

Historical Racial Trauma and its Intergenerational Transmission: A Case Study of The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

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Background and Statement of the Problem

- Historical racial (cultural) trauma is real (native folks, Jewish folks, etc.) and there is some empirical support for this phenomenon.
- 400 year history of Anti-Black racial violence
 - 5,000 African American lynched between 1865 and 1968; most cases are unsolved. There have been few, if any, prosecutions; and even fewer convictions
 - Over 30 major acts of ethnoviolence (i.e., mass violence directed at the African American community –see Tulsa, Rosewood, etc.)

Background (cont.)

- African Americans remain the primary target of racial violence
- Scarcity of research examining psychological trauma in relation to historical racial violence among African Americans
- Implications for individual and collective healing
 - Is an apology adequate?
 - Reparations

Cultural Trauma

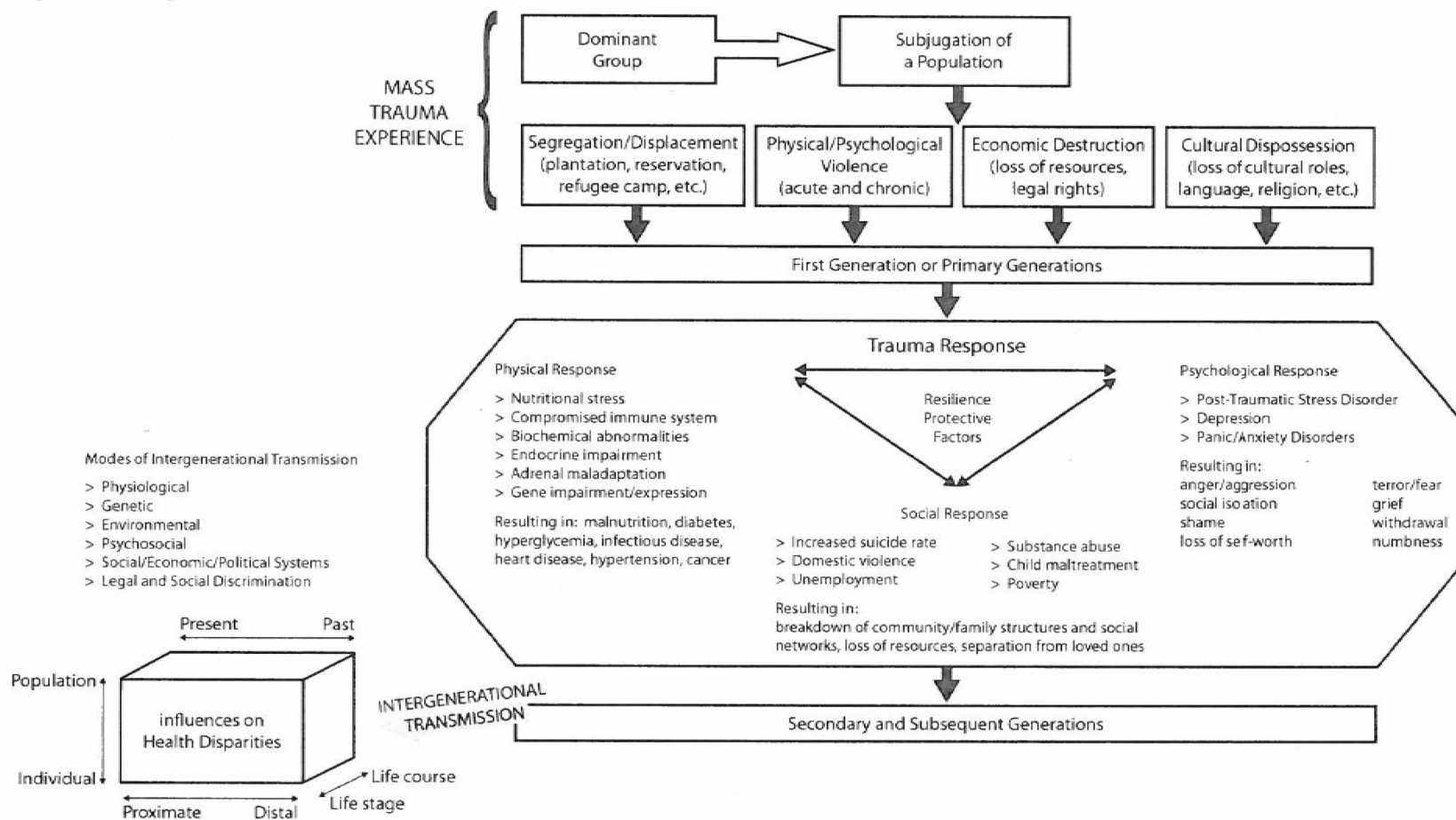
- The legacy of slavery, through the collective lens of a shared traumatic experience, continues to exact a heavy psychological and emotional toll on contemporary African Americans.
- The unrelenting terror and violence associated with slavery and Jim Crow segregation is part of the collective psyche of African Americans (Akbar, 1986; Eyerman, 2001; Utsey, 2001).

Cultural Trauma (cont.)

- Jenkins (2001) defined cultural trauma as “that which occurs when an entire culture experiences a traumatic event during the same period, in a common geographical area and caused by the same agency, be it human or natural” (pp. 1).
- According to Eyerman (2001), cultural trauma is the dramatic loss of identity affecting a group of people who had achieved a degree of cohesiveness.

Cultural Trauma and Mechanisms of Transmission

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma



Intergenerational Transmission of Racial Trauma

- Racial socialization
- Family communication (stories, silences, etc.).
- Art and literature
- Oral history, including legends, fables, and tales
 - Brer Rabbit & Brer Fox (tricksters), Stack o le, etc
- Family cohesiveness
- Attachment theory

Conceptual Framework

- Intergenerational transmission of racial/cultural trauma
 - Shoshan (1989) found that the children of Holocaust survivors had more difficulty developing relationships outside the home
 - Signal & Weinfeld (1985) found that the children of Holocaust survivors had higher levels of depression, anxiety, conduct disorders, and maladaptive coping

Background on Racial Violence in the United States

- Mass racial violence directed at African Americans
 - Occurred in three waves
 - Wave 1 - Reconstruction era (1866-1875)
 - Wave 2 - Jim Crow era (1896-1914)
 - Wave 3 – WWI – 1919 was “Red Hot Summer”

Tulsa

- Trail of Tears/Indian territory
- Oil and White interlopers
- The wealth that segregation built
- Home ownership
- 160 + business
- Lawlessness (bootleggers, prostitution, etc)

Black Wall Street in Tulsa

- Escape from southern oppression/violence
- Black owned business grow and prosper
- Descendants of enslaved Africans owned by Indians
- Sense of ownership and belonging
- Highest rate of Black literacy in the state
- High number of Black professionals
- Greenwood District = Black Wall Street

The Tulsa Race Riot (War) of 1921

- Relevant events leading up to the riot
 - Hostility and resentment
 - Conspiracy
 - The spark
 - To lynch Negro
 - Stand like men
 - Round midnight

The Players

- Dick Rowland dropped out of high school and was arrested for allegedly molesting a white woman by the name of Sarah Page, “on a public elevator in broad day light” .
- After Rowland was arrested, angry white vigilantes gathered at the courthouse with the intent on lynching the bootlick .

Cont...(Rowland)

- Armed blacks integrated the mob to protect him. There was a scuffle between a black and white man and a shot rang out. The crowd scattered.
- By 10:00 a.m. a race riot had broken out. Blacks defended their community for a while, “ but then the airplanes came dropping bombs.”
- All of the black community was burned to the ground and about 300 people were left dead.

Airplanes & the Riot

- There is no question that airplanes were in the air over Tulsa during and after the Tulsa race riot. The question is: What were they being used for?

History Has A Record

- Facts :
 - Black Tulsans had every right to believe Dick Rowland would be lynched.
 - Hostile groups gathered and their confrontation worsened.
 - Civil officials selected many men, all of them white and some of them participants in the violence, and made those men their agents as deputies.
 - Deputies did not stem the violence but added to it
 -

Cont...(History)

- Facts:
 - Public official provided firearms and ammunition to Whites.
 - Units of Oklahoma National Guard participated in the mass arrests of all, or nearly all, of Greenwood's residents, removed them to other parts of the city and detained them in holding centers.
 - Whites stole, damaged or destroyed personal property left behind in homes and businesses.

Cont...

- Facts:
 - People, some of them agents of the government, also deliberately burned or otherwise destroyed homes estimated to have numbered 1,256, along with other structures- including churches, schools, businesses, even a hospital and library.
 - Although the exact total can never be determined, credible evidence makes it provable that many people, likely numbering between one and three hundred, were killed in the riot.

Cont...(History)

- Facts:
 - Not one of these criminal acts was ever prosecuted or punished.
 - After the restoration of order it was official policy to release a black detainee only upon the application of a white person, and then only if that white person agreed to accept responsibility for the detainee's subsequent behavior.

More Than A Riot

- In less than twenty-four hours, nearly all of Tulsa's African American residential district-some forty-square-blocks in all- had been reduced to ashes, leaving nearly nine thousand people homeless.
- For some, what occurred in Tulsa on May 31 and June 1, 1921 was a massacre, a program, or, to use a more modern term, an ethnic cleansing.... for others, it was nothing short of a race war.

Reparations

- While the official damage estimated over \$1.5 million, the black community filed more than \$4 Million. All were denied.
- However, two claims exceeding \$5,000, “for guns and ammunition taken during the racial disturbance of June 1”, were approved.

In The End

- Facts:
 - Neither city or county government contributed substantially to Greenwood's rebuilding; in fact, municipal authorities acted initially to impede rebuilding.
 - In the end the restoration of Greenwood after its systematic destruction was left to the victims of that destruction.

LITTLE AFRICA ON FIRE
TULSA RACE RIOT 6-1-1921

STORE CO.

MAY

WATER TOWER

TULSA MAY







RUNNING THE NEGRO OUT OF
TULSA
JUNE TH 1 1921



RUINS OF THE
TULSA RACE RIOT
6-1-21





(Courtesy Department of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).











CHARCO NEGRO
KILLED IN TULSA RIOT 6-1-1921



A VICTIM OF
THE GREAT
FLOOD



NEGRO SLAIN IN TULSA RIOT JUNE 1-1921





TRUCK BEING USED TO GATHER UP
COLORED VICTIMS - DURING TEXAS
RACE RIOT - 6-1-25

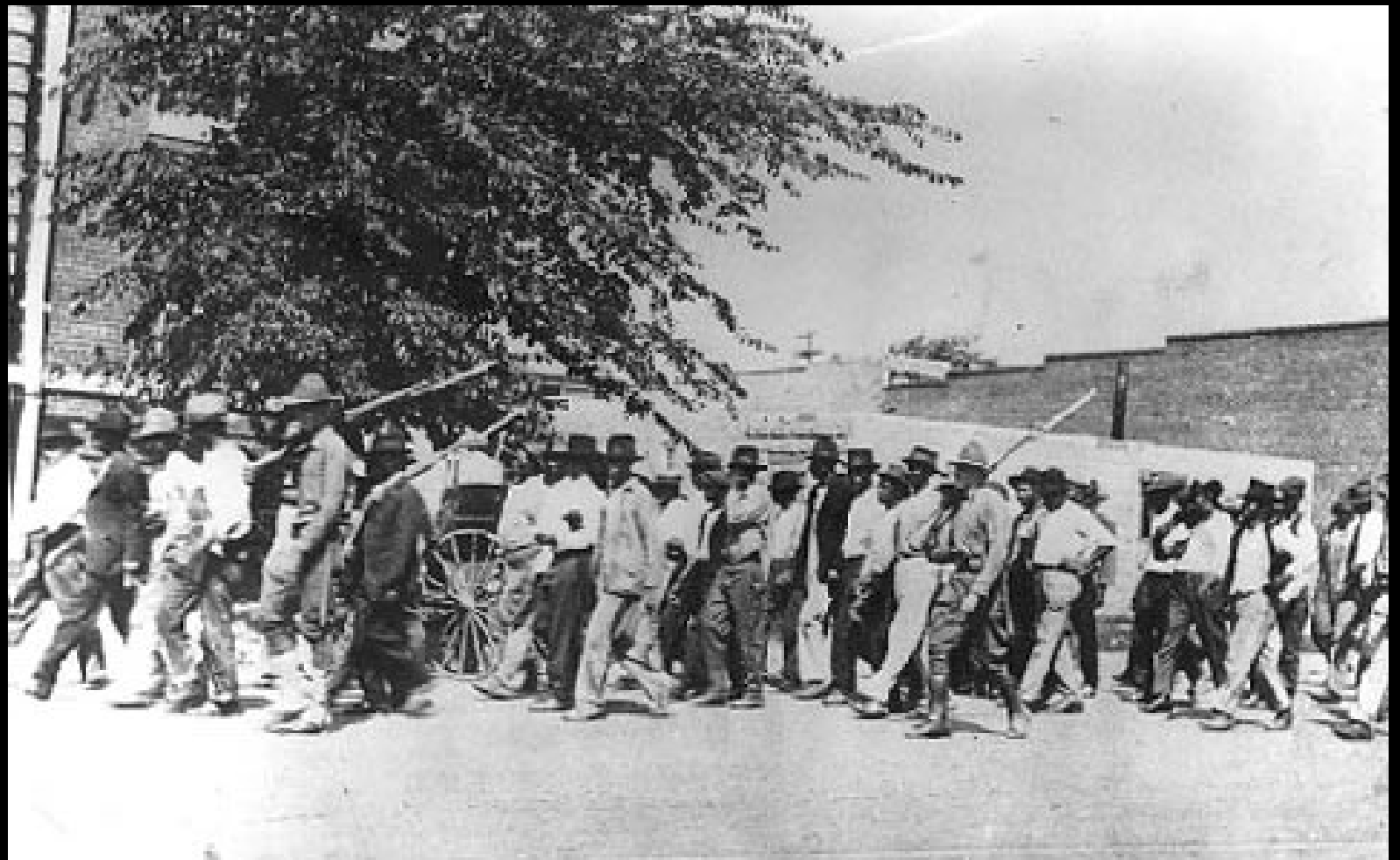




RACE RIOT
TULSA, OKLA



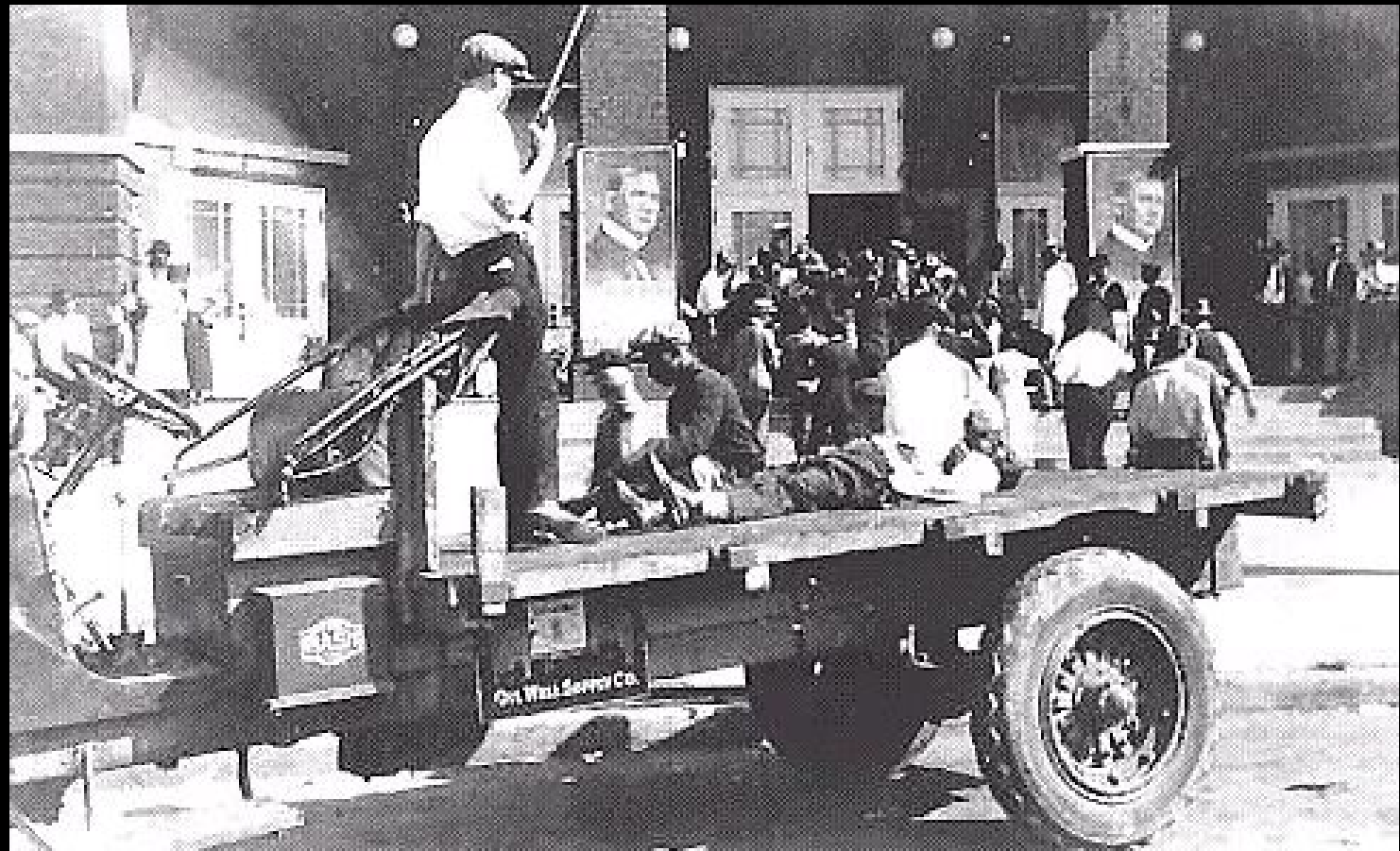






CAPTURED NEGROSS ON WAY TO
CONVENTION HALL - DURING TULSA RACE RIOT
JUNE 30 - 1921.







ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF HIS HOME
AFTER TOLSON RACE TRIST - 6-1-1921







Tulsa riot.







Discussion

- Summary/Conclusions
 - Trauma was present, but not prominent
 - Resilience was a central theme
 - Community
 - Religiosity/spirituality
 - Silence then and now
 - Fear of reprisal
 - Protect children/others
 - Lack of closure = re-injury

Discussion (cont.)

- Implications
 - Mass racial violence has long-term consequences
 - Traumatic effects are transmitted across generations
- Limitations
 - Survivors were children during riot
 - Current political climate related to Riot
- Future Research
 - Return for more in-depth inquiry
 - Examine community-level trauma

Message From the Survivors

- “We didn’ t just have a riot, we had a thriving community: we had businesses, owned our own houses, had farms. When they destroyed it we didn’ t leave, we rebuilt our community.”



BLACK
WALL STREET
MEMORIAL



PIONEERS GARDEN

1996