FIRM NEWS

The Justice for Greenwood Foundation Requests Formal Investigation of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre by the US Department of Justice

August 2021

The Justice for Greenwood Foundation, the three living survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP (SRZ), local Black elected officials and community activists, and a team of civil and human rights lawyers, including Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative, Nicole Austin-Hillery of Human Rights Watch, Damon T. Hewett of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and Angela Rye, have sent a letter to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Justice ("DOJ"), requesting a formal investigation into the Massacre.

The Justice for Greenwood Foundation ("J4G") is a 501(c)(3) organization that seeks truth, justice, and reparations for the victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. J4G has broad support among the Tulsa Race Massacre Descendants community and has several partnerships with national civil rights organizations, such as *Color of Change*, *Equal Justice Institute*, and the *NAACP Legal Defense Fund*. The letter is the J4G's latest action to help provide healing and justice to the survivors and descendants of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

Pursuant to the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2007, together with its 2016 Reauthorization, the letter asks that the DOJ conduct a meaningful and objective investigation into the Massacre that will provide overdue transparency into the City of Tulsa's handling of the Massacre's aftermath and answer the questions that have long gone

Copyright © 2024 Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP

Attorney Advertising

unresolved, as the City has long failed to adequately conduct an investigation and prosecute those responsible.

"In this letter, we are calling on the Department of Justice to bring the independence of the federal government to Tulsa to help heal the century-old wounds left by the Massacre," said **Damario Solomon-Simmons**, founder and Executive Director of J4G.

In late 2020, over 30 coffins were found in unmarked graves, which included the skeletal remains of a Black man with multiple gunshot wounds to his head and shoulder, where witnesses reported seeing mass graves following the Massacre. Despite the strong objection from Massacre survivors, descendants, and community-led Tulsa Mass Graves Oversight Committee, the City of Tulsa abruptly reburied the bodies without delivering an investigative report into the deaths or allowing for the remains to receive a proper community-led burial ceremony. To ensure the deaths of the Massacre victims whose remains are found are properly and thoroughly investigated, J4G is calling on the Department of Justice to act as a neutral, third-party investigator and to take over the search and investigation, as well as provide answers and findings that the Massacre survivors, descendants of the Massacre, and the rest of the public, can trust.

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.

In May 2021, Human Rights Watch published a follow up to their groundbreaking May 2020 report on the Case for Reparations in Tulsa, reporting on the failure of the City of Tulsa and the Centennial Commission to support the survivors' demands for justice.

Read the full letter here.

Read more about Schulte's involvement here.

Copyright © 2024 Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP

Attorney Advertising

Practices

PRO BONO

LITIGATION

Copyright © 2024 Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP

Attorney Advertising