many African Americans it is analogous to the story of Henry Brown, who was forcibly separated from his family, never to be united again. Throughout the course of American history, black families have been destroyed by forces out of their control: slavery, racial cleansings, and now mass incarceration, to name a few, have been constant obstacles used to disenfranchise the black community.

Racism has denied people of color the chance of receiving a semblance of respect in this nation. It is difficult to believe this might change any time soon, especially with the growing number of deaths of African American men and women at the hands of racist police officers around the country. The negative perception of African Americans has led many within our society to once again, blame these victims, even though, in many cases, these events have been caught on camera proving the victims were defenseless and not a danger to their killers. The election of the first black president did not prove to be enough to change the nation’s long history of racism. In fact, it sometimes reinforced that racism. At the very least, it demonstrated that such racism is more prevalent than is often admitted, because for years it had been hidden by notions of social change and progress. Racism is the reason why the circumstances of blacks will never be the same as those of whites.
After a speech at Howard University in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson met with civil rights leaders who reinforced his sentiment that “Negro poverty is a special, and particularly destructive, form of American poverty.” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). The assertion remains as true today as it was then. The Reconstruction era provided blacks with a semblance of freedom that was eventually hindered and destroyed by so-called race riots, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and mob violence. At the start of the Progressive Era, Edwin McCabe’s model for Black Nationalism was growing. The need to build and the desire to nurture a community that was self-sufficient away from centuries of oppression inspired many African Americans to construct their own neighborhoods. These black men and women who helped to create these environments had a vision for what they believed made them citizens in a country they had learned to adopt as their own. The attacks unleashed upon them out of a perceived need to maintain racial domination not only tarnished the foundation of a people finally beginning to flourish, but put forth a form of slow violence that is still apparent in our society today. The acquired and reinforced racial cues instilled over a century ago or more have resulted in a divided nation. Over a century ago W.E.B. Du Bois in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* made a prediction that the century sadly fulfilled: “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line” (Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk 1903).

W.E.B. Du Bois’s model of self-sufficiency based on the desire to educate oneself, cannot flourish in environments unconducive to learning that are the result of socioeconomic imbalances. Children as a whole cannot learn if they are not in the right environment to do so, and parents cannot teach them if their focus is on survival. All of
the ills that plague black communities today may not directly be the result of racial cleansing, but racism is at their root.

Racial cleansings for years have been mislabeled as “so called race-riots” allowing these events to go unexplored over the course of our history. New investigations of this topic will prove that the long-term effects of these events have hurt and deformed our society by continuously forcing a group of people to uproot themselves leaving behind all they have earned and collected, and relocate elsewhere, usually in even more difficult circumstances. Coupled with a lack of societal support, a depressed economy, and laws created to oppress an entire race, our social progress has been stunted. Furthermore, racial cleansing did not only result in a loss of materialistic possessions, such as land and valuables, but also time. For a race of people to reside in a country for this long and still lack the basic necessities and opportunities to achieve some form of freedom is an undeniable shame, and we have not fully faced the psychological toll of racial cleansing either, which hinders both drive and desire and replaces both with fear, apprehension, and self-hate. Such characteristics are not easily removed, especially if they are unknowingly transmitted across generations. To the victims and descendants of racial cleansing there is a debt that needs to be paid. No amount of money can pay it, but reparations can help to eliminate for some at least, the socioeconomic ills many of these families have faced.

In January 2016, presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was asked about his stance on reparations, and he responded by saying, “[What] we should be talking about is making massive investments in rebuilding our cities, in creating millions of decent paying jobs, in making public colleges and universities tuition-free, basically targeting
our federal resources to the areas where it is needed the most and where it is needed the most is in impoverished communities, often African American and Latino” (Coates, The Atlantic 2016). As noble as this rhetoric is, there are still problems with it, for there is no guarantee that those who need these things most will receive them, and in order to enact these policies the president would also need the approval from other areas of government. Reparations on a massive scale may be difficult to achieve at this stage in our history, but on a smaller scale the events surrounding racial cleansings might provide a good place to begin the healing process that might tackle the systemic racism that still plagues this country. For Coates, the ability to provide reparations in general means “a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). He also thinks that “reparations would seek to close the chasm” pertaining to the wealth gap between whites who have treated blacks as second class citizens over the course of this nation’s history (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). Coates uses Thomas Jefferson as a frame of reference to argue the case for reparation and how it could change the African American economic landscape. Over the course of this country’s history, countless lives have been lost due to the refusal to value African Americans as equal citizens and contributors to this country’s success. Coates’ case for reparations argues for the monetary recognition for a race of people, and failing to do so is analogous to rewriting history, omitting the truth to preserve whiteness. “If Thomas Jefferson’s genius matters, then so does his taking of Sally Hemings’s body. If George Washington crossing the Delaware matters, so must his ruthless pursuit of the runagate Oney Judge” (Coates, The Case for Reparations 2014). If racial cleansings at the turn of the century have created wealth for whites through illegal land-grabs, which were unjustly legitimized by
fraudulent political practices, there must be both acknowledgement and compensation for the disenfranchised blacks who were the victims of these cleansings, both then and now.
Acknowledgments

I was always told at a young age to do all of your schooling while you are young. Unfortunately, like many others, I never found my direction until I was older. By the time I was done with my undergraduate degree, I was tired of school and wanted to work and move into my career. The moving on process was accentuated by not going to my college graduation. At the time, I did not think about those who worked so hard to get me to this place, and me walking down the aisle was not only a testament of my hard work but theirs. This was a huge mistake, as the first person in my family to graduate from college, I did not realize the importance of the event. It took over a decade for me to make the decision to go back. Why so long? I could not imagine being interested in anything that much to spend more time in school. I had a family and needed to make sure they were supported, but like everything in life, things change. One day at work we were discussing books, and I expressed my lack of desire to read. In passing, my boss at the time was appalled by my comments and began to quiz me profusely on my reading desire, or lack thereof. It did not take long for her to narrow down what appealed to me and come up with a book I would like, *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah. From that day on, I became a book sponge. She fed me book after book, allowing me to keep them all. She would say, keep it and add it to your library. It was not long before I began to expand my reading desire to books I had always longed for, African American literature and history.

As a black boy growing up in one of the worst communities in New York, Brownsville Brooklyn, I embraced my impoverished environment, never questioning why we lived in such a dire predicament. But as I grew, I changed, and I traded one hood for another, moving to Far Rockaway, in Queens, New York. As a child I always thought
I would meet my demise by being kidnapped or shot. This is a horrible way to grow up. As long as we survive we rarely revisit these thoughts. Rather than run away from them, we often embrace them, linking them to our strength and belief that nothing could hinder our progress because in some way shape or form, we made it. It was not until my first semester in graduate school that I realized how rare my circumstances were. I was surrounded by a majority who did not come from a similar background. At that moment, I raised my hand and proceeded to answer the Professor’s question when it dawned on me the road I had traveled. I realized that the community that raised me rarely produced graduate or undergraduate students. Not that it could not—there were many intelligent people in the community, an overwhelmingly amount of gifted individuals, but sadly the focus was to survive, not necessarily college or any form of higher education for that matter. The question is why? The answer I give to those who pose that question is simple; there are a lack role models and mentors. If you do not know anyone going to college, how can you envision or dream of college? For most kids in the hood we equate college to what we see on TV, whatever form that may be. For me it was basketball, and my college applications reflected the teams taking part in the March Madness Tournament. I pray that this change in time, all I can do is my part and thank those who have helped me to stay focused and arrive at this point in my life.

With that said, I would like to first thank my Grandmother, Mary Bailey, who passed away the year I was originally scheduled to matriculate from graduate school. As the matriarch of the family, she put everyone else first. She had a hand in the growth of our entire family. At the time of my college graduation, I did not realize how important it was for her to see me cross that stage. She never told me until years later how
disappointed she was, but she never imposed a feeling of guilt or shame on me. As a woman who only went as far as the seventh grade, she preached the importance of school. When I was a child, she stayed up all hours of the night with me, trying to help me get my homework done. It was an amazing feat, especially for someone who barely had the knowledge herself, but she persevered, night after night. I told her not to worry; when I graduate with my M.A. she will get that chance. Unfortunately, she would not live long enough to see that day, so this paper is dedicated to my grandmother, Mary Bailey, my idol and confidant. She was a vision of strength, patience, and integrity. I could not have made it to this point without her.

As I reflect back on my seventeen-year television career, I believe I was on the right path to achieving my goal in becoming an editor, but looking back maybe that was not the goal. That conversation about the importance of reading changed my life. No longer my boss, Jarletta Williams became more of an aunt. Over the course of our relationship, she has been a role model, a necessary support system, inspiration, and cheerleader. Filled with knowledge and a big heart, she got me through my television career and introduced me to reading, giving me the ability to share with my kids how important reading truly is.

The love of reading did not become a part time habit but a constant thought even on vacation. Often when I went on vacation I made it a habit to visit the local bookstore. One particular vacation I happened to find a book that automatically intrigued me. Looking back I can honestly say it changed my life and actually made this thesis a reality. In perusing the shelves in this one bookstore I came across Elliot Jaspin’s book, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden Story of Racial Cleansing in America*. From the moment I
picked it up, I was captivated, spending hours reading and re-reading stories about African Americans being driven away from their communities by way of violence. I began to think about how much these individuals lost by constantly having to start over after working so hard to establish themselves within their communities. Jaspin, in his book did not spare the gruesome violence bestowed upon these individuals. It was not explained how these events affected them, so I tried to envision what their lives were like once they were removed. It could not be easy. It might actually resurface in the ways in which people of color now try so hard to acquire a semblance of livelihood in an environment where all odds are against them. His book inspired and prompted me to think past the actual events and imagine life today. My thesis picks up where Jaspin left off, attempting to put all the pieces together in hopes of rethinking our history at a critical time in African American history. His book may be one of the most important books in my life, so thank you Mr. Jaspin.

As I stated earlier, going back to school as an adult was challenging. I spent a lot of time questioning my ability. One night while talking to my eldest daughter, Jessenia, I shared with her my desire to go back to school. At the time she was around fourteen, but I knew it would help me to gauge my own desire. She gave me a big smile and told me how great it was that I wanted to go back. With that vote of confidence, I jumped head in. At that moment, I recognized it was not only about me but my chance to be an example of what hard work could accomplish. On those days when I had a paper due and wanted to just put the pen down, my desire for my kids to be proud of me helped me to persevere. So I want to acknowledge my kids, Jessenia, Jevon, Jordan, and Jayden. They
inspire and remind me every day that this is not only for me but a way to continue to
grow and move the bar for excellence a little higher.

As much as my kids inspired me, inspiration was not going to get me an A.
Returning to school was an arduous task, and at first I struggled tremendously. Writing
papers, formulating thoughts, and spending countless hours doing historic research which
led to the formation of this thesis was a tough task. Many nights I spent looking at a
blank screen. Every draft I wrote was met with my own criticism and fear it was not good
enough. Fortunately, I was able to rely on my older sister, Tamara Thomas, day or night
she took the time to read my papers no matter how terrible they were at first. She
provided the feedback and support I needed to turn my C into an A. We often fought, but
that’s what we do, it also helped that we share the same birthday.

Over time my writing ability got better and I was able to leave the nest and fly
solo, but are we ever solo? One of the greatest aspects I have been able to add to my life
as I got older was a group of great friends. Through anything in life we need a support
system and as a black man in a world which does not always value him or his ability, it is
necessary to be able to call on those who can support you, and at the same time tell you
when you are wrong and still accept you as a person. At this time I would like to
acknowledge those individuals, starting with my proofreaders Markland Walker and
Rachael Benavidez, who have had the opportunity in some circumstances to read this
thesis more than once. Thank you for taking the time to help me accomplish my dream in
this paper. In addition, I would like to thank the rest of my team, Shameek Robinson,
Allen Jones, Phil Johnson, and Daniel Castellanos. My last seventeen years in television
also allowed me to take my relationship with coworkers into the realm of true friendship.

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On the days where I did not think I would make it I was able to lean on a great cast who
on a daily basis were able to supply strength in an environment that turned cancerous by
the end. Marquis Reid, Kashawn Cleaves, Walter Cooper, and Boby Hawthorne, thank
you for keeping me grounded. Clarence aka “Scooter” Taylor, we have been friends since
my second semester in New Paltz. You are one of my oldest friends and for years, you
were the Zen master, the angel on my shoulder, day in and day out. You put the good
word in for me to get the job that allowed me to take care of my family today. We may
not speak as often now, but I still cherish that friendship.

As a young man, I always believed I had a somewhat decent education, with an
assortment of teachers who were amazing. But upon graduating from City College, I am
able to really provide an example of what a great education looks like. During my time at
City College, I have met some of the greatest educators in my life. The Center for Worker
Education’s staff is top notch. They exemplify what an educator should be. Like many
institutions, the staff is there to see you graduate, but for me, I felt a sense of unity and
caring like no other. When I began I often felt like I was falling short and my professor,
Martin Woessner, told me that we would get through it together, not to worry, and to just
keep working. I achieved a deserving A- in his class, the lowest grade I would get in my
graduate career. It was only fitting for me to enlist him in my thesis. What better way to
start and finish my career but with the professor who said he would see me through this
process. Thank you, Professor, for all the work you put into meeting with me when I was
not in your class, as well as for this paper. I would also like to recognize my secondary
reader, and former professor, Justin Williams. It was great to have a black male educator.
Black men in academia are rare, so it was my pleasure to have you as a professor and
advisor. To Professor, Susanna Rosenbaum, who was my unofficial advisor, thank you for all of your help over the years. I spent a lot of time taking up your office hours, but I learned so much. You were not only one of my favorite professors, but you taught one of my favorite classes, *Race and Gender*. I was most excited about taking this class when I joined the Study of the Americas program. To Professor Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, even though I did not have the chance to take any of your classes, we spent so many hours talking about a variety of things that it felt as though I was in your class. You have done a wonderful job as the department chair; you work so hard for the students and staff. Reflecting on our conversations about who deserves to teach people of color, you definitely have the right since you recognize the challenges that are present, and what continues to lie ahead for people of color trying to get into academia. Lastly, during my graduate studies I had the pleasure to go outside of the CWE environment and take classes at the Graduate Center. I did not realize until I was done that I was taking Ph.D. courses. I felt the students were a little advanced but I equated it to the school culture. At the Graduate Center I had the opportunity to take classes with the late Professor Jerry Gafio Watts and Professor Jonathan Sassi. Taking these classes allowed me to envision what studying would be like at the Ph.D. level. Professor Sassi, thank you for your continued assistance in helping me take the steps necessary to move forward in my studies.

When the notion of graduate school was first introduced to me, I realized I was not going to be able to pass the tests many graduate school programs required. I also needed to be able to go to work while I went to school. I would have never started this program if it was not for my at the time girlfriend, now wife, Sendy. From day one, she
was there to help me with my statement, constantly on me to make sure all my paperwork was on time. She was a constant support system throughout this process. During the writing process of my thesis, we had major deaths in our families, coupled with the birth of our son, Jayden, and through it all, she did her best to pick up the slack as I spent large amounts of time reading and working. It was not always ideal, but nothing in life is, and I can truly say I am fortunate to have someone like her to get me through the process and across the finish line in such a magnificent fashion. Thank you, I appreciate all of your efforts.

Overall, this process could not be complete without those who helped me to establish my foundation over the years; my mom, Janice Bailey, my cousin, Amanda Themalvoisin, my big brother Samuel Houston, and my younger sister Tina Richardson. As the only child, I was fortunate to be able to adopt and be adopted by those who have loved and cared for me since the beginning. For the communities that raised me, my life has been a recipe made up of luck, hard work, caring, perseverance, fortitude and most importantly a great support system throughout. I hope those who continue to grow up in impoverished communities realize that the neighborhoods that support you do not have to define you or your future. Technology has allowed us to dream and envision the impossible. I pray for constant perseverance and the desire to be better no matter the odds.
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