

## #1425 Remembering and Learning from History (Tulsa Massacre and Juneteenth)

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we shall take a look at the purposeful effort to erase the history of anti-black terrorism in America and the renewed efforts to expose our true history in order to learn from it and create the opportunity for healing.

Clips today are from *Vox*; *CounterSpin*; *Into America*; *Today, Explained*; *Democracy now!*; *The AI Franken Podcast* and *The Majority Report*.

### The massacre of Tulsa's "Black Wall Street" - Vox - Air Date 2-27-19

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:00:29] We're driving in what's known as Black Wall Street. It's where one of the nation's worst episodes of racial violence took place.

In 1921, a neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma called the Greenwood District was a bustling community of Black owned businesses. Tulsa locals know that period of Greenwood's history as a kind of golden age.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 1:** [00:00:53] If you can imagine just a like an old time downtown. Things like movie theaters, pharmacies, hair salons, and so forth.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:01:04] They called it Black Wall Street.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 2:** [00:01:06] It was a Mecca. It was a huge success.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:01:08] But Black Wall Street was also an anomaly. It thrived at a time when the KKK was incredibly active in Oklahoma. And the nation had just been through the Red Summer of 1919, when White mobs murdered Black people in dozens of incidents across the U.S..

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 1:** [00:01:28] There needed to be sort of match or an igniter tossed on these embers, and that event was, that trigger event, was an incident that involved two teenagers: Dick Rowen, 19 year old, Black boy who signed shoes downtown, Sarah Page 17 year old White girl ran an elevator in a downtown building called the Drexel building. He went to the building board of the elevator; something happened, Sarah Page began to scream; they both ran out of the elevator.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:01:56] Now we don't know exactly what happened in this elevator. But a day later, Roland was arrested and taken to the courthouse. The local newspaper ran an article claiming Roland had assaulted Page. Even though Page refused to press charges, the article was essentially a call to action for Whites.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 1:** [00:02:16] A large White mob began to gather on the lawn of the courthouse. Dick Rowland was in jail on the top floor. A number of Black men, several dozen marched down to the courthouse to protect him. Some of them armed. There was a

struggle between one of the Black men in the small group and one of the White men in the larger group. And things sort of went south from that point.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:02:36] Hundreds of White people descended upon Black Wall Street, armed. Black residents withdrew behind the railroad tracks that marked off the Greenwood District. Some of them were armed and fought back, but they were outnumbered by the White mob, which shot their way through.

The White mob murdered. They looted. And they set fire to Black Wall Street.

**VANESSA HALL-HARPER:** [00:03:04] This was the strategy, if you will, of how to deal with these communities, with these successful Black communities. The effects were

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 5:** [00:03:11] disastrous.

For two

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:03:14] days, the Greenwood district burned. Martial law was declared and the National Guard was brought in. By the time the massacre ended, Greenwood was in ruins. More than 1200 homes were destroyed and 35 blocks burned.

The exact number of casualties is harder to pin down. Some initially only reported that White people died. Others reported somewhere between 30 and 100, mostly Black, casualties. But estimates now put that number closer to 300.

As for those that survive, thousands of them lived in tent cities in the months that followed, and we're left to pick up the pieces of rubble they once called home.

After the massacre, the cover-up started. Records went missing from city files, including the very article that started it all. It makes photos from this time all the more important as part of the historical record, but back in 1921, these images served a very different purpose.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 4:** [00:04:23] So photo postcards, like these were pretty widely distributed after the massacre. At the time, they were a part of White supremacist culture and kept as souvenirs of racially charged crimes.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:04:34] Now, they're preserved to make sure this part of Tulsa's history isn't forgotten, and they paint a clear picture of how much destruction there was that day.

On the postcards, it's called Tulsa Race Riot, a name that itself erases what really happened.

**VANESSA HALL-HARPER:** [00:04:53] By calling it a riot, it's a way of trying to rewrite the history, assuming that there were both sides at fault. And that was not the case. I call it a massacre, and I call it that because that's what it was.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:05:06] Greenwood eventually rebuilt, but nearly a century later, there's a part of this story that still haunts the city. No one actually knows where the victims' bodies are.

**J. KAVIN ROSS:** [00:05:18] We've got to find our people. We've got to put them at rest, you know? If not, we continue to be haunted by what was done so many

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 5:** [00:05:27] years ago.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:05:28] Kavin Ross, a local writer is one of many in Tulsa, descended from people who lost everything in the massacre.

So in this cemetery, there are only two official victims of the Tulsa race massacre. How many victims do you think there are?

**J. KAVIN ROSS:** [00:05:44] After all these years, I think 300 is putting it mildly.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:05:50] In 1997, the city finally put together a commission to study the massacre, and help piece together what happened in 1921. They compiled records and eye witness accounts.

**ELDORIS MCCONDICHIE:** [00:06:02] The bullets were just raining down over us.

**GEORGE MONROE:** [00:06:06] They set our house on fire, and went right straight to the curtains, and set the curtains on fire.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:06:11] These accounts are especially important now because none of these survivors are alive anymore. And they also provided new information. Some mentioned trucks, like this one, loaded with victims of the riot.

One riot witness in particular came forth, testifying that he saw bodies being dumped in Oaklawn cemetery.

**J. KAVIN ROSS:** [00:06:34] This is it. This is the area.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:06:38] Using the survivor accounts, records, and eventually radar, the city was able to pinpoint three locations with anomalies in the soil. Only one step was left, to excavate.

But it was something the city at the time, wasn't up for doing. For many Tulsans ,it was a part of history, best forgotten and not worth investigating.

In some ways, today, that sentiment remains.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 3:** [00:07:06] Kind of a waste of money.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:08] Why do you think that?

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 3:** [00:07:10] It's over and done with.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:12] But there are clear signs of a city that's ready to come to terms with a dark chapter in its history.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 4:** [00:07:18] Honestly, that's a lot of missing people. People that probably had families.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 5:** [00:07:21] We owe it to the people who... whose blood is actually fertilized the grounds of this place.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 6:** [00:07:27] There was a tremendous amount of racism.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 7:** [00:07:29] Injustice, plus time, does not equal justice.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:34] Today a new mayor is reopening the investigation.

**G.T. BYNUM:** [00:07:38] I think a pretty basic compact that a city makes with its citizens is, if somebody murders you, we will do everything we can to find out what happened to you and give your family closure.

And whether that, whether you were murdered yesterday, or you were murdered 98 years ago.

**RANJANI CHAKRABORTY - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:55] The city will be looking into the three areas that the commission noted. That process of finding out what lies beneath Tulsa, and DNA matching any remains with descendants, could take years.

The investigation is just one part of a bigger historical reckoning, but the reality is, it can't undo the crimes or the cover-up of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

**UNKNOWN TULSA RESIDENT 5:** [00:08:22] This story is the greatest conspiracy of silence that I've ever seen in history.

## Joseph Torres on Media & Tulsa Massacre - CounterSpin - Air Date 6-4-21

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:08:30] *Then As Now* is importantly a story about media, about what newspapers told people and they believed at the time, and then afterward what folks were told to remember and told to forget. You wrote about it recently for Free Press, and I would refer listeners to that piece, but talk a little, if you would, about the role of journalism in the Tulsa massacre?

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:08:57] The role of the two main daily papers—the Tulsa World, which was the morning paper and the Tulsa Tribune, the afternoon paper—were critical. The Tulsa Tribune, for example, is the so-called "light that sparked the massacre," in the initial days afterwards, as well, and in going forward in the cover-up, making sure the story is basically forgotten in our society.

So the Tulsa Tribune was owned by a publisher named Richard Lloyd Jones, and in his book about the Tulsa Massacre...

When we think about white power structures in our society, when we think about hierarchies and White racial hierarchies in the society, the media companies are a part of that system. Always have been.

And this was a case in point. So the paper is very sympathetic--the Tulsa Tribune--to the KKK, basically prints an advertisement about the KKK's plans to come into Oklahoma. And then it focuses its coverage, more so in May, on issues of crime and criminality. They normally ignored Black folks in Tulsa unless it dealt with crime,

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:10:07] Mmm-mm.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:10:07] But they started focusing more on a campaign of Black lawlessness in the Greenwood District. But the night, as you mentioned, in the intro, the May 31 headline of the false attack of Dick Rowland on a White teenage girl lights the spark that results in a White mob heading down to the courthouse to demand that Rowland be handed over to them, and basically lynched.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:10:33] Mmm-mm.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:10:33] There's an editorial that many believe was actually published in that paper as well that was predicting a lynching that night. But that editorial, in years later, and also that front-page story about the alleged rape, disappeared from the microfilm when they went to record the paper for historical purposes. But eyewitnesses, and folks who were alive at the time, remember that editorial.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:10:58] Right.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:10:58] So there was this daily news story that was very sensational in its details of this alleged rape, and then predicting a lynching that night, lit the match of thousands of White folks actually going to the courthouse. And the massacre itself, thousands of White people invaded Greenwood and torched the whole place.

And then following that, the Tulsa World—which is still in existence today, it's still the daily paper in Tulsa—all this language, both papers are saying "bad n-word," you know, "We've got to get rid of these bad n-words" in their community. Right?

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:11:31] Right.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:11:32] It was a purposeful attempt to blame Black folks, because what happened, as well, the last important detail is, that, there was never a person who was lynched in Tulsa I believe, who was Black to that point.

And so, Black residents grabbed their arms—a lot of them were former World War I veterans—and they went down to the courthouse and asked the police if they needed help to protect Dick Rowland from being lynched. They were declined twice. And so, the newspapers blamed Black folks who brought their guns to try to protect someone from being lynched as the agitators of this, and that's how they framed it; it was the Black community that was the reason this happened and it brought great shame on Tulsa.

Now, the Tulsa White community was responding and trying to rebuild and Black folks needed to be very appreciative of this effort and get rid of—as you were mentioning—those leaders that they followed and a lot of those leaders. including Two Black newspapers were burned down as well.

The Tulsa Star and the Oklahoma Sun [Star publisher] A.J. Smitherman was a very prominent member of the Black community in Tulsa, a very powerful person. And he eventually, fled the state because he was actually charged, the Black folks in the community were charged, for instigating the massacre. And A.J. Smitherman actually settled down, and left the state and he printed papers in Buffalo, New York, where he died.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:12:58] You know, you talk about the erasing of the incendiary editorial, and there's been a kind of general erasure of what happened in Tulsa. It's kind of strange to hear folks saying "The little-known..." you know? "This invisible history..."

And I think, well, you know, I know a lot of Black people who've been knowing about Tulsa, but it's true that it is more widely speaking, or, among White people, it is hidden history. And that has something to do with media, too. There's just been a lot of silence around this story.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:13:40] Yes, it was an intentional campaign. The Tulsa Tribune, which no longer exists, didn't mention the massacre until 50 years later. There were efforts to cover it up.

There was this White reporter back in 1971 who was asked—unbelievably, by the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce—to write something and commemorate what happened on the 50th anniversary. And he started researching this story and he started getting basically threatened by strangers that would approach him on the street and tell him not to write the story, calls to his house, someone wrote on his car windshield with a bar of soap "Better look under your hood." I believe was written. Right.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:14:18] Wow.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:14:19] One of the things he stated in interviews is, that there were still people who were alive, who might be very prominent members of the community who actually took part in the massacre. And you just think about it, the children of those folks-- because thousands of people literally, took part in this massacre-- everyday folks in Tulsa... and police deputized—meanwhile they declined Black folks from trying to protect Dick Rowland, right—they deputized, White folks to go into Greenwood, set the place on fire, which they did. And then they put thousands of Black folks in concentration camps following that. They just rounded up everybody.

And so a lot of these folks, children, still may be alive as well. And grandchildren. So you can see how a coverup happens, right? Because the powers that be in the city are going to be totally implicated. And for the newspapers, obviously, they played a role. They played a role in there. Matter of fact, when that publisher died, there was no mention in the paper at all, when he died, in their own paper, of his role in the Tulsa massacre.

So this is how it happens, And how is this really different than what Nikole Hannah-Jones is going through on the issue of tenure in North Carolina? And all this attack against Critical Race Theory? it's all the same thing. We have to keep that stuff buried in the past and not remember it because if we remember it, there's a potential that you have to... When you reconcile with something, it can be a call for repair, right.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:15:49] Yep.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:15:50] And folks don't want to address the repair part. What do reparations look like? How do you make a community whole like Greenwood? It was a community that was self-sustaining, that had everything it needed in that community. And it was destroyed.

Again, you need a narrative, right? That's the whole thing with media. You need narratives. You need narratives to dehumanize people. You need narratives to justify the massacre of

people. And then you need narratives to talk about how White folks in this community were coming to the aid of those who were harmed.

And they're the ones who are the heroes in the narratives. And, often, not telling the story is--not only do you need a narrative to give you political cover, but then not telling the story is another way of just total erasure, Right?

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:16:35] Absolutely.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:16:35] Of course.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:16:35] Yeah.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:16:36] It's still going on, this whole 1619 struggle, just to recognize very basic facts in our nation's history, and you can see the backlash because, at the end of the day, in my personal opinion, the question is whether a multi-racial democracy, which democracy has never been fully realized, is it actually possible? Right?

And when you have to reconcile with these stories in history, there's going to, of course, be calls for repair, you know? And that's one thing we don't want to do as a country, right? We don't want to repair. I believe even Joe Biden, correct me if I'm wrong, yesterday, when he went to Tulsa, he didn't even mention anything about reparations.

There are three living survivors. There are three Black folks—who are 107, 106 and 100—who survived the massacre, and one of them, Ms. Fletcher, testified in Congress that she is still financially struggling.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:17:28] Viola Ford Fletcher, 107 years old.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:17:32] Yes.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:17:32] She was seven, saying she's slept with the lights on ever since, because, "If I don't have the lights on, how... How will I see to get out of my house?"

It's too much to even get your brain around the harm—and it's living history. So I just want to come back to that question of bringing it into the present because...

OK, right now there are stories on this. Some are folks like Deneen Brown, who's been on it for decades, right? And then, OK, here's the Wall Street Journal talking about multi-generational reverberations on family wealth in Tulsa. Here's USA Today talking about how, "Oh, you know, it's not just Tulsa; racist mobs," --that's their language-- "have been a widespread and constant concern." We've got TV projects with LeBron James, we've got curricula, all right.

So everybody who is invested in wanting this country to change knows that you take your shot when there's an opening. We need understanding all the time, but you take your shot where there's an opening, but right now it seems like we're saying, "Look at Tulsa. It's an example of the depth and the breadth of the hatred, of the intergenerational harm..."

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:18:59] Right.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:19:00] "Of the lie, and of the silencing, and gaslighting, and censoring." And I fear that what some folks are taking via the media is, "Tulsa... What a crazy exceptional episode in US history," you know, "Thank goodness we aren't like that anymore!"

It matters not just to tell the story, but to show that it's not just story, you know? So I'm just wondering, like—I'm not negative on it. I appreciate the attention.

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:19:30] Yes.

**JANINE JACKSON:** [00:19:30] I appreciate the spotlight. My question is, "What's going to be left behind when media move away, when they're not talking about Watchmen, when they move away from the story of Tulsa? What's going to be the sediment, what's going to be learned from it?"

**JOSEPH TORRES:** [00:19:48] Yeah, that's the thing. I feel privileged and honored to be able to work on a project called Media 2070 that the Black Caucus at Free Press created, which calls for immediate reparations for the Black community. And a part of reparations is reconciling and repair. For us, for myself, speaking for myself, the idea is that we have to address narratives in the history of anti-Black racism in the media system and narrative that's been intentionally weaponized in order to further White racial hierarchies in society. When you think about the federal government. Now, when we think about broadcasting, we think about broadband. It's been a policy of exclusion. It's been a policy of excluding Black folks, and other communities of color, from ownership of our nation's infrastructure.

Powerful institutions have been created by using our public airwaves, by the roads that we dig up and the broadband that we lay underneath the ground, and that's our rights of way, have been used to generate great wealth and cause great harm to our communities by the stories that these institutions tell.

## **Blood on Black Wall Street - Excavating the Past - Into America - Air Date 6-3-21**

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:20:52] Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:20:53] Well, I was born in 1946 in Tulsa, and grew up here. My mother was Ruth Sigler Avery, and she was born in 1914 and she was seven years old when she saw the race massacre.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:21:16] Joy's mother, Mrs. Sigler Avery, was a witness to the massacre, but unlike most white Tulsans of her generation, she chose not to keep the secret.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:21:25] My mom would talk about it a lot at family gatherings, at Thanksgiving and Easter and various times that all the family was together, and she would talk about how she was only seven years old when she saw this truck full of dead bodies and that one of them hit a pothole. and there was a little boy about her age on the top of this truck, and he turned his face at that point and looked directly toward her. She said she had

never seen any dead bodies before, and then this little boy her age looked at her straight in the face and she was petrified.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:22:13] Wow. So she's carrying this story from that day with her entire life, do you have any sense of how that affected her looking over and seeing that Black boy's eyes, that dead boy, how that might have affected her, why she held onto it for so long?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:22:27] I think she was very upset about it, but I think probably even more upset because I didn't believe her.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:22:36] Now, I just want to sit with that for one second. Joy and her sister, they didn't even believe their own mother.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:22:42] I'm sure my father knew that it was true and people around her generation knew that it was true, but she couldn't get her daughters to believe it because we had no experience of it.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:22:56] So you heard it from your mother, but did you learn about it in class at all, was it ever part of your school lesson?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:23:00] Oh no. In fact, we challenged her several times and said, "Mom, nobody's written about it. Nobody talks about it. If you witnessed this, you're gonna have to do the research on it because there is nothing in any books, there's nothing in civics class, in history, of what's gone on in Tulsa." Nobody had talked about it.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:23:23] Joy came up in Tulsa in the 1950s and '60s. The silence was deep and purposeful. Police records from the time of the massacre disappeared. Newspaper articles went missing from the city library. And it wasn't taught in schools until the '90s, if at all. All this motivated Mrs. Sigler Avery to embark on a mission of her own, to give a thorough account of what she saw that day. To prove that it happened.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:23:49] For about 30 years, she was talking to as many people as she could about what they had experienced.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:23:56] Her materials were so comprehensive and so unusual, so desperately needed, that they were accepted by Oklahoma State University at Tulsa. Her work was even used in a 2001 commission report about the massacre, where they called her a one-woman research bureau. All because she was convinced that this history had been deliberately covered up.

I have to wonder, as your mother is uncovering more and more about what happened here in Tulsa with the massacre, did you discover that some of your neighbors, friends, or maybe even family participated, on the wrong side, as you say, in the massacre?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:24:30] Actually, I was more worried about waking up to having a cross burned on our front lawn, because it was really scary. There were a lot of important people. When I was reading about the Ku Klux Klan, there were mayors and there were highly influential people who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:24:53] And so your mother unearthing this stuff, you started to say to yourself, there might be people who want to keep this a secret, so much so that maybe we're in danger.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:24:59] I began to feel that way.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:25:02] Wow. How have you, in the course of your adult life and you have all that material that your mother - all the research, how did it change the way you viewed this community and race relations? Did you have to come to grips with the reality of your community also?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:25:17] I didn't really know how to.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:25:20] Why do you think it is that there are so many white people who are still so reluctant to just embrace the truth, and at least confront the truth?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:25:29] I would just say shame.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:25:31] Yeah. Is there anything that you've come across in your mother's research or heard later that haunts you, that shocks you? Is there a certain aspect of anything that you've learned that sits with you?

**JOY AVERY:** [00:25:46] It seems strange that it takes 100 years for people to fess up with what happened and tell the stories. And I think Marlin has been doing a really good job of

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:26:01] Marlin Lavanhar, who joy is talkin' about, is the Reverend at All Souls Unitarian Church in south Tulsa.

**JOY AVERY:** [00:26:07] Marlin Lavanhar gave a sermon several years ago that was telling about my mom, and it was talking about the race massacre, and I think that was good in opening up the topic for other people to research.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:26:26] It seems like a lot of people right now are tryin' to rush towards this idea of reconciliation, but truly in order to get there, we have to tell the truth, and we have to do some repair.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:26:37] I talked with Reverend Lavanhar in the church's sanctuary. He's composed, the kind of guy who thinks carefully about everything he says.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:26:45] I am a Unitarian Universalist minister. I've been in Tulsa for 20 years, and I arrived just at the time that the report was coming out about the massacre. So it was 80 years later, and finally the community was getting the knowledge of what had happened for the first time in an official way.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:27:02] Over the past few years All Souls has played a central role in pushing white Tulsans to reckon with their history.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:27:10] So we have this sort of split in the community right now, where you have a lot of people, certainly people in the establishment and a lot of

white people, quite frankly, who think we're in this period of reconciliation finally, after 100 years.

And then there's a lot of the rest of us who believe that we need to still tell the truth about what happened, and we don't know that truth, particularly as it pertains to the white side of the equation and the perpetrator side.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:27:34] And in this tug of war between whether you shield yourself from the truth or whether you dig deeper, your church is squarely in the middle of that. Tell me the story about how your church has played some role in what happened.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:27:45] Yeah, so our church has an interesting history as it relates to the massacre. Our church was founded just a few weeks before the massacre happened at the YWCA. We didn't have a building, there was 27 people, but one of those 27 people was Richard Lloyd Jones, who was the editor and owner of the Tulsa Tribune. And it was his paper, the evening paper, that broke the story that accused Dick Rowland of accosting Sarah Page in the elevator, which of course sparked the mob at the courthouse, at the jail, which eventually turned into the massacre.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:28:22] That story Reverend Lavanhar is talkin' about, the one in Jones' paper, ran with the infamous headline, "Nab Negro." The article said Dick Rowland, a young Black shoe shiner, assaulted a white elevator attendant named Sarah Page. The story turned out to be false.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:28:39] Something that also bothers a lot of us is afterward, on June 4th while the embers were still burning in the fire, he wrote an editorial that said, I make no apology for what this paper has said for many years about cleaning up. And then he talked about Greenwood in the worst possible terms. Devaluing the lives of people, devaluing the community and what it stood for and what it was.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:29:04] So cleaning up. He defends, in his words, cleaning up, which in fact was a murder, a massacre of hundreds of Black people in this community, he defend that?

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:29:11] And not only that, he also was among those who helped to say this was a riot, blamed it on the Black community. So therefore the Black community did not receive reparations of any kind because they became blamed for that.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:29:27] Richard Lloyd Jones. He played a key role in sparking the violence and then in burying the truth of the massacre.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:29:35] In our congregation, we make no apology. This man, he did what he did and we condemn it. We condemn it outright. The impact of it, the results of it, at the same time, we've been working as a community for decades now, since the early '60s, about 1960 when my predecessor, Dr. John Wolf, came here and became a leader in the community in the civil rights movement, this church has really dedicated itself, since that time, to being an advocate for racial justice.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:30:02] Reverend Lavanhar is using his position from the pulpit to teach folks about the massacre and to encourage his white congregants, who make up 90% of the church, to take responsibility.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:30:12] So it's one thing for us to look back and point our fingers at what people did 100 years ago, but it's another thing to really do the work that we need to do to change ourselves today.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:30:24] One way All Souls is trying to do that, a program called Rewire. People learn about privilege, and how white supremacy permeates American culture. Over the course of nine months, participants meet and talk through what they're learning. Reverend Lavanhar knows how complicated this can be for white people, because he's had to do this work on himself.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:30:44] I'm a straight white male with higher education, American citizenship, cis-gendered, all of those things that have given a person status within American culture. And so even though it wasn't told to me directly, indirectly I had got this message. It was people like me that built this country, the greatest country in the world, and all this stuff that inflated my sense of what it meant to be who I was in the world. So to do the work of dismantling racism and rewiring our understanding of white supremacy and whiteness, it's not just dropping down to the level of equality with everybody, it's really going from this sense of being this God's gift to the world almost, down into a deep sense of, "wow, it was the legacy of whiteness that's been so violent, and so terrible, and atrocious.

**TRYMAINE LEE - HOST, INTO AMERICA:** [00:31:39] But in Tulsa, and a lot of places in this country, that's a tall order.

**REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR:** [00:31:45] So it's a long fall for a lot of white people to learn the history and realize. That's a reckoning with our own sense of self and identity.

## **The Tulsa massacre, 100 years later - Today, Explained - Air Date 6-1-21**

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:31:57] The surviving residents at Greenwood couldn't get back the lives they'd lost. But they tried to get compensation for all the property and businesses that had been destroyed. They filed insurance claims and lawsuits against the city, but very few people were ever paid.

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:32:11] In fact, this massacre was investigated early on by a state grand jury.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:32:18] Congressman Hank Johnson representing Georgia's fourth district.

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:32:21] Which concluded that it was a race riot, and the race riot was precipitated by the Black people whose community got burned.

And so based on that finding, all of the claims that were filed by the Greenwood victims, they were denied any kind of insurance coverage, and of course any kind of compensation for what had happened to them.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:32:47] Last week Congressman Johnson introduced the Tulsa Greenwood Massacre Claims Accountability Act, legislation that would give the victims and their descendants another shot at restitution.

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:32:57] It's going to take an act of Congress, literally, in order for them to have the courthouse doors open so that they can press their claims in accordance with federal law.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:33:09] Why do we need legislation as a remedy to this problem?

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:33:14] Under the law, a case can be time-barred because one waited too long in order to assert the claim. And so it's a technical defense that's available to every defendant who gets sued. And so we have to have a law that would waive that statute of limitations period, not for any reason other than the fact that the delay was induced by fraud. And it was not at the fault of the plaintiffs that they could not assert their claims in a timely manner, it was because of state action. So we need to undo that state action and also give these claimants an opportunity to claim damage under law that did not exist at the time. And of course, this legislation opens the federal courthouse doors, not the state courthouse, but the federal courthouse doors for litigation by these claimants.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:34:12] Right. I think that's an important distinction that you make here is that you're not guaranteeing any kind of reparation here, you're just simply opening up the available avenues people can pursue this accountability through the courts. You're just making it available to them. Is that correct?

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:34:29] That's exactly right. This legislation is not about an award of reparation. It's about opening the courthouse doors so that the claimants can go into court and in accordance with the law assert their claims for damages. And the damages that flow from what happened a hundred years ago can be quantified. And so the personal property, the real estate, the lives of the people themselves who were killed, the descendants of those who were killed have causes of action to assert for the value of the life of those who were killed.

And then when you start talking about the generational wealth, these descendants could have benefited through generational wealth transfer which did not happen as a result of everything going up in smoke and being denied compensation at the outset. So for all of these years, you can quantify the effects of the loss, and they would be, in my opinion, substantial.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:35:41] Is there support in Congress for your bill? In particular, amongst Republicans in the House and in the Senate?

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:35:48] I don't think we have any Republican co-sponsors in the House, and we're still working on a leader in the Senate to sponsor this legislation there. But momentum is building in the House. Every day we get more and more co-sponsors.

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:36:07] Congressman, you held a hearing on this legislation a couple of weeks ago. And you heard the testimony, as we all did, from three

centenarians who shared their remembrances of surviving the Tulsa massacre. What did you make of their testimony?

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:36:18] Yeah, the testimony was poignant. Mr Van --

**JAMIL SMITH HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** [00:36:23] You're talking about the veteran?

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:36:25] Yes. He actually got choked up during his testimony a hundred years later, you know, and he is still visibly affected by what happened to him.

**HUGHES VAN ELLIS:** [00:36:37] We aren't just black and white pictures on a screen. We are flesh and blood. I was there when it happened. I'm still here.

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:36:53] The ladies who testified reminded me of the elderly people in my family that I have known -- my grandmothers, you know, my aunts -- and how they used to sit on the back porch and talk about things. But then when we came around, the young people, they would shush up and stop talking and he never let us know what they were talking about. But we found out later what had happened.

**VIOLA FLETCHER:** [00:37:23] The night of the massacre, I was awakened by my family, my parents, and five siblings were there. I was told we had to leave, and that was it. I will never forget the violence of the white mob when we left our home. I still see Black men seeing being shot. Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams, have lived through the massacre every day. A country may forget this history, but I cannot.

**CONGRESS PERSON HANK JOHNSON:** [00:38:06] You know, it was really a strong sense of appreciation for what these folks have been through, what they have endured, and what they have accomplished in their time on this earth, and for them to be able to appear before Congress in a hearing that was televised to the nation. And I felt, you know, it was deeply motivating for me and I'm sure for my colleagues who were there with me.

## **Clint Smith on Juneteenth Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America - Democracy Now! - Air Date 6-18-21**

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:38:38] On Thursday, president Biden signed legislation to create a new federal holiday to commemorate Juneteenth, which marks the end of slavery in the United States. The Juneteenth celebration dates back to the last days of the Civil War, when Union soldiers landed in Galveston, Texas on June 19th, 1866, with news of the war had ended and enslaved people learned they were freed two and a half years *after* the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth is the first new federal holiday since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created nearly 40 years ago.

President Biden spoke at the ceremony at the White House Thursday.

**PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN:** [00:39:22] Juneteenth marks both the long, hard night of slavery subjugation and the promise for brighter morning to come. This is a day profound in my view, profound weight and profound power. A day which you remember the moral stain, the terrible toll that slavery took on the country, and continues to take. What I've long called America's original sin.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:39:58] The bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday was passed by a unanimous vote in the Senate, but in the House, 14 Republicans, all white men, voted against the holiday. At Thursday's White House ceremony, vice president Kamala Harris spoke about how enslaved people in Texas were held for over two years after president Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

**VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS:** [00:40:24] For more than two years, the enslaved people of Texas were kept in servitude. For more than two years, they were intentionally kept from their freedom. For more than two years. And then on that summer day, 156 years ago, the enslaved people of Texas learn the news. They learned that they were free. And they claimed their freedom.

It was indeed an important day.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:41:00] To talk more about Juneteenth and the legacy of slavery, we're joined by the writer and poet, Clint Smith. He's author of the new book, *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery across America*. He's also a staff writer at the Atlantic. Clint Smith, welcome to Democracy Now! It's great to have you with us.

**CLINT SMITH:** [00:41:21] Thank you for having me.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:41:23] So one of the chapters in your book is Galveston Island. And that is where Juneteenth comes from. Can you tell us the story in full of Juneteenth, then your feelings today? This is the first day the federal holiday is being celebrated because June 19th actually falls on a Saturday.

**CLINT SMITH:** [00:41:46] Yeah. So, as you mentioned, I went to Galveston, Texas. I've been writing this book for four years, and I went two years ago and it was marking the 40th anniversary when Texas had made Juneteenth a state holiday. And it was the Al Edwards prayer breakfast. The late Al Edwards Sr. is the state legislator, a black state legislator, who made possible and advocated for the legislation that turned Juneteenth into a holiday, a state holiday in Texas.

And so I went in part because I wanted to spend time with people who were the actual descendants of those who had been freed by general Gordon Granger's general order number three. And it was a really remarkable moment because I was in this place, on this island, on this land with people for whom Juneteenth was not an abstraction, it was not a performance. It was not merely a symbol. It was part of their tradition. It was part of their lineage. It was an heirloom that had been passed down that had made their lives possible. And so I think I gained a more intimate sense of what that holiday meant.

And just broaden out more generally, you spoke to how it was more than two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. And it was an additional two months after

general Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox effectively ending the Civil War. So it wasn't only two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, it was an additional two months after the Civil War was effectively over.

And so for me, when I think of Juneteenth, part of what I think about is both the both-handedness of it, that it is this moment in which we mourn the fact that freedom was kept from hundreds of thousands of enslaved people for years and for months after it had been attained by them. And then at the same time, celebrating the end of one of the most egregious things that this country has ever done.

And I think what we're experiencing right now is a sort of marathon of cognitive dissonance in the way that is reflective of the black experience as a whole, because we are in a moment where we had the first new federal holiday in over 40 years in a moment that is important to celebrate Juneteenth and to celebrate the end of slavery, and to have it recognized as a national holiday.

And at the same time that is happening, we have a state-sanctioned effort across state legislatures across the country that is attempting to prevent teachers from teaching the very thing that helps young people understand the context from which Juneteenth emerges. And so I think that we recognize that as a symbol, Juneteenth is not that it matters, that it is important, but it is clearly not enough. And I think what the fact that Juneteenth has happened is reflective of a shift in our public consciousness, but also the work that Black Texans and Black people across this country have done for decades to make this moment possible.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:44:26] And can you explain more what happened in Galveston in 1865? And even as you point out what the Emancipation Proclamation actually did two and a half years before.

**CLINT SMITH:** [00:44:39] Right. So the Emancipation Proclamation is often a widely misunderstood document. So it did not wholesale free the enslaved people throughout the union. It did not reinstate people in the union. In fact, there were several border states that were part of the union that continued to keep their enslaved labor, states like Kentucky, states like Delaware, states like Missouri. And what it did was it was a military edict that was attempting to free enslaved people in Confederate territory. But the only way that edict would be enforced is if union soldiers went and took that territory. And so part of what many enslavers realized, right, and realized correctly, was that Texas would be one of the last frontiers that union soldiers would be able to come in and enforce the Emancipation Proclamation, if they ever made it there in the first place. Cause this was two years prior to the end of the Civil War. And so you had enslavers from Virginia and from North Carolina and from all of these states in the upper south who brought their enslaved laborers and relocated to Texas and in ways that increased the population of enslaved people in Texas by the tens of thousands.

And so what, when Gordon Granger comes to Texas, he is making clear and letting people know that the Emancipation Proclamation had been enacted in ways that because of the topography of Texas and because of how spread out and rural and far apart from different ecosystems of information many people were, a lot of enslaved people didn't know that the Emancipation Proclamation had happened. And some didn't even know that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox two months prior. And so part of what this is doing is making

clear to the 250,000 enslaved people in Texas, that they had actually been granted freedom two and a half years prior, and that the war that this was all fought over had ended two months before.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:46:23] At Thursday's presidential signing ceremony, Joe Biden got down on his knee to greet Opal Lee, the 94-year-old activist known as the grandmother of Juneteenth. This is Biden speaking about Lee.

**PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN:** [00:46:39] As a child growing up in Texas, she and her family would celebrate Juneteenth. On Juneteenth, 1939, when she was 12 years old, the mob torched her family home. But such hate never stopped her, any more than it stopped the vast majority of you I'm looking from this podium. Over the course of decades, she's made it her mission to see that this day came. It was almost a singular mission. She's walked for miles and miles, literally and figuratively, to bring attention to Juneteenth, to make this day possible.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:47:22] And this is Opal Lee speaking at Harvard School of Public Health earlier this week.

**OPAL LEE:** [00:47:28] I don't want people to think Juneteenth is just one day. There is too much educational components. We have too much to do. I even advocate that we do Juneteenth, that we celebrate freedom from the 19th of June to the 4th of July. Because we weren't free on 4th of July, 1776. That will be celebrating freedom, you understand, if we were able to do that.

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!:** [00:48:00] And that is Opal Lee, considered the grandmother of Juneteenth. And Clint, one of the things you do in your book is you introduce us to grassroots activists. This doesn't come from the top. This comes from years of organizing, as you point out, in Galveston itself, and with people like -- not that there's anyone like -- Opal Lee.

**CLINT SMITH:** [00:48:23] Yeah, no, absolutely. Part of what this book is doing, it is an attempt to uplift the stories of people who don't often get the attention that they deserve, in how they shape the historical record.

So that means the public historians who work at these historical sites and plantations. That means the museum curators. That means the activists and the organizers. People like Take Them Down NOLA in New Orleans, who pushed the city council and the mayor to make possible the fact that in 2017, these statutes would come down, several Confederate statues in my hometown in New Orleans.

And part of when I think about someone like Miss Opal Lee, part of what I think about is our proximity to this period of history, right? Slavery existed for 250 years in this country and is only not existed for 150. And you know, the way that I was taught about slavery growing up in elementary school, we were made to feel as if it was something that happened in the Jurassic age, that it was the Flintstones, the dinosaurs and slavery almost as if they all happen at the same time.

But the woman who opened the National Museum of African-American History and Culture alongside the Obama family in 2006, was the daughter of an enslaved person -- not the

granddaughter or the great-granddaughter, the great-great granddaughter -- the *daughter* of an enslaved person is who opened this museum at the Smithsonian in 2016.

And so there's clearly for so many people, there are people who are alive today who were raised by, who knew, who were in community with, who love, key people who were born into intergenerational chattel bondage.

So this history that we tell ourselves was a long time ago wasn't in fact that long ago at all. And part of what so many activists and grassroots, public historians and organizers across this country recognize is that if we don't fully understand and account for this history that actually wasn't that long ago, that in the scope of human history was only just yesterday, then we won't fully understand our contemporary landscape of inequality today. We won't understand how slavery shaped the political, economic, and social infrastructure of this country.

And when you have a more acute understanding of how slavery shaped the infrastructure of this country, then you're able to more effectively look around you and see how the reason one community looks one way and another community looks another way is not because of the people in those communities, but it is because of what has been done to those communities, generation after generation after generation.

And I think that that is central to the sort of public pedagogy and, as so many of these activists and organizers who have been attempting to make Juneteenth a holiday and bring attention to it as an entry point, to think more wholly and honestly about the legacy of slavery have been doing.

## **Michael Harriot, Senior Writer for TheRoot.com, the Nation's Largest Black Online Newspaper - The Al Franken Podcast - Air Date 6-20-21**

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:50:48] So, there's a couple of things I wanted to ask you: you wrote a terrific article about the Tulsa Massacre, or the Black Massacre, in Tulsa, a century ago. I wanted to ask you about that, and about why really did we just hear about this? And most Americans just hear about... "Really? Oh wow. That's bad. Whoa. I didn't know that." And then the other ones there must be... there, there's other...

And also we massacred Indians in Minnesota. I wasn't... my family was in Krakow, we were in Europe, and that's why we shouldn't pay reparations. That's my...

I want to get to that! I want to get to reparations and this idea that, if you were in Krakow until, or in Belarus or wherever your family was from until 1902, then I had nothing to do with slavery, and I didn't benefit at all from... since 1902, because I'm White, and didn't have any advantages. So I shouldn't pay reparations. But I'll tell you who should: the people who owned slaves, who you can prove owned... I want to talk about that.

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:51:53] Right. So I guess we could start with Tulsa, right? And either way, and these massacres, and kind of tie them together. Right.

So, Tulsa is, it's definitely not the worst one, or the only one.

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:52:05] Wow. It isn't the worst one?

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:52:07] No! In 1920, the Thibodaux Massacre was probably the worst one. But again, we're still discovering a lot of these massacres.

So, Thibodaux was a... this was after the civil war, it was a sugar cane plantation in Thibodaux, Louisiana, right? So the Black workers, mostly Black workers who worked on these sugar plantations were trying to organize a union, and you know, of course the plantation owners--who just come out of slavery--were against it.

So at a meeting for Black organizers, the paramilitary forces of, what we would call Klansman now (they had a bunch of different names in Louisiana: the White League, the League of the White Camelia), they attacked these workers.

And we kind of still don't know how many were killed because they killed... you know, the people weren't just from one town. So it wasn't like Tulsa in that, you know, they burned a section of town, they just killed people.

And then once the word got out in newspapers, more White supremacist groups started coming down and just started hunting people for a week. So it was one of the biggest Black massacres in history.

And, so it lasted for the, I mean, it went through the entire county. Some people say 300, some people say as many as a thousand were killed, the bodies were burned and buried in shallow graves. So we don't know how many people, really, died.

And there are stories like this all over the country: Oscarville in Georgia, right outside of Atlanta is one of my favorites. (Well, not favorite, but it's one of the craziest stories because...)

So there's a lake called Lake Lanier near... that has a bunch of resorts around it in Georgia. And every summer, a bunch of White people die drowning in that lake. And the legend is that there are the ghosts of Black people who are enacting their revenge, because years ago, Oscarville, Georgia was a majority Black town. They had this motor speedway, a bunch of Black businesses, kind of like Tulsa. And a Black man was accused of raping a White woman. Her grandchildren say it was definitely a false accusation.

And they slaughtered the Black people and ran the rest of them out of town. And then a couple of years later, they came up with this idea to flood this Black town by building a dam and providing Atlanta with hydro electric power. So they basically flooded the town.

And so under the town [reservoir] is still this intact entire Black city. And sometimes when there's a drought, you can see like the tops of smokestacks, and the motor speedway peak up from the lake.

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:55:12] Boy that's eerie.

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:55:14] Right? And...

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:55:16] That is *The Shining!* That is really worth making... I'm going to write that down. I'm going to make a movie.

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:55:23] And it's interesting. There was 57 boating fatalities and 145 drownings between '99 and 2018. So it's

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:55:33] There you go! That's the movie! That's Act II!

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:55:35] Like, they still go swimming at this big resort area, like... 128 boating accidents in the last three years alone. You know, there's this kind of legend there, if you're Black, you know not to go swimming in Lake Lanier because...

It's... and so, what's funny about it, it's always been this kind of Black legend.

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:55:57] Maybe, there's... I would check out who... who owns the bars around there. Cause maybe there's a lot of Black guys own bars and stuff. Just go, "No, have another drink and get in your boat. Yeah. Here, eat up. Yeah."

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:56:12] So these kinds of stories like Tulsa, like the Thibodaux massacre, are kind of well-known, because Black people pass these stories amongst each other, and these are the things that they don't teach in schools. Right?

And so these kinds of, you know... Black people are aware of not just these atrocities, but these kinds of systemic issues that we were talking about earlier that are pervasive in American history.

And that's why a lot of people, Black people, support reparations, because we, kind of, know more than White people about racism in America.

And it's also important to point out that Black people don't think White people should pay reparations, they think America should pay reparations. So it's not like Black people's taxes wouldn't be taken. It's, it's just like the national deficit. All of us are responsible, even though we don't all benefit from the stuff that America did or some of the debts that America owes.

And one of the historical things, when we talk about Brown vs. Board of Education, for instance, right? And this is one of the things that I'd like to point out about reparations.

So let's forget about slavery. Let's take slavery off the board, it was legal, it was constitutional. The constitution ruled out, made slavery illegal. So let's take slavery off the board.

And let's talk about from 1865 until now, right? When Black people were working, we're paying taxes. And for most of that period, we couldn't attend the same schools. We just talked about how, even when we could attend schools, Black schools were underfunded.

So, we were in essence paying to educate White children, to make America better for White people. When you talk about the New Deal, that came out of American's taxes, after Black people were freed from slavery, and our money was used to build an entire White middle-class.

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:58:11] Yeah, actually a lot of people don't think about this or realize it, that, there were a lot of concessions made to get White Southern votes for the New Deal, like who would not get Social Security. Right?

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:58:24] Right. Who wouldn't get Social Security... we can go into the history of red lining when, you know, banks were forbidden for... from giving loans on homes that weren't in White neighborhoods.

And so all of that money, all those Black people's taxes, went to White people. And so, reparations, in a sense, could not just be for slavery, but for the money that Black people invested in America, and didn't get a return. If America was a stock, we bought those stocks and White people got the dividends.

And again, Black people aren't asking White people to pay for those, because if you came from Krakow, as you said, in 1902, you still got to attend a good White school in a White neighborhood. That may...

**AL FRANKEN - HOST, THE AL FRANKEN PODCAST:** [00:59:11] That's why my argument before kind of falls apart.

**MICHAEL HARRIOT:** [00:59:15] Right. So, so every White person benefited from the labor and the taxes of all the Black people, and all Black people are saying in the reparations argument, is that, "Hey, we don't want something special. We want the things that our parents and our grandparents didn't get, because a lot of the people who are just middle-class people now benefited from their grandparents and their parent's labor and from Black people's labor and Black people didn't have that opportunity."

## **The Legacies of Slavery Hidden in Plain Sight w/ Clint Smith - The Majority Report - Air Date 6-14-21**

**CLINT SMITH:** [00:59:51] None of these are definitive accounts of any of these places, they are reflections of my experience at each of these places, at any given point in time. But Blandford I initially thought I was going to write a chapter on civil war battlefields, and so I went to this civil war battlefield that's a national park in Petersburg, Virginia and I went the tour and I was like, "okay, this is interesting, I think there's something here," but I was telling the tour guide, the ranger, about my project, and he was like, "oh, you should go to this Confederate cemetery, it's about 10 minutes down the road." And I was like, "confederate cemetery?" There's things you would do on your own and then things you do as a journalist. In my own capacity, there's no chance that I'm ever gonna go to a Confederate cemetery, but the journalist in me started being like, oh, okay, that sounds like a fascinating thing that I had that truly was never even on my mind as a potential possibility.

And so I went and I went on this tour in which they gave this tour of the church, and for context, Blandford is one of the largest Confederate cemeteries in the country, a place where the remains of 30,000 Confederate soldiers are buried. And I went on a tour of the church at the center of the cemetery and they were pointing to all these stained glass windows and talking in intimate detail about their history, and then the tour ended. And I was like, this is bizarre that we just spent all this time talking about the beauty of these stained glass windows with saints embedded in them, and we're not talking at all about why these

windows were built, who they were built in honor of, or the land that we're standing on. And literally at the bottom of the windows it says, "In honor of our brave Confederate soldiers who fought for a just cause" and different iterations of that.

There was a flyer inside of the visitor center. I was talking to a woman who works inside the visitor center and there was a flyer on the desk in front of her, and we were talking, my eyes started wandering and I looked down and I was like, "what is that?" And then she thrust her hand on top of it, and I was like, "oh, this is strange." I could read between her fingers, it was a flyer promoting , the Sons of Confederate Veterans Memorial Day Celebration happening there a few weeks from then. And so I was like I have to come back for this.

And so I came back for the Sons of Confederate Veterans Memorial Day celebration, and I was conspicuous, as you can imagine, a conspicuous presence. I went with my white friend, William--my wife wouldn't let me go by myself. She was like, "you gotta take your white friend," and so I was like, "Billy, come on, man. We gotta go to the Confederate cemetery." And so we went and it was just so clarifying, because I was spending the day with these Sons of Confederate Veterans, these United Daughters of Confederacy, these Confederate reenactors, Neo-Confederates, the whole spectrum, and having conversations with them about why they believed what they believed - that slavery wasn't a central cause of the civil war, that it was overblown, it was the war of Northern aggression, that all the people buried in this Confederate cemetery where people worthy of being honored.

The keynote speaker was Paul C. Gramling who was, at that time, the Commander in Chief, as they call it, of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and when he was giving a speech, he said that all the people who wanted to take down the statues of Confederate leaders were the American ISIS. He was like, "they're terrorists, and they're trying to erase history in the same way that ISIS is in the middle east, and we should treat them as such." It was just, again, clarifying to understand how the Lost Cause manifest itself today, because I think for some people their understanding of history is not grounded in empirical evidence or primary source documents, it is a story they have been told, and it is a story they tell. It is an heirloom that is passed down across generations and who they understand things to be in the world is very much shaped by the stories they've been told by people they love, even when those stories are false.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** [01:03:31] So, is that relationship that they have to the story, is it a relationship that exists to the people who told them it or is it... How much of that story is also important... They could have been told any story, and, oh you're telling me something contrary to that that has implications to my relationship with my grandfather, who passed away, cause he's the one who told me that story. And if that story is not real, what else don't I know about him? And everything I thought about him was wrong." That implicates that relationship as opposed to the part of it where it's like, "oh, the reality you're telling me implicates my relationship to everything around me and who I am in the world, distinct from my finding out that my grandfather was a fraud" or whatever. What do you think that balance is there?

**CLINT SMITH:** [01:04:19] I think it's absolutely both. I think about a conversation I had with a guy named Jeff who told me about how, when he was a kid, his grandfather would take him to the cemetery and they would sit in the gazebo at the center of the cemetery and watch, at dusk, as the sun would set, and the deers would sort of slalom through the tombstones, and

he would sing him songs that his grandfather had sang him, and he would tell him about all the people who were buried here, who were part of his community, part of his family and how they're so misunderstood by this country, and how they fought a war to protect their families and their loved ones, and that they weren't racist, and slavery had nothing to do with it. That's propaganda. And so these are the stories that Jeff grows up with, and Jeff now has his own granddaughters who he brings to the cemetery and tells the same story to.

And so it very much is deeply entangled in an emotional and psychological, and intimate relationship that people have with the people they love, who told them the stories. And we see this manifest itself, not only in the Lost Cause, we see this in religion, we see this in politics, we see this in all sorts of ways. The heirloom of ideology is passed down and people either grapple with it and reject it, or create nuance within it, or create distinct "granddad is homophobic and racist" and you put that here and then you go to Thanksgiving dinner and you just try to keep it, or whatever the case may be. But for a lot of people, if they accept that so many of the stories that the people who loved them told them about who they were, who this country is, who their community is, it becomes difficult to disentangle their love for that person, from the things that person told them. And I think embedded within that is your second point of, then it brings in, it becomes this existential question, or this existential crisis, where so much of how someone has come to understand themselves in the world has been shaped by the stories that they have been told by these people who were telling lies. And so if they're going to accept that these were lies, then it shatters so much of how they have situated themselves in relationship to history, in relationship to this country, in relationship to the world. And that is a hard thing for many people to let go of.

One of the guys at the end of the book that I talk about said, " you want me to accept that my great grandfather was a monster. And for me I'm like, "actually I'm not interested in the interiority of your grandfather's heart or spirit, that's secondary to me. It is important that you accept that your great grandfather fought for a monstrous cause." There's a difference between whether someone is a monster and the actions that they did. It's the way that our understanding, rightfully, of how racism manifests itself is moving away from an interpersonal understanding of its manifestations to a systemic, a structural, one that's grounded in policy and action.

If so much of who you believe yourself to be in the world is animated by things you realize are lies, then you just tell yourself that they're not lies. And you say that everybody else is lying.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** [01:07:22] I almost feel like when you were saying that we need to put an asterisk on this so that we do not fall foul of the critical race theories. To a certain extent, that whole critical race theory, I don't know, boogie man or person that is being unleashed, it feels like, on some level, is a reaction to... I don't know, I don't think I'm imagining that there has been a revisiting of the implications of slavery over the past 10 years or so, just in terms of we do five interviews a week or four interviews a week and the books that are coming out about the relationship of cotton to the entire country's economy.

And there has been more in reconstruction, and Juneteenth sort of feels like it's making a little bit come back. Tulsa and Charleston and all the other ones that we - but what do you think accounts for this? What's happening generationally that there is space for this now? Is

it just that certain generations have died off and there's space? What else do you think is happening?

**CLINT SMITH:** [01:08:21] I think it is mostly attributed to the Black Lives Matter movement. I think in the same way that the Civil Rights Movement completely recalibrated the way that people understood the origins of Black/white inequality and lifted up an entire new generation of social historians who used history to make sense of the present, to make sense of what we were seeing with Jim Crow, to make sense of what we were seeing with segregation, to make sense of what we were seeing with white supremacist violence, gave people a new understanding of the history from which it emerged.

I think now, since 2012-2013, part of what activists and organizers have done is opened up space for writers and academics and journalists and artists to go back into that history to help us understand that what happened to Mike Brown, what happened to Renisha McBride, what happened to Eric Garner, what happened to the list goes on and on, George Floyd, Brianna Taylor, they're not isolated incidents, the context that shaped what those police departments look like, the historical context that shaped what the communities look like in which those police are operating, the context that has shaped, what sort of resources communities do or don't have socially and economically, that is all part of a history that we tell ourselves was a long time ago, but it, in fact, wasn't that long ago at all.

And part of what I want the reader to understand in this book is that we both have a physical proximity to this landscape that is profound, in which the scars of this history are all around us. I wrote this book about nine places I could have written about 10,009, it's everywhere. But not only our physical proximity, but our temporal proximity. That this institution existed for 250 years and has only not existed for 150. So it existed for a hundred years longer than it didn't. And again, there are people who are still with us who had relationships to those who were born into bondage. The woman who opened the museum, the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in 2016, alongside the Obama my family, was the daughter of an enslaved person. Not the granddaughter or the great-granddaughter, she was the daughter of someone who was born into slavery, and this is in 2016. My grandfather's grandfather was enslaved, so when I imagine my son, my four year old son, sitting on my grandfather's lap, I think about my grandfather and imagine him sitting on his grandfather's lap, and I'm reminded that, again, this history we tell ourselves was a long time ago wasn't that long ago at all.

And so the idea that history, which wasn't that long ago, would have nothing to do with what our contemporary landscape of inequality looks like is morally and intellectually disingenuous. It has everything to do with it. Our political, economic, and social infrastructure has been shaped by this thing that was only a few generations ago.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** [01:11:08] And not to mention, I think one of the things that your book shows too, is that the elements of that institution still exist. The ideological framework and the understanding of the world is still being taught on some level, and so the actual dynamic of the institution doesn't exist, but the vapors of it is still floating around in the air in some fashion.

**CLINT SMITH:** [01:11:30] Yeah. And the scholar Saidiya Hartman talks about it as the afterlife of slavery, in which if we think about prison, for example, I'm not someone who would say that prison is slavery. I think they are two phenomenologically different things and should be

interrogated on their own terms and their own precise terms, but certainly contemporary prisons in our contemporary carceral system carries the remnants and the residue of that history in really profound ways, and that, that needs to be understood and accounted for. And not just in things that are self-evident like our prison system, but in our electoral college, our history of gerrymandering, the zoning policies we have. The list goes on and on, but ultimately you realize that the reason one community looks one way and another community looks another way is not because singularly of the people in those communities or what they have, or have not done, but it's because of what has been done to those communities generation after generation after generation.

And so this book is about slavery, and even if we were just to account for slavery, that would be true, but then when it kept going and with the black codes, then with Jim Crow, then with segregation, now with red lining and then mass incarceration, mass criminalization. So we see and continue to see different iterations of it, and part of what a deep understanding of history does and part of why you have so many state sanctioned efforts and legislatures across the country, attempting to prevent teachers from teaching, it is because when you realize the history of this country, this country can't lie to you anymore. It can't lie to you about why certain people have things and certain people don't, and you can no longer attribute it to notions of what people morally deserve or don't deserve because they did or didn't work hard, but you understand it as being the result of, again, state sanctioned policies that have been enacted across generations.

## Summary

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:13:17] We've just heard clips today, starting with Vox, laying out a detailed history of the Tulsa Massacre; Counterspin explained the extremely deliberate efforts to erase the history of anti-Black terrorism; Into America looked at the great effort that must be undertaken to teach history, and for White people to come to terms with the legacy of anti-Black violence;

Today, Explained, discussed new proposed legislation that could open the door for legal remedies to be pursued by the descendants of the victims of the Tulsa massacre; and Democracy Now discussed the significance of the enshrining of Juneteenth as a national holiday.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from the AI Franken Podcast telling stories of many small towns around the country where the prosperous Black residents were terrorized and driven from their homes by White mobs; they also explained the concrete rationale for reparations; and The Majority Report explored the stories that are still told to this day to uphold the myth of the Lost Cause and the innocence of the Confederates.

For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and are part of the transcript for today's episode, so you can still find them if you want to make the effort. Today's clips in particular... I really encourage everyone to hear these clips, they are full of fascinating stories and insights, and they're just way too long to fit in the main show, but really worth your time.

So to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information.

Every request is granted, no questions asked. And now. We'll hear from you.

## **Final comments on Deadline for Democracy marches and Harriet Tubman's lifespan**

Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991, or write me a message to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com).

We have late breaking activism, so now that you're informed and angry, here's what you can do about it. This week, as you may have heard, Senate Republicans blocked the procedural vote to even debate the For the People Act. So it's time for Democrats, and I think the promotional writers for The Real World said it best, they need to stop being polite and start getting real. It's depressing to say, but this summer is their last chance to get anything else passed before 2022 midterm fever kicks in. They had five months, that was it, welcome to American politics.

What's even more amazing is the lack of focus on the fact that if Democrats don't pass voting reform now, voter suppression laws will all but guarantee they lose seats in 2022 and beyond. This means handing over what's left of our democracy to the GOP, which has wrapped itself in lies and conspiracy theories, and insurrection, as it fully embraces fascism and racism. The stakes couldn't be higher. That's why indivisible and local grassroots groups are taking to the streets. During the July recess, June 28th through July 10th, public, press-worthy events will be held across the country to put pressure on all senators to do whatever it takes to pass election reform. That includes abolishing the filibuster. The GOP likely can't be shamed, but Democrats can absolutely be shamed into being bolder. Find an event near you [deadlinefordemocracy.org](https://deadlinefordemocracy.org).

Now, I want to finish up today with a sort of regulatory factoid. There's been a lot of talk in the show trying to drive home the point of how recent our history is. That we should brush aside any suggestion that the history about racism is so long ago that it doesn't matter. And this tidbit of information really helps drive that home. So the next time you hear someone say, "oh, you know, slavery, racism, that was a long time ago. Didn't we solve that?" Let them know that Harriet Tubman was alive during both Thomas Jefferson's and Ronald Reagan's lives. That was a little factoid that went somewhat viral on the internet in the last couple of months. It's been fact checked as true, and I found that really astonishing, and helped drive home the important point of how recent this history is.

The other thing we talked about is how systematic the effort was to suppress Black prosperity in America, and that it was done using textbook domestic terrorism while the government, at best, turned a willfully blind eye. So luckily times have changed, we don't live in a time when domestic terrorists would dare attempt to subvert our democracy or anything like that, because they know the times have changed and the government would do anything

but tacitly endorse such actions by refusing to investigate them or something like that. Sarcasm.

But even though times are somewhat different, we need to make sure to never take even a single avoidable step down that road, less we risk finding ourselves reliving some of the darkest periods of our history. So join in on those upcoming marches with details at [deadlinefordemocracy.Org](http://deadlinefordemocracy.Org).

And as always, keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). That's going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes, of course. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Scott for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and so on. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift membership at [bestoftheleft.com/support](http://bestoftheleft.com/support) or from right inside the Apple Podcast app if that's your style.

For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on our website and likely right on the device you're using to listen. So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left Podcast* coming to twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](http://bestoftheleft.com).