

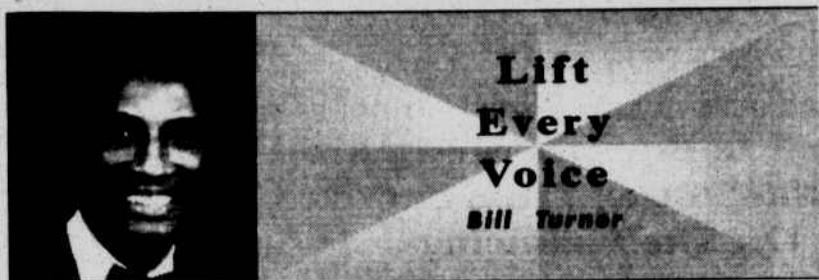
FORUM

Memorializing a Black Holocaust in America

Remembering the Tulsa, Okla., Bombing

This Memorial Day, especially in Oklahoma City, people are pausing to recall what was wrought on that community a little over a year ago: the most calamitous attack with bombs ever to take place on U.S. soil. But, in spite of the fact that Timothy McVeigh is now on trial for that bombing, we ought to pause and remember the Tulsa race riots of 1921.

Virtually no one in America was charged nor punished for what is documented in "Black Wallstreet: A Lost Dream," co-authored by Ron Wallace, a Tulsa native and Jay Jay Wilson, a Los Angeles-based writer.



Wallace and Wilson make us remember the events in Tulsa June 1, 1921, through oral accounts and detailed library research. Then and there, 76 years to the day this weekend, occurred this almost forgotten milestone of violence, visited upon the people of African descent, two hours northeast of Oklahoma City.

Northern Tulsa's all-black area was fittingly called "Black Wallstreet." At the time, it was in the top five of the most affluent black communities in America. "Black Wallstreet," also known as "Little Africa," was a 36-square-block area of thriving black businesses and residences. There were

21 churches, an equal number of restaurants, more than two dozen-grocery stores, two movie theaters, and a hospital.

A model self-sufficient black community, "Black Wallstreet's" elites owned half-a-dozen private airplanes, a bus service, personal care services, a hospital, and an abundance of law and medical offices. In a period of 12 hours on the weekend of June 1, 1921, "Black Wallstreet" in Tulsa was bombed from the air and burned to the ground.

Duke professor and Oklahoma native Dr. John Hope Franklin, in his book, "From Slavery to Freedom," described it as no less than a full-fledged "race war," in which "nine whites were known to be killed." Wallace and Wilson report that "the carnage left between 1,500 and 3,000 blacks dead (buried in mass unmarked graves) and over 600 successful businesses destroyed."

Behind it all was a group like that to which Timothy McVeigh — being tried for the Oklahoma City bombing of 1996 — supposedly belongs: the KKK. The KKK was about to avenge the alleged assault on a white woman by a black man.

Thousands of "Black Wallstreet" residents took arms to the jail to protect the accused. When the altercations heated, general rioting, looting, and house burnings began.

Wallace and Wilson's recently released book and video on the Tulsa event of 1921 chronicles the remembrances of blacks and whites about what happened and why. It is instructive to us — here and now — to know what happened.

For one thing, we are still numbed by the blast in Oklahoma City, which is thought to be the worst bombing ever to take place on American soil. Doesn't it also allow us to know now that an even bloodier event took place

— which has not been reported, for all practical purposes?

From the accounts provided by those now-aged persons who recalled the episode, jealousy and economic competition was the chief cause. The 15,000-or-so residents of "Black Wallstreet" are somewhat like what we see in many American communities today. At that time, Oklahoma had been "set aside" as a state for blacks and Native Americans. The state had three dozen black townships (like in South Africa), many residents of which had traveled from the South with Indians during the Trail of Tears between 1830 and 1842.

Blacks thrived in the black towns of Oklahoma, quite simply, up until 1921, many having settled on their "40 acres," most with a mule, but many with lucrative oil reserves on their land. One black owned the largest cotton gin west of the Mississippi river. They chose a black man from Kansas as their governor.

Many survivors of the "Black Wallstreet Massacre of 1921" believe that the "whole thing was planned." While the Post WWI era was prosperous, many lived off the "Grapes of Wrath," a story told of dirt-farm hardships by John Steinbeck. Rather than look for ways to get along, those envious of blacks' success opted for destruction.

"Black Wallstreet" can be ordered from Duralon Entertainment, Box 2702, Tulsa, OK 74149. Call 1-800-682-7975.

As we find ourselves in times that are strikingly similar, it is worth knowing about and remembering these tough times in Tulsa in '21. Memorial Day, after all, is a time to really remember the words of George Santyana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

(Bill Turner is a freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

The Enduring Legacy of Malcolm X

This week we celebrate the kuzaliwa, the birthday of "our Black Shining Prince" El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, Malcolm X. There is no leader in the history of Africans in America who is more worthy to be commemorated, celebrated and emulated than Malcolm X. As we reflect on the tragic deaths of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Small in the last year, two of our brilliant young warriors who lived and rapped about the "realness" of ghetto life, it is useful to see Malcolm's life as a metaphor of possibilities for those locked in the prison of ghetto life today. Malcolm rose from humble beginnings in a poor working class family. He eventually got caught up in the dark underside of the domestic colonies created by Amerikkka's white supremacist system. He was a petty thief, a pimp and a lightweight gangsta who landed in Amerikkka's criminal injustice system for his transgressions.

The remarkable thing about Malcolm, however, is that under the tutelage of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, he did not get stuck in the "thug life." He did not simply bemoan the "realness" of ghetto existence or wallow in and perpetuate it. Malcolm X transformed himself from an agent of destruction within Amerikkka's dark ghettos to an agent of liberation committed to changing the "realness" of racial oppression and economic exploitation afflicting Africans in America and the world. This transformative dimension is one of the most enduring aspects of the legacy of Malcolm X.

But there is obviously much more that this generation needs to study and learn from the life and teachings of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. At a time when police brutality, killings and misconduct have reached epidemic proportions, the analysis and teachings of Malcolm continue to be instructive: "The ... white press inflames the white public against Negroes ... The police are able to make the white public think that 90 percent or 99 percent of the Negroes ... are criminals. And once the white public is convinced that most of the Negro community is a criminal element, then this automatically paves the way for the police to move

into the Negro community, exercising Gestapo tactics, stopping any black man who is on the sidewalk, whether he is guilty or whether he is innocent, whether he is well dressed or whether he is poorly dressed, whether he is educated or whether he is dumb ... As long as he is black and a member of the Negro community, the white public thinks that the white policeman is justified in going in there and trampling on that man's civil rights and ... human rights."

Malcolm X understood the racist and systemic nature of police violence directed against the black community. He also knew that only collective and concerted action by the black masses would stop police violence and end the oppression/exploitation of the black nation. Hence, Malcolm taught us that we must control the politics and economics of the black community, that politicians must come from and be account-

able to the black community. Deeply steeped in the philosophy of self help and self reliance that was/is the centerpiece of the economic program of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm consistently hammered home the point that black people must utilize their economic resources for self development, that the shops, stores and business enterprises in the black community should be owned by and accountable to black people.

Malcolm's vision was not confined to Amerikkka, however. He was an internationalist and Pan-Africanist. Malcolm was clear that the same system of white supremacy that was oppressing Africans and people of color in Amerikkka was oppressing and exploiting people throughout the Third World and Africans everywhere including Africa. Therefore, he was a fierce proponent of self-determination of African and Third world people and devoted to the concept of African and Third World unity/solidarity as a means of achieving the goal of freedom from global white domination.

These were not popular ideas when Malcolm was among us and they are hardly popular today. But Malcolm courageously stood by his convictions, changing some precepts and concepts as his experiences expanded his knowledge base, but always standing firm on the basic principles of nationalism, internationalism and Pan Africanism. It is clear that Malcolm's life and legacy are as relevant to our circumstances as African people today as ever before. No doubt Malcolm would be disappointed that "the more things change, the more they stay the same," that we have not made more progress since he walked among us. That notwithstanding, our "Black Shining Prince" would not give up on this generation. His abiding faith in the transformative power of African people as exemplified by his life would dictate that he exhort us to continue to struggle with the confidence that ultimately we will be victorious.

El Hajj Malik El Shabazz was born a victim of circumstances created by racism and white supremacy. Like so many victims of racial oppression and economic exploitation, he was criminalized by a criminal system. In effect he was sentenced to death in the genocidal conditions of the ghetto. But Malcolm X refused to languish in the grave. He rose up to become one of the greatest leaders of African people of all time, this is the enduring legacy of Malcolm X, a legacy which should be an inspiration to this and succeeding generations. Long live Malcolm X!

(Ron Daniels is a nationally syndicated columnist.)

Vantage Point

Ron Daniels

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years with the United Nations International Labor Organization before retiring, handles clerical duties for Delaware Stand For Children. And her only son, Leonard Jr., who retired from Dupont after 25 years, helps out with business affairs.

"My life is frenetic, but it's interesting," says Vivian, who often stays up until 2 or 3 a.m. preparing for her visits to policy makers.

"Sometimes I think about sitting on the porch and knitting, and then I say, 'Nah! I'm supposed to be living at this pace.' I think it's what keeps me young."

When state Rep. Jane Mulrooney handed Vivian the Delaware Tomorrow Award recently, for her work with children, Mulrooney said, "It seems as if everybody will recognize the Delaware Stand For Children as a dominant force for children for a long time."

"She was right," Vivian says. "We will be a force that the Legislature, the governor, and the local government will have to deal

with. And the good thing about Stand For Children is that it's not a onetime thing. We will remain a force for children."

For information on how you can Stand For Healthy Children in your community June 1, call 1-800-663-4032.

(Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund, which coordinates the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC), whose mission is to leave no child behind and to ensure every child a healthy, head, fair, safe, and moral start in life. For more information about the BCCC, call (202) 628-8787.)

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