Tracing Greenwood's Story

Compare evidence from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre

OKH.P.2.2 "Develop skills which demonstrate an understanding of historical events and the people who shaped our history. Gather and evaluate the usefulness of various formats of evidence for specific inquiry, analyzing the broader historical context..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline details about what happened in 1921, circle each type of evidence, and number the events in time order. Use your marks to consider what each source can and cannot tell you.

What the Records Reveal

1. On May 31, 1921, a white mob attacked Greenwood, a prosperous Black neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The violence followed an accusation that a Black teenager, Dick Rowland, had assaulted a white elevator operator, Sarah Page. A Tulsa newspaper reported the accusation, but an accusation is not proof. Armed groups gathered near the courthouse, where Rowland was held. During the night and into June 1, attackers burned homes and businesses, and many residents fled. The destruction occurred in a city where segregation and racial hostility shaped whose safety officials protected. Its scale makes the event more than a dispute between individuals.

2. To investigate what residents lost, a historian might compare insurance claims filed after the attack with interviews survivors gave many years later. Claims can identify damaged buildings, addresses, and estimated dollar losses. Yet many insurers refused to pay because policies excluded damage caused by riots, and a claim cannot measure a family's fear or a lost community network. Survivors could describe what it felt like to escape or return to burned streets. Their memories preserve experiences that property records miss, although details may change over decades. Neither format captures every resident's story, especially when some had no property to insure.

3. In 1997, Oklahoma lawmakers created a commission to study the attack, long after many witnesses had died. Its 2001 report drew on records and testimony and recommended direct payments to survivors and a scholarship fund. A reader can place three moments side by side: the 1921 attack, the claims filed soon afterward, and the commission's investigation decades later. Each moment shaped what people could record and what questions they asked. A claim written shortly after a fire might give a detailed cost but little explanation of why violence happened. A later investigation could connect sources and examine the city's response, yet it could not interview everyone who was there.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. If you were investigating both property damage and residents' experiences, why would you use insurance claims and survivor interviews together?

2. A researcher wants to know whether Rowland assaulted Page. Why does the newspaper report not settle that question, and why would insurance claims add little?

3. How could the time between the 1921 attack and the commission's investigation affect what its 2001 report could establish?

4. How might racial hostility in 1921 and the long delay before the commission's work each affect the evidence available about the attack?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine finding a Greenwood shopkeeper's June 1921 ledger listing prices for goods lost in the attack. In five or six sentences, assess its usefulness for investigating Greenwood's losses, give one possible bias or limit, compare it with a survivor interview, and explain how its date affects what it records.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline details about what happened in 1921, circle each type of evidence, and number the events in time order. Use your marks to consider what each source can and cannot tell you. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	If you were investigating both property damage and residents' experiences, why would you use insurance claims and survivor interviews together?	**Claims provide addresses and estimated losses, while interviews describe experiences such as escaping and returning. Each records something the other may miss.**
2	A researcher wants to know whether Rowland assaulted Page. Why does the newspaper report not settle that question, and why would insurance claims add little?	**The newspaper reported an accusation, not proof. Insurance claims concern property losses, not whether the accusation was true.**
3	How could the time between the 1921 attack and the commission's investigation affect what its 2001 report could establish?	**The commission could compare records and testimony, but many witnesses had died, so it could not hear every firsthand account.**
4	How might racial hostility in 1921 and the long delay before the commission's work each affect the evidence available about the attack?	**Racial hostility shaped whose safety officials protected during the attack. By the time the commission began, many witnesses had died, limiting the testimony it could gather.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A shopkeeper's June 1921 ledger could help estimate the value of goods lost soon after the attack. Its close date might make its prices more precise than a survivor's memory recorded decades later. The owner might overstate prices, and the ledger would omit losses outside that store. A survivor interview could describe fear and escape, which prices cannot measure. Together, the sources offer different views, but neither shows every loss Greenwood suffered.

Accept other supported limits, such as missing goods or people who owned no store. Responses should distinguish the ledger's near-contemporary price information from experiences an interview can convey.