

## Sidedoor S6 Ep. 12 Bonus Confronting the Past Final Transcription

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: 100 years ago this week, one of the most violent episodes of racial violence in American history erupted over a period of three days. Over the course of the Tulsa race massacre, more than 1,250 homes were destroyed in Greenwood, an all-black neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Churches, schools, businesses, and even a hospital were also deliberately burned or destroyed. By the end of it, the wealthiest black neighborhood in the United States was completely devastated. And for decades, not many people talked about this horrifying violent moment in our country's history. In our silence, many Americans never even learned it happened. So, this week, we're rerunning our episode about the Tulsa race massacre. And just a warning for listeners, this episode contains graphic firsthand accounts of violence. The story is reported by former Sidedoor Producer, Megan Detrie. Okay, here we go.

[MUSIC]

Clyde Eddy: They were hurting a bunch of the black people down in Convention Hall. They were interning in the Convention Hall building.

Jimmie Lily Franklin: They didn't know where they were taking them, and then they set our house afire.

Eunice Jackson: You could see the blazes from where we lived over the hill. Looked like the whole world was on fire.

Clyde Eddy: They burnt down over 30 square blocks.

Eunice Jackson: It seemed like a dream. It doesn't seem like things like that ever will happen.

Megan Detrie: Clyde Eddy, Jimmie Lily Franklin, and Eunice Jackson were witnesses to the 1921 Oklahoma race riot, which started ostensibly because of an encounter between a young black shoe shiner and a white elevator operator over Memorial Day weekend in 1921. The recordings were collected by the Smithsonian's newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture. It's for an exhibit about the Power of Place and the African American experience.

John W. Franklin: In late May of 1921, a young man named Dick Roland, who was a Tulsan, had an encounter with a young white woman on an elevator in a downtown Tulsa building. What happened on that elevator? We don't really know whether he stepped on her foot, whether the

elevator stopped short. But what we do know is that a young woman exited the elevator with claims that she was raped, which she later recanted.

Megan Detrie: But to understand what happens next, you need to know more about what was going on in Oklahoma at the time.

John W. Franklin: African Americans had been moving to the Oklahoma territories since the 1840s. Some had come on the Trail of Tears, both enslaved with Cherokees and free members of the Cherokee Nation, and had established themselves in pockets and communities all throughout Eastern Oklahoma.

Megan Detrie: On November 16th, 1907, Oklahoma became a state, and with statehood came the ability to separate blacks and whites through a set of federal laws known as the Jim Crow laws. There were to be separate coaches and rail cars. Interracial marriage became a felony. Over those first few years, hospitals, cemeteries, and even public payphone booths became segregated. In the 14 years between statehood and the 1921 race riot, 26 African Americans were lynched in Oklahoma.

John W. Franklin: As Tulsa began to develop into one of Oklahoma's major cities and oil was discovered, blacks shared in that wealth. Owning land, building a community for themselves in north Tulsa, that became known to many as Black Wall Street, or in the parlance of the time, Negro Wall Street.

Megan Detrie: Black Wall Street, also called the Greenwood Neighborhood, was a thriving commercial district with some of the most prosperous black owned businesses in the southwest. There were cafes, grocery stores, beauty parlors, a 750-seat theater, a roller-skating rink, two black owned newspapers, dentists, lawyers, doctors' offices, and more than a half dozen African American churches. But most importantly, Greenwood was home to nearly 10,000 people. Tulsa, with its growing black wealth and increasingly resentful white population, was just a powder keg waiting for a match.

John W. Franklin: So is the little background, the necessary background to this situation that results in Dick Rowland's accusations of 1921 and subsequent arguments between the established and prosperous black community protecting one of its own and a white community that is fearful of and becoming more desperate about their black neighbors.

Megan Detrie: After Dick Rowland was arrested, black Tulsa worried that a white mob, spurred on by a sensationalist news story, might attempt some form of vigilante justice. A group of armed African American World War I veterans came to the courthouse to offer their assistance in defending Rowland. They were sent away by the sheriff. Meanwhile, angry white Tulsans are gathering outside. They grew into a mob of 2,000 people. Some also had guns. A shot was fired and mayhem broke loose.

John W. Franklin: Overnight, on May 31st, the conflagrations turn deadly. White mobs, with the authority of Tulsa's police, attack and raise all of what had been called Negro Wall Street, burning it to the ground. An untold number of black community members are murdered, thousands of businesses are lost, and homes are lost as well.

Megan Detrie: This wasn't just rage or indiscriminate violence. Historians say it was an attempt to wipe out the heart of black life and black success in Tulsa. John W. Franklin, the program manager at the museum, has spent years working on reconciliation within the Tulsa community. He follows in the footsteps of his father, prominent historian, John Hope Franklin, and his grandfather, B.C. Franklin, a well-known lawyer in Tulsa, who fought for the Greenwood district to be rebuilt after the riot.

John W. Franklin: When the so-called riot occurred, a riot is usually thought of in the United States in terms of black people destroying things, but in this case, it was white people destroying a black community. And so, it's referred to increasingly not as the Tulsa race riot, but as the Tulsa massacre. In light of what occurred in Europe with ethnic cleansing, people are increasingly calling it a pogrom, because it's a destruction in one night of an entire black community's wellbeing, livelihood, and future.

Megan Detrie: Within hours, a pattern emerged. Armed whites would break into black homes and businesses. Anyone inside was forced into the streets. Men were led away at gunpoint to internment centers. If they resisted, they were shot. If they had guns, they were shot. The rioters then looted the homes, hauling off whatever they wanted before setting the buildings on fire. Columns of smoke rose hundreds of feet into the air over the north end of the city. This is John, again, whose grandfather survived the riot.

John W. Franklin: Of course of which African Americans are machine gunned down in the streets of their neighborhood, private planes drop turpentine, burning turpentine bombs, on the black community so that the businesses, banks, hotels, residences, furriers, insurance companies all burn from the top down, including my grandfather's rooming house and his law offices.

Megan Detrie: Eldoris McCondichie was a young girl asleep at home when the violence broke out in North Tulsa.

Eldoris McCondichie: When my mother had me to get up, I just didn't want to get up or wake up then, so I just didn't answer her. But when she's saying, "Eldoris, wake up. We have to go," and then she said, "The white people are killing the colored folks," and she didn't have any more trouble out of me getting up then.

Megan Detrie: Olivia Hooker is a retired psychology professor, who recently turned 101. Her father and his business partner owned a department store in Greenwood.

Olivia Hooker: Picture with me the trauma of a young six year old girl hearing things hitting the house, "Bum, bum, bum, bum, bum," like that, and thinking it was hail, until my mother took me to the window and let me peer through the blinds and said, "That thing up there on the stand with the American flag on top of it is a machine gun, and those are bullets hitting the house, and that means your country is shooting at you." This was a totally amazing thought to a child, who was totally idealistic. I had never met any kind of discrimination.

Megan Detrie: Her mother hid Olivia and her siblings under a table, as her father and brother were taken away. She remembers men sneaking into her backyard to set fire to doll clothes that had been hung on a line to dry.

Olivia Hooker: The damage that was done was not only the material things, a house destroyed, the entire neighborhood destroyed, the businesses destroyed, all the services destroyed, our school bombed on the day that we should have been getting our report cards to move up to the next class, so that the children of Tulsa were very devastated.

Megan Detrie: Jimmie Lilly Franklin lived with her uncle, parents, grandparents, and three sisters in a four-bedroom, two story house, in the heart of the African American district.

Eunice Jackson: And we got to the bottom of the stairway to see our front door being splintered and people rushing in with shotguns and pistols, and some of them had hoods, so it frightened us to death. And the next thing we noticed, standing near the bottom of the stairway, was that, the one loading up mama's Kimball piano into a truck, papa's photographic equipment into a truck, and our piggy banks off the mantel in the living room. Mendon started to say something. Mama put her hands over her lips and told her not to speak anything.

Megan Detrie: The rioting continued through the next day and until the morning of June 1st, when the Oklahoma National Guard arrived and declared martial law. By then, most of the city's black population had fled or was being held under armed guard. There were a few pockets of armed resistance still in the northern most parts of the district, and in some areas, sympathetic whites hid black neighbors and employees. But around 40 blocks of the city were destroyed, including over 1,000 homes. John describes the scene.

John W. Franklin: Churches burning, homes burning, businesses burning.

Megan Detrie: No one knows exactly, but it's likely that between 100 and 300 people were killed.

John W. Franklin: And then the aftermath of the Red Cross getting nourishment and clothing and temporary housing for the residents, who have lost everything. The entire community is devastated, decimated.

Megan Detrie: Across Tulsa's dividing line, the railroad tracks, no white homes had been touched. It was days before the Red Cross was allowed to enter the city to offer relief.

Thousands of black Tulsans spent the winter living in tents. Others moved away. Official damage was estimated at \$1.5 million dollars, about \$18 million by today's standards. The black community filed damage claims for three times that amount, but all of the claims were denied. And when a jury investigated the riots, it blamed them on the black community. No one, black or white, was convicted for taking part in the violence.

John W. Franklin: The city passed an ordinance following the massacre that everyone had to rebuild with non-flammable materials, and my grandfather took that, fought that to the State Supreme Court and won, so that people were actually able to rebuild where they had once had businesses and homes. So, this is a story of American resilience, in spite of the massacre, in spite of the burning, in spite of the theft of people's person and property, and the refusal of insurance companies to compensate them because it was a riot.

Megan Detrie: And then, as the Greenwood district rebuilt, the story just disappeared. It became so hidden that blacks and whites alike grew up in Tulsa having never heard of what happened. Textbooks didn't cover it, classrooms rarely taught it. "Even in private," John says, "a sense of shame often kept people quiet." In fact, someone went so far as to try to erase the newspaper coverage that put the riot in motion. The original bound volumes of the Tulsa Tribune from that time are gone, and in the microfilm version for May 31st, 1921, someone has torn out both a front-page article and almost all of the editorial page.

John W. Franklin: The history is basically hidden, suppressed. The newspapers disappeared from that week. Blacks didn't talk about it; whites didn't talk about it. Some people did talk about it, but for the most part, it became a silent part of Tulsa's history.

Paul Gardullo: After the break, we'll return to Tulsa and hear about the silence that followed the massacre and how it took nearly 90 years to fully acknowledge the emotional damage that it caused to the people of Tulsa and the country.

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Paul Gardullo: Welcome back to Sidedoor. We go back to Producer, Megan Detrie, and her story of hatred and healing in Tulsa.

John W. Franklin: For years, black women see white women wearing their jewelry and just go walk up to them and snatch it off. "You know your husband didn't buy you. This came from my home."

Megan Detrie: If anyone acknowledged the riot, it was only in small ways. John says, "There are a lot of reasons why people stayed quiet. For the black community..."

John W. Franklin: It's very, very painful to discuss. We fear that many people who survived the massacre escaped to other parts of the country. Following the massacre, the Klan rose up in Tulsa. The Klan really wasn't well-established before the massacre, but then the Klan became

very evident. But then there's the shame of admitting, as white citizens, that your police department and fire department did nothing to protect the people. So, there's a certain level of denial, and also a level of resistance that we couldn't have been this mean as a people.

Megan Detrie: As time passed, there was more political pressure to acknowledge what happened.

John W. Franklin: It's part of a history of a city that's been suppressed for 80 years. The first public discussion of the massacre occurred in 2010, 89 years after it occurred. White journalists trying to do a story on it in the '70s received death threats.

Megan Detrie: In 1997, Oklahoma launched a commission to learn what actually happened. The Commission to Countries of Oral Histories from remaining survivors and their descendants collected papers and photographs. Some of the survivors sued for reparations in 2001, but the federal courts dismissed it. The statute of limitations had expired. This is the museum's Curator, Paul, again.

Paul Gardullo: At the turn of our 21st century, it brought this story back into people's memories in a large way.

Megan Detrie: All of these things got the story national attention for the very first time, and now Tulsa and the rest of the country is finally starting to open up about the riot. In 2011, the state made the Tulsa race riots a mandatory part of school curriculum.

Paul Gardullo: It's crucial not because just of what happened in Tulsa, but because of how this story is resonant for communities across the nation.

Megan Detrie: Just this year, the city renovated a park named after B.C. Franklin, John's grandfather. It features a Black Wall Street themed playground and the John Franklin Reconciliation Center, named after John's father, a prominent African American historian, has been holding annual discussions with community members since it opened seven years ago. For Paul, it's important that we face what happened.

Paul Gardullo: This is not an exceptional event. This is a horrific, horrific history, but it's not an exceptional one. And I think the better that our country can grapple with that fact, the better we'll begin to move forward. We have to. Almost a dozen black owned and operated churches, sacred spaces, were burned or looted. We can't help but recognize that, just one year ago, we had another attack on a sacred space in Charleston, South Carolina. And I think until we begin to recognize that these histories are part of a longer chain and the bigger context that has to do with questions of racism, of intolerance, and of hatred, but then, while we're not in Tulsa of 1921, we have to ask ourselves how far past Tulsa of 1921 we've moved.

Megan Detrie: Meanwhile, John has been visiting Tulsa, working with the Reconciliation Center in the park, as well as speaking with survivors and their families. And for the last five years, he's

brought Paul with him, and they've been collecting documentation for the new museum. Just last year, John made a new discovery about his own grandfather, B.C. Franklin.

John W. Franklin: So, a family member had put materials in storage and couldn't afford to pay for them and they were sold at auction, and someone approached an intermediary saying that they had these historic artifacts, historic documents for sale.

Megan Detrie: It was an unpublished manuscript and two photos of B.C. Franklin, one taken just five days after the riot, as B.C. and his law partner practiced law in a Red Cross tent. And the manuscript, written in 1931, is one of the earliest eyewitness accounts of the riot. In it, B.C. writes about meeting a young black soldier, called Ross, in 1917, just after Ross has come back from fighting in World War I. Then, during the riot, B.C. encounters him again as Ross is trying to defend his burning home, while his mother begs the mob to leave. A group of Tulsans purchased the manuscript and photos and donated them to the new museum. In displaying the manuscript, the museum asks the same questions of us as John's grandfather asked of the people of Tulsa, to not just be a passer-by, but instead to witness this history and to speak truth about what happened. This is John reading from his grandfather's manuscript.

John W. Franklin: "During that bloody day, I lived a thousand years, in the spirit at least. I lived the whole experience of the race, the experiences of royal ancestry beyond the seas, experience of the slave ships on their first voyage to America, where they're human cargo, experiences of American slavery and its concomitant evils, experiences of loyalty and devotion to the race, to this nation, to its flag, and war and in peace." "And I thought of Ross out yonder, in his last stand no doubt, for the protection of home and fireside and of old Mother Ross left homeless in the eventide of her life. I thought of the place the preachers call hell and wondered seriously if there was such a mystical place. It appeared in the surrounding that the only hell was the hell on this earth and such as the race was then passing through." "For fully 48 hours, the fires raged and burned everything in its path, and left nothing but ashes and burned safes and trunks and the like, where once stood beautiful homes and business houses. And so proud, rich, black Tulsa was destroyed by fire. That is, its buildings and property, but its spirit was neither killed nor daunted." "How the years have flown and how changed and changing as the whole face of this nation. It is now August 22nd, 1931, and this is being written. A little more than 10 years have passed under the bridge of time since the great Holocaust here. Young Ross, the veteran of the World War, survived the great catastrophe, but lost both his mind and eyesight in the fires that destroyed his home. With a burned and scarred faced, a mindless mind, he sits today in the asylum of the state and stares blankly into space." "At the corner of North Greenwood and East Easton sits Mother Ross, with her tin cup in hand, begging alms of the passers-by. They are nearly all newcomers and have no knowledge of her tragic past, hence they pay her little attention. Young Mrs. Ross is working and doing her best she can to carry on in these times of depression. She divides her visits between her mother-in-law and her husband at the asylum." "Of course, he has not the slightest recollection of her or of his mother. All yesteryears are only blank pieces of paper to him. He cannot remember one thing in the living, breathing, throbbing prison." B.C. Franklin.

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Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

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Lizzie Peabody: This episode of Sidedoor was produced by Megan Detrie, Tony Cohn, Nicco Picarro, Max Rosenthal, and Jason Orfanon, with special thanks to Kat Roman, Barbara Rehm, Gabe Kosowitz, Becky Habracker, and Linda St. Thomas.

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Lizzie Peabody: We also want to note that Paul Gardullo is the curator you hear in the episode, who worked on the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture's exhibition on Power of Place. Paul's name was left out of the original recording. The oral histories you heard were a gift from the Tulsa Project Incorporated, Reginald Turner, J.D. Clement, and the Lomax company.

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Lizzie Peabody: We'll be back next week with a new episode of Sidedoor.

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Lizzie Peabody: Until then, I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.