

FIRM NEWS

Schulte Roth & Zabel Joins Historic Tulsa Race Massacre Lawsuit

January 26, 2021

Schulte Roth & Zabel (SRZ) is proud to announce that it has joined a team of civil and human rights lawyers led by Tulsa-based attorney **Damario Solomon-Simmons** of **SolomonSimmonsLaw** who have filed a lawsuit demanding the City of Tulsa and other defendants fix the public nuisance they caused by their destruction of Greenwood in 1921, their continuing failure to rebuild what they destroyed and their audacity in seeking to reap and, in fact, reaping benefits from their destructive acts.

“The Tulsa Race Massacre that occurred in 1921 has had devastating effects that are still felt to this day. We are eager to work alongside Damario and his team to seek justice for the wrongs that continue to plague the Greenwood community,” said **Sara Solfanelli**, special counsel for Pro Bono Initiatives at SRZ.

On May 31, 1921, one of the worst acts of domestic terrorism in U.S. history completely decimated Tulsa’s thriving, all-Black community of Greenwood. A large White mob, including members of the Tulsa Police Department, the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, the Tulsa County Sheriff’s Department and the Oklahoma National Guard, as well as other city and county leaders, overwhelmed the approximately 40-square-block community, killing hundreds of Black residents, injuring thousands more, burning down over one thousand homes and businesses and stealing residents’ personal property.

“The Greenwood neighborhood never recovered from the near-total devastation of the 1921 massacre, and that impact is still felt today by

descendants of survivors and Black Tulsans generally,” commented **Michael Swartz**, co-chair of SRZ’s Litigation Group and chair of the firm’s Pro Bono Committee. “We are excited to leverage our extensive experience in complex litigation to support Damario in this historic case, and eager to help amplify the fight for justice for the Greenwood community.”

“Partnering with SRZ is a very exciting opportunity. Together, we will compel the Defendant to finally do what is right — accept responsibility for its heinous crime of causing and continuing a nuisance to the present day and then repairing it,” **Mr. Solomon-Simmons** said.

The claim seeks to abate the public nuisance of racial disparities, economic inequalities, insecurity and trauma that the City of Tulsa’s unlawful actions and omissions caused and continue to cause, and aims to return the Greenwood District, once known as Black Wall Street, back to the prosperous area it was prior to the devastating events of May 1921. Today, this area still remains poorer and in worse health than the rest of the city. “I am excited to be a part of an important litigation that represents hope for descendants and survivors of the Massacre and Black Americans everywhere. Too many painful events in American history have gone unanswered, and we must do whatever we can to achieve justice,” said **McKenzie Haynes**, SRZ litigation associate and co-chair of the firm’s Task Force for Racial Justice Initiatives.

“We created our Task Force for Racial Justice Initiatives to further expand our pro bono reach and help the firm identify and implement initiatives directed at addressing ongoing issues of community racial injustice, like those in *Randle v. City of Tulsa et. al.*,” said **David Efron**, SRZ co-managing partner and co-head of the Investment Management Group. “Pro bono work is an extremely important part of what we do at SRZ,” added **Marc Elovitz**, SRZ co-managing partner and chair of the Investment Management Regulatory & Compliance Group. “We are honored to be able to play a role in this important case and help amplify the voices of those impacted who might otherwise go underserved.”

In addition to Mr. Solomon-Simmons, SRZ joins attorneys **J. Spencer Bryan** and **Steven Terrill** of Bryan Terrill, P.C., Professor **Eric Miller** of Loyola Marymount College of Law, **Maynard M. Henry, Sr.**, **Lashandra Peoples-Johnson** and **Cordal Cephas** of Johnson Cephas Law PLLC. The lawsuit has been filed in Tulsa County District Court. The team will

also work with Mr. Solomon-Simmons' partners from the human rights community, including **Human Rights Watch**, which in May 2020 published a groundbreaking report documenting the impact of the Tulsa Race Massacre and the systemic racism that followed, and called for reparations.

SRZ is a market-leading law firm serving the financial services industry from offices in New York, Washington, DC and London. SRZ has a long history as a leader in pro bono legal work and a firm-wide legacy of contributing to the greater good. SRZ's Task Force for Racial Justice Initiatives helps the firm identify and implement specific initiatives directed to addressing the ongoing issues of racial injustice in our community and works in conjunction with the Pro Bono Committee to identify pro bono legal projects or volunteer service projects to assist protestors, communities and other groups that need assistance, as well as large-scale, long-term pro bono legal projects that aim to fight racism and racial injustice.

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