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## Review of *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* By James S. Hirsch

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*Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy.* By James S. Hirsch. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002. x + 358 pp. Photographs, sources, index. \$25.00.

In *Riot and Remembrance*, James S. Hirsch, an ace reporter formerly affiliated with the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, adds his dispassionate voice to the swelling volumes on one of America's most obscure, ignominious racial conflicts: the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot. As Hirsch points out, even many native Tulsans knew nothing of the Riot until recent years, the silence surrounding the catastrophe having been deafening. Not only did the Riot escape local civic discourse, it garnered only scant mention—if any mention at all—in state-mandated textbooks.

Why now? Why Tulsa? The answers to both questions turn in large part on the formation of an eleven-member 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission, a body whose dialogue, debate, and deliberations Hirsch covered assiduously and documented meticulously. Initially convened in 1997, the Commission was charged by the Oklahoma legislature with finding facts, locating Riot survivors, and offering recommendations—including whether reparations for the Riot should be made. The Commission's work drew world-wide media attention.

An alleged "assault" involving two teenagers, seventeen-year-old elevator operator Sarah Page and nineteen-year-old shoeshine boy Dick Rowland, triggered an orgy of violence and mayhem. The supposed "assault" (a code word for rape in the overtly racist culture that defined this period) catalyzed rumors of a planned lynching. Sensational reporting by the *Tulsa Tribune*, lax law enforcement, and a racially hostile climate in general ensured the triumph of mob rule. All hell broke loose.

A marauding band of white vigilantes invaded Greenwood, the prominent African American entrepreneurial community, and looted, burned, and shot with reckless abandon. People, property, and promise vanished. Like a scorched earth war zone on the wrong

side of the tracks, Greenwood clung perilously to life. Property damage ran into the millions. The death toll arguably reached as high as three hundred. Scores lay injured. Tulsa stood defiled and defined.

A testament to the resilience of its residents, Greenwood rose from the ashes. Now largely of historical significance, the community continues to evolve.

Hirsch offers a lucid, accessible, objective account of this deeply disturbing American tragedy. *Riot and Remembrance* adds yet another perspective to a compelling story no longer waiting to be heard.

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