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Catalysts and Impediments to Tax Increment Finance in Tulsa's Historical African American Neighborhood

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Catalysts and Impediments to Tax Increment Finance in Tulsa's Historical African
American Neighborhood

A Thesis

University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

by

Bria Dixon

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Abstract

This thesis assesses how Tulsa, Oklahoma grew to utilize tax increment financing (TIF) to produce economic activity in Tulsa's historic downtown area. Specifically, how the creation, history, and maintenance of ONEOK Field, a \$60 million, 6,000-seat sports venue in Tulsa's historically African American neighborhood became the catalyst for Tulsa's current TIF policy. In examining the fiscal outcomes of ONEOK Field, this thesis finds implications for inequitable investment in and around Tulsa's Greenwood TIF district.

Keywords: Tax Increment Financing, Tulsa, ONEOK Field, Greenwood, 1921

Chapter 1

Introduction

Between 1890 and 1921 Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma was a powerful center of commerce for Black residents, with Greenwood being the first and wealthiest free Black community in the United States (Ross, 2011). This legacy, along with the promise of jobs brought thousands of Black and Brown migrants to the Tulsa area during the early Progressive era. However, the dreadful acts of racial violence that took place on the night of March 31 and the wee hours of June 1, 1921, shook the Greenwood community and ended the country's first Black Wall Street in what was the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. This massive displacement of black-owned businesses and residents systematically shattered the life, wealth, and economic vitality that once made Greenwood shine.

During this year's centennial anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, questions of economic investment and community inclusivity emerged in academic studies, news and media outlets, and governmental reports throughout the country. The centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre fell during a year in which the nation became increasingly aware of its historical marginalization of Black and Brown people. Also, Greenwood, the site of the Massacre, entered the spotlight. Despite this newfound awareness however, researchers have yet to investigate capital investment or investment allocation within the Greenwood community. Similarly, research and academic literature on tax increment finance (TIF) fails to consider or review the development and application of TIF policy in small urban communities – especially historically African American communities such as Greenwood that has endured repeat

episodes of state guided disinvestment.

Today, ONEOK Field, a \$60 million infrastructural investment, sits in Greenwood as the pride and joy of downtown Tulsa. The following research explores the relationship between ONEOK Field, a symbol of Tulsa's economic stability and Greenwood's economic development, and tax increment financing of inner-city revitalization. To this end, data extracted from state and city municipalities, historical records, research journals, and news articles have been synthesized and organized to both identify and critically review ONEOK Field as the catalyst for TIF and economic growth in Tulsa. In the same manner, the data also allude to the impact ONEOK Field has had on residents living in Tulsa's oldest African American neighborhood. Therefore, in studying the relationship between ONEOK Field in Greenwood and TIF in Tulsa, readers can come to understand the effects of capital investment and investment allocation within downtown Tulsa and the Greenwood TIF district.

Regarding Tulsa's fiscal matters, I assert that ONEOK Field has accomplished its goal of bringing positive economic activity to the downtown Tulsa area, and that the Greenwood TIF district, unlike other areas of downtown, has yet to see the same or similar manner of capital investment since the ballpark's construction in 2010. Based on the social and political climates surrounding the centennial anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, I expected to find Tulsa's TIF practices in the Greenwood and Tulsa Arts TIF districts further divide poor and wealthy residents via preferential fiscal policies. As a means to investigate this theory, I first seek to understand what TIF is and who or what is responsible for its inception. Next, a review of Greenwood's historical fiscal health prior to the development of ONEOK Field provides insight on how future

developments may correct or positively influence Greenwood's fiscal health. This followed by an in-depth review of ONEOK Field's funding and creation helps to conceptualize how TIF was intended to impact the downtown area—and its iconic African American neighborhood. Lastly, a comparative analysis of Greenwood and Tulsa Arts following the construction of ONEOK Field and TIF addresses how both tools have and have not fiscally revitalized Tulsa's oldest communities.

Chapter 2

Research Questions

This thesis discusses TIF and the Greenwood community but primarily focuses on the tax finance culture in Greenwood. A single project—the ONEOK field—provides a singular point of entry into the complex tax policies and development planning of Tulsa. Not a TIF-funded project, its financing sheds light on how Tulsa, Oklahoma has come to utilize TIF theory to fund the stadium and future TIF projects in the downtown area.

As of late, the City of Tulsa has agreed that it “has not done enough to engage the Black community in economic development opportunities,” but it is not to dismiss that ONEOK Field is yet another stamp in the systemic disruption of Black intergenerational wealth and entrepreneurship in the Greenwood community (Humans Rights Watch, 2021). The Greenwood TIF District was first opened for business in April 2018 just three months shy of the Tulsa Arts TIF activation. Per the 2010 Downtown Area Project Plan, the Greenwood TIF District offers “opportunities for improved connections from the historic Greenwood/Black Wall Street area to adjacent neighborhoods and district”, but the IDL and railroad crossings that were once an essential asset in bringing African Americans from the south to Tulsa to community border the north and east sides of the district, presenting unique challenges and constraints to future development sites and “compromised right of ways” (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018). Likewise, in analyzing the spatial history of the Greenwood TIF District, one must bear in mind the ways in which the City used space,

or the mapping of space, to assert control and authority over that space, the people in the space, and the economic success therein.

In this research I seek to answer two questions:

1. What is the relationship between tax increment financing in downtown Tulsa and ONEOK Field?
2. Has the Greenwood community benefited financially from ONEOK Field?

As an economic revitalization tool used to fund critical, often opportunistic, projects and improvements, tax increment policies employed by cities inherently require private-public partnerships to be effective (Reddick and Law, 2015). In these partnerships, privately owned industry invests capital, land, or other resources into the project, where the city or municipal body “subsidizes companies by refunding or diverting a portion of their taxes to help finance development in an area or (less frequently) on a project site” which is found in the Tulsa Stadium Trust with the creation of ONEOK Field (City of Chicago, 2021; Good Jobs First, 2021). The overall goal of this system is to capture an increase in revenues created by the new development or improvement, and then use those funds to in essence repay the cost of the development. In theory, cities and municipalities use future revenue projections to determine what percent of the project or development will be funded upfront, and that percentage is then paid by the city using bonds, loans, and other finance methods available to the city. These advances, so to speak, are then paid back by the public over a set period of time with the revenues of increased sales tax, payrolls tax, business tax, and other cash flows (Chicago, 2021).

Youngman (2011) thus criticizes TIF spending theory, saying that it “creates a perfect closed system of self-sustaining finance” - meaning cities and municipalities can fund project and improvement below the radars of public scrutiny or approval, and thus

leave residents vulnerable to costs and projects they may deem unfit or unnecessary. This is a noticeable critique of ONEOK Field as residents and property owners were not involved in the decision-making process, which will be explored in a later chapter. In the City of Chicago (2020) there are over 180 TIF projects that are currently active, and data on these TIF projects are made free and accessible to the public through Chicago's open-source data. Not only does this aid in TIF assessment and evaluation, but it keeps politicians accountable and transparent. Currently, the City of Tulsa has no such thing, nor does it look to make TIF information readily available or easily accessible. In describing the larger problem of municipal finance, Youngman (2011) criticizes the invisibility of the TIF processes and its finance masking ability. Kenyon, Langley, and Paquin, (2012) in addition to Mitmore (2008) also criticize the general lack of transparency and efficacy found in TIF oversight and reporting, all of which have left holes in gaining Tulsa providing general public knowledge and information.

In Sroka's (2020) extensive work on how TIF subsidies obscure the true public cost of sports facilities he highlights six key findings across all sports venue TIF projects. Of these findings, one, two, three, and five are the most pertinent to ONEOK Field, downtown Tulsa, and the Greenwood community where: (1) TIF positively influences commercial and mixed commercial/ residential use property values; (2) TIF does not fulfill the "but-for" fallacy; (3) TIF zones competing with neighboring jurisdictions simply reallocate economic activity more than they create new growth; and (5) mixed-use TIF projects create more vibrant neighborhoods faster than industrial or single-use TIF projects, even if there are no net economic gains within the new jurisdiction. In observance of these phenomena, all of Sroka's critiques are discussed

throughout this research in one way or another –echoing similar pools of thought.

Moreover, Knight’s (2016) work on TIF and race in the City of Chicago found that of Chicago’s 50 wards, white wards received substantially greater TIF allocations than Black and Hispanic wards and that the lowest-income areas, where neither white nor Asian wards fell into either classification, received substantially lower TIF allocations – meaning less funding to reinvest into Black communities. Comparatively, the TIF districts of Bronzeville in Chicago and Greenwood in Tulsa share many similarities. Both have an intricate history of deep racial segregation; both had a ‘Black Wall Street’; both share the similar interest of trying to revive their Black heritage, both communities border a university, both communities have similar histories, and both neighborhoods share similar demographics. To date Tulsa has yet to produce annual TIF reporting, but based on TIF revenues and collections as seen in *Figure 1*, Greenwood like Bronzeville, has received the lowest revenue allotment compared to Tulsa’s other TIF –despite the fact that ONEOK Field single-handedly generates millions of dollars for all of downtown (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018).

TIF Districts: Revenues and Collections

INCREMENT DISTRICTS	AD VALOREM		SALES TAX			Maximum Budget (\$)
	TIF	TPS Share	TIF	Rate	TIF Applicability	
A: The Arts TIF District	Yes	10%	Yes	2% (undedicated)	• Retail	5,000,000
B: PAC TIF District	Yes	-	Yes	3.65%	• Construction • Retail	39,000,000
C: East End TIF District	Yes	10%	No	-	-	90,000,000
D: Cathedral TIF District	Yes	10%	No	-	-	25,000,000
E: Evans-Fintube TIF District	Yes	10%	Yes	2% (undedicated)	• Construction	40,000,000
F: Western Supply TIF District	Yes	10%	Yes	2% (undedicated)	• Construction • Retail	28,000,000
G: Ball Park Area TIF District	Yes	10%	Yes	2% (undedicated)	• Construction • Retail	28,000,000
H: Greenwood TIF District	Yes	10%	No	-	-	5,000,000

Figure 1: Allotted TIF Revenues, *Tulsa Development Authority, 2018*

Furthermore, additional critiques by other researchers include the popular fallacy that if not for TIF the site's development or infrastructural improvement would not have been made possible –which is otherwise referred to as the 'but-for' (Briffault 2010; Hicks, Faulk, & Devaraj, 2019; Sroka, 2020). ONEOK Field, though TIF-like, is a prime example that large development, revitalization, and improvement projects can be funded without a TIF designation, but that is not to say that the project would have been possible as a solely private development. With that amount of acreage to be developed, the Greenwood TIF District could have easily established housing, cultural, and numerous other revitalization projects in light of the community's historic African American heritage.

Shortly following the completion of ONEOK Field, the Greenwood district experienced a resurgence of interest related to its historic economic activity and African American heritage –i.e., social and economic interests completely irrelevant to the creation



of ONEOK Field (Human Rights Watch, Map 1: ONEOK Field's in Greenwood TIF District, Google Maps 2021). However, opportunities to further explore housing, cultural and other means of restoring the community's heritage were short-lived and in essence short-changed as the ONEOK Field had only recently squandered a large sum of the community's land. Now residents and the city fight to reinvest in the area's visibly blighted or least

desirable sites as ONEOK Field envelops almost half of the Greenwood TIF District, leaving little to no room for new TIF projects or other revitalization efforts (Map 1) (Ibid). In this respect, Tulsa differs little from cash strapped cities that use—and abuse—TIF for inner city revitalization.

Knight (2016) specifically critiques the City of Chicago’s broad definition of ‘blight’, finding that it allows for a wide disparity of traditional and not traditional blight classifications. In the City of Chicago (2021), perhaps the most widely researched city in studying TIF – especially TIF in African American and historically African American communities –, land designated for an incrementally funded project is often characterized by “population losses, business stagnation, building disrepair, disinvestment and other negative influences” to include blight (Good Jobs First, 2021). At the suggestion of the City of Tulsa, a vast portion of Greenwood’s underdeveloped land was utilized in the creation of the ONEOK Field project because it fit the blight designation. The area met this condition because the city, like many others capitalizing on provisions of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act, built an interstate highway (now called the IDL, or Inner Dispersal Loop) through Greenwood (Moreno, 2021). To be clear, the land acquired for ONEOK Field was by no means ‘blighted’ in the traditional sense of being dilapidated, unsafe, or unsightly, but the City of Tulsa leveraged state power to take seven acres of priceless Greenwood real estate for interstate infrastructure.

TIF—A Tool of Tulsa’s Return to Urban Renewal

TIF allows governments practical financing and spending flexibility, keeps taxes

from rising, and shields projects and developments from ‘the voter constraint’ (Sroka, 2020). Unlike, the mega metropolis of Chicago, Tulsa as a city is a much smaller footprint and TIF in Tulsa, Oklahoma is a relatively new venture. Stemming from past TIF experiences and the city’s recent experience in producing and maintaining ONEOK Field, Tulsa’s approach to TIF is notably different in geographical utilization and community application. In exploring Tulsa’s utilization and application of TIF as an economic tool to spur revitalization, this chapter first explores Tulsa’s history with TIF before analyzing how the Greenwood community, other stakeholders, and the Tulsa Arts neighborhood had the potential to benefit from direct capital investment.

The data present are to serve as benchmarks for observing the fiscal resiliency of the community on the whole – particularly its readiness or need for renewed economic activity. Likewise, the sections below consist of historical records sourced from a variety of City Council presentations, board and committee meetings, city resolutions, press releases held by the Mayor’s Office of Economic Development, and local Tulsan news reporting outlets. To date, few resources evaluate the Greenwood community through a fiscal lens dating from 1921 to now. Still, the economic framework creates the case for fiscal intervention – to which the City of Tulsa thought it best to construct a state-of-the-art sports stadium in the heart of the community. In so far as to recreate the fiscal history of Greenwood, a great number of news, news outlets, and archival data have been used to expand upon the circumstantial effects of violence, blight, and fiscal disinvestment within the Greenwood community.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This thesis was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which cities and states issued public health orders limiting contact with non-household members, economic activity, entertainment events and even public services. According to a study published by the city in 2018, the population of Tulsa's downtown TIF districts, which included 1.4 square miles of Tulsan real estate, totaled approximately 4,200 people or 1 percent of the city's population. This area like many others cautioned unnecessary travel and advised against face-to-face interactions (Mitchell, 2018).

Consequently, virtual research involved a lot of 'rabbit holes' leading to unmaintained public webpages offering only the message: 'uh-oh...this page cannot be found'. However, insight into Tulsa's tax increment history, policies, and practice was obtained from media and public records searches containing a combination of the following key words: tax increment financing, Tulsa, ONEOK Field, TIF districts, Greenwood, and Tulsa Arts. Most notably the City of Tulsa and the *Tulsa World*, a local newspaper, provided the bulk of data presented. In many instances, the *Tulsa World's* reporting provided detailed clues as to where certain information could potentially be found or who said what when pertaining to city meetings and happenings surrounding ONEOK Field and other TIF related activities. From these primary sources, I extracted legal and historical data and synthesized public reports to summarize my findings. Research at a geographical distance, in other words, proved fruitful albeit limited to digital records and snowball research methods.

Delimitations

Firstly, many of the court cases brought against the Tulsa Development Authority, Tulsa Industrial Authority, Tulsa Stadium Trust, and Tulsa Stadium Improvement District were not considered for discussion but were utilized to extract information relative to the development, creation, utilization, purpose, history, or public approval of the agent or the agent's handling of its duties and responsibilities. Naturally, picking a side of any of the arguments brought against the said actors delineates from the overall purpose of this research, which is to review, extract, synthesize, and inform the general audience about the stated topics, and agents.

Secondly, agencies such as Downtown Tulsa Partnership, Inc., (DTP), the Downtown Management Organization, and the Tulsa Authority for Economic Opportunity which merges the Mayor's Office of Economic Development (MOED), Tulsa Industrial Authority (TIA), Tulsa Parking Authority (TPA), and Economic Development Commission (EDC) into a single, enhanced Trust Authority (City of Tulsa, 2021a) were not included for their infancy and the general lack of public information on the entity.

Chapter 4

Tax Increment Financing

From the very start, the city of Tulsa's TIF policy was built on financial risks and investments where those with the means to leverage and influence growth seized the opportunity to secure and expand their financial interests. In 1990 with the passage of State Question 641 in Article X, Section 6C of the Oklahoma State Constitution, The Local Development Act was created. By 1992, Title 62, Sections 850 – 869 of the Local Development Act granted local municipalities and counties the authority to create tax increment financing (Bates, n.d.). Since its inception, the Local Development Act of 1992 has been amended numerous times to account for the creation of new districts or the restructuring of how funds from incrementally funded tax districts were to be allocated. Nearly two decades later, Tulsa's 2010 Downtown Area Master Plan was the first to establish a project area and eight unique incrementally funded tax districts.

So, what exactly is TIF? Tax increment financing, or TIF for short, is an economic tool employed by cities, governments, and municipal bodies to spur capital investment and financial cash flows without raising taxes. For Tulsa, the Tulsa Development Authority (TDA) describes TIF as “a public tool that reallocates newly generated tax dollars for up to 25 years for supporting development or redevelopment in certain, limited areas of a city, town, or county”. Accordingly, TIF is generally used to generate private development projects that are funded by tax dollars of public improvements and other eligible project costs as defined in the Local Development Act. In theory, this process works by first establishing a base amount and then appropriating an increment of local taxes to fund eligible project costs (Figure 2).

How Does TIF work Increment -> Project Costs

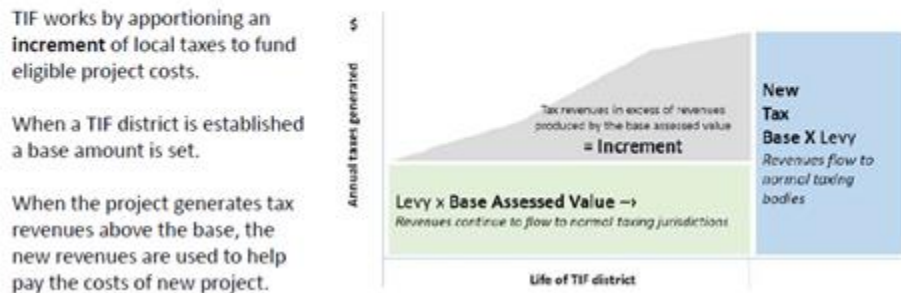
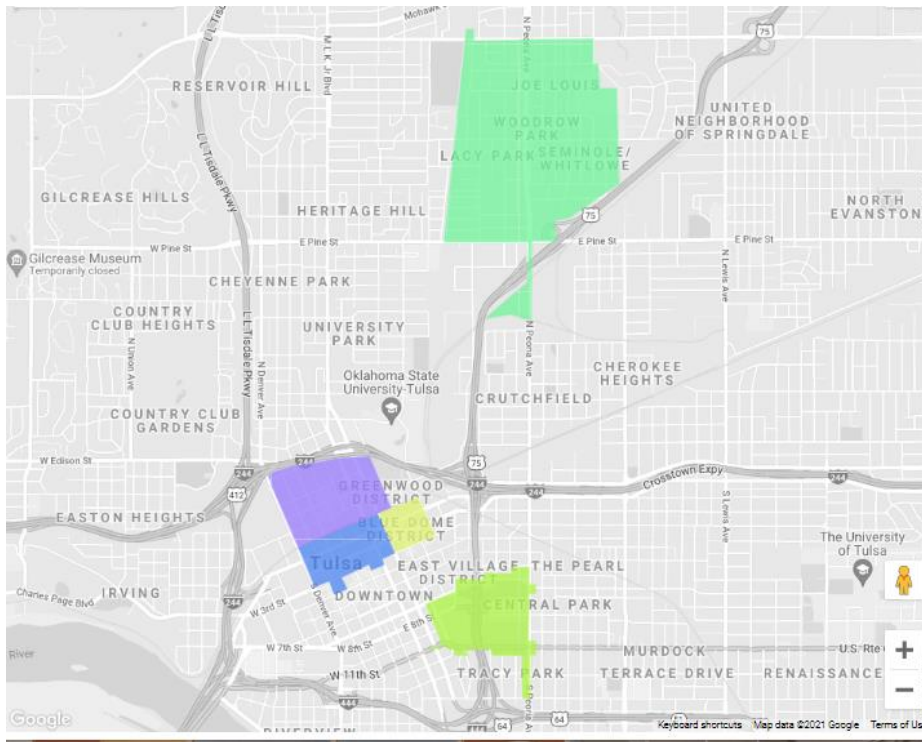


Figure 2: How TIF works, *Tulsa Development Authority, 2018*

One simple but important distinction to make is that a TIF district is not the same as a tax incentive district. While TIF reallocates newly generated tax dollars for up to 25 years, a tax incentive district provides a multi-year abatement on local property taxes for a specified development project. Put in simpler terms, TIF districts reallocate tax revenues, and tax incentive districts entirely remove tax revenues. For this reason, tax abatements from a tax incentive district cannot be stacked with TIF districts (City of Tulsa, n.d.). Likewise, projects completed in qualified TIF Districts are expected raise tax revenues above the established base set by officials, and the revenues generated from said projects can then be used to pay for the cost of new projects and developments, but this can only happen if and only if improvement revenues exist (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018).

With this in mind, prior to the 2010 Downtown Area Master Plan, the City of Tulsa had a grand total of five TIF districts (*Map 1*). The inaugural TIF districts fell under the jurisdiction of the TDA and only lasted for a period of 15 years instead of the 25-year state maximum. To date, all five of the TIF districts have either met their TIF goal or expired, yet Tulsa's use of TIF has continued to evolve (Bates, n.d.). Part of this evolution was the reassignment of TIF oversight.

Map 1: Five original TIF Districts, Tulsa Development Authority



Prior to 2010, the TDA at the request of the City of Tulsa, the Mayor of Tulsa, and the City Council recorded and oversaw all funding and administrative aspects of TIF in Tulsa. The mission of

the TDA since 1959 has been to “improve Tulsa through programs and projects designed to utilize private and public resources that advance the physical, social and economic wellbeing of citizens and neighborhoods throughout the city” (Tulsa Development Authority, 2015). To this end, the TDA’s five-member board of commissioners who have been appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the Tulsa City Council have sought to: (1) identify, remove, and reinvigorate blighted areas; (2) create land revitalization opportunities; (3) sell unused land; (4) improve infrastructure and manage TIF funds; (5) drive multi-family residential projects; and (6) supply plans for select improvement areas.

Through the years, the TIF districts administered by the TDA have all expired and are no longer collecting increment. Since the closure of all TDA TIF districts, the TDA has transferred much of its TIF oversight to the Tulsa Industrial Authority, which

now monitors, reviews, and reports on all authorities involved in a TIF project, project area, or TIF district in addition to its other duties (Tulsa Development Authority, 2015). Established in 1969 by Title 39, Chapter 10, Section 1000 of the Tulsa, Oklahoma Code of Ordinances, the Tulsa Industrial Authority (TIA) serves the following purposes:

(condensed for length)

- (1) To promote the development of industry within the State of Oklahoma.
- (2) To acquire, construct, reconstruct, extend, lease, purchase, install, equip, maintain, repair, enlarge, remodel, and operate any property, improvements, buildings, and other facilities of every nature for use by the United States of America, or the State of Oklahoma, or of any municipality thereof, for industrial development
- (3) To lease, rent, furnish, or provide such property, buildings, improvements, and facilities for use by industrial and manufacturing firms, businesses
- (4) To perform on behalf of the beneficiary the functions and powers as authorized by industrial development statutes.
- (5) To provide funds for the cost of financing, refinancing, acquiring, constructing, purchasing, equipping, maintaining, leasing, repairing, improving, extending, enlarging, remodeling, holding, storing, operating, and administering any or all aforesaid property, improvements, buildings, facilities, and all properties (real, personal, or mixed), needful for executing and fulfilling the Trust purposes
- (6) To expend all funds coming into the hands of the Trustees as revenue or otherwise for the payment of any indebtedness incurred by the Trustees for purposes specified herein

Because their purpose closely aligns with Tulsa's TIF goals, the TIA and not the TDA is the authorized agency expected to carry out and plan TIF projects and plans.

Per this expectancy, the TIA assists the City by: pledging revenues, incurring project costs, issuing tax apportionment bonds or notes, providing funds to or to reimburse the City for project costs, incurring the costs of issuance of bonds, and negotiating levels of developer assistance. In pursuit of these objectives, the TIA enters development agreements that leverage private development and public improvements or assistance, monitors budgets and cash flows for each district, and helps to ensure the effective implementation of the project plan (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018). Elected officials – specifically the Mayor and City Council – are tasked with carrying out and administering the project plan as prescribed (Ibid). Prior to receiving funding, all TIF projects and plans undergo a series of studies and approvals to determine the need for the project and to account for all the costs associated with bringing the project to fruition. Per the 2010 Downtown Area Master Plan, for instance, TIF funding must be used to either “bridge a demonstrated gap in financing of real estate development projects that meet the goals of the TIF District, or 2) to finance the construction of various types of physical improvements like streets, utilities, and other types of municipal infrastructure” in support of new real estate development projects and the redevelopment, preservation, and restoration of existing buildings within the Inner Dispersal Loop (IDL) – or downtown area (City of Tulsa, 2020). Funding generated from TIF activities cannot be appropriated to the City's general fund and once created, belongs to the TIA.

At this time, TIF funds are available to be used in a myriad of ways. By way of the Local Development Act of 1992, common uses include “acquiring land, clearing land, building public facilities or improvements such as roads, sidewalks, water lines, sewer lines, and drainage facilities,” (Bates, n.d.) or for more administrative functions like “financing, professional services, administration, interest, fees, and assistance in development financing for private projects” (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018). While not stated, an important use of TIF revenues as defined by Section 853(9) of the Local Development Act is that Tulsa Public Schools receive ten percent of all increment revenues garnered by all TIF districts except for funds generated by TIF District B, or the Performing Arts Center (Ibid). Generally, schools as public interests benefit the community at large, and rightfully they are guaranteed TIF allocations.

Yet, with so many ways to divvy up and spend TIF revenues, it is imperative to note that TIF revenues are only to be spent in the designated ‘project area’.

The Downtown Area Project Plan, which oversees nine distinct areas is comprised of two distinct geographies (*Map 2*). The first being the actual increment district or “the geographies where tax increment from new development and growth in property values is collected”, and the second being the designated project area or “the geography where TIF revenues can be spent” (Tulsa Development Authority, 2018). Once a TIF district meets its funding goal – as in it pays back or covers its original project costs– the TIF designations end or expire. Presently the Tulsa Arts District (2021b) thrives off an eclectic group of bars, restaurants, local businesses, and performing arts, and the Greenwood TIF District is still striving to develop an economic identity.

1 Project Area and 8 Tax Increment Districts

Project Area is the area in which generated increment taxes may be spent on Project Costs

Increment Districts are the areas in which the tax increment is generated and collected.

- TIF A (Arts District) activated when the Project Plan was approved on 12.28.17.
- TIFs B, C, D, E, F, G, and H will be activated by future City Council resolution (must be before December 2027)



Map 2: Project Area and Increment Districts, *Tulsa Development Authority, 2018*

Map 3: Project Area Boundary Map, *Tulsa Development Authority, 2018*

From this point onward, the duration of this study will focus on TIF District A (Tulsa Arts), TIF District H (Greenwood), and ONEOK Field –a sports development in TIF District H adjacent to TIF District H– starting with the Greenwood and Tulsa Arts TIF districts (Map 2, left and Map 3, right).



The Economic Foundations of Greenwood: 1890- 1921

According to Ross (2011), “of the 32 Black townships that were established in America after the civil war, 28 of them were in Oklahoma.” Greenwood, being one of those towns, was established in Tulsa, Oklahoma before the City was incorporated and grew during the Jim Crow era of the late 1800s. Purchased out of necessity, the

Greenwood community would grow to span forty acres of land. O.W. Gurley –a founding father of Tulsa – bought the land for Greenwood with the exclusive intent of only selling it to Black people. Legally, Oklahoma outlawed “coloreds from residing, traveling, and marrying outside their race,” and thoughts of Black’s owning property were certainly out of the question (Ibid). This however did not stop Gurley from his plan, and like Gurley, other African Americans purchased property in Greenwood and built successful local businesses. Despite its unpaved dirt roads, Greenwood became not only a place for Black residents to shop, but a powerful symbol of Black pride, commerce, and community. As a matter of fact, Greenwood was filled with so much affluency that at the turn of the early twentieth century, Greenwood had produced its own doctors, law firms, theaters, businesses and more, earning the community national recognition as the United States’ largest, wealthiest, and most successful African American community.



Figure 3: North facing views from Greenwood 1917, *Tulsa Historical Society*

Figure 4: A still from one of the Rev. Harold Mose Anderson's Greenwood films, *Courtesy Carlos Moreno, 2021*



Contrary to its success, Greenwood was still regarded by Tulsa authorities as a dark tainted place, and it did not take long to spark the match lying in wait (Ibid). In discussing his experience as a commissioner tasked with

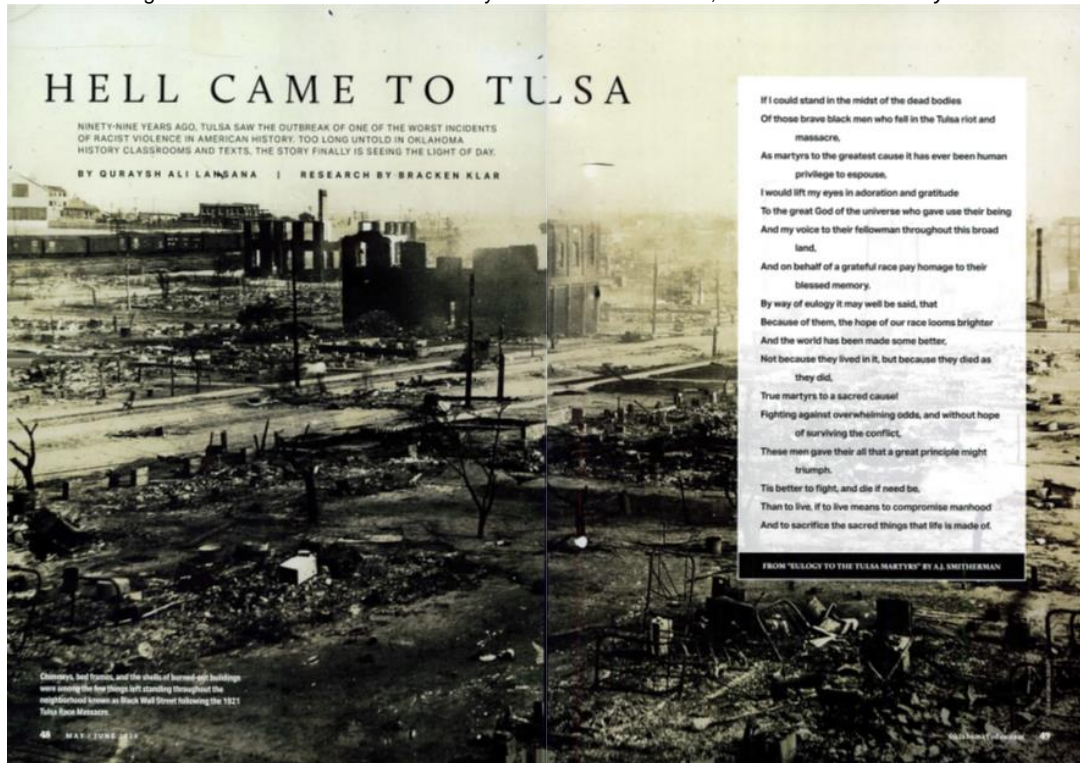
researching and retelling the history of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, African American researcher Eddie Faye Gates provided an eye-opening glimpse of when, why, and how white rioters altered the Greenwood community. What Gates summarizes in a few short sentences is that:

On May 31–June 1, 1921, what would become known as “the worst race riot in American history” took place. A young Black man was accused of assaulting a white female elevator operator, and it was rumored that he would be lynched. Racial tensions quickly mounted, and Tulsa’s Greenwood District came under attack by white rioters, who burned thirty five blocks of north Tulsa to the ground. Ten whites and twenty-six Blacks are known to have been killed. Many more deaths went unconfirmed (Gates, 2003).

As one of his duties, Gates interviewed 169 Black survivors between 1997 and 2001 and documented their experiences. Up until 1997, the events that took place on the aforementioned nights went highly unobserved and were quite frankly never discussed.

Commissioned by House Bill 1035 and championed by Representative Don Ross (D-Tulsa, OK), Senator Maxine Horner (D-Tulsa, OK), District 11, and three other members of the Black Caucus in 1997, Greenwood residents for the first time since 1921 would be acknowledged and memorialized for the innumerable crimes committed

Figure 5 and 6: Greenwood community burned down to ashes, *Tulsa Historical Society*



against them at the community hands of their white neighbors. The gruesome acts of violence and terrorism wrecked lives, memories, families, and the shared community identity many residents and Black onlookers across the country shared with the Greenwood neighborhood.



Figure 7: Photo taken from the roof of what was then the 14-story Cosden Building in downtown Tulsa, *Tulsa Historical Society*



Figure 8: Greenwood buildings on fire, *Oklahoma Historical Society*, June 1921



Figure 9: View of Greenwood from 14-story Tulsa building June 1, 1921, *Tulsa Historical Society*

Despite this and the physical violence that ensued on those dreadful nights, further investigation reveals that “there had been a pattern of deliberate distortion of facts regarding the riot and even the destruction of vital documents and a subsequent coverup” (Gates, 2003). Still, the ‘Black Wall Street’, which Greenwood was affectionately nicknamed by W.E.B. DuBois in observance of its successful Black commerce, entered the national spotlight and brought a new wave of

global awareness to the racial injustices sustained against Greenwood’s Black and Brown residents in what would come to be the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

All in all, Gates' efforts and that of other researchers and Black commissioners set out on a mission to gather, collect, and analyze, the facts of the Tulsa Massacre to construct an unbiased truth of what really happened. Amid opposing opinions and coverups, white analysts biasedly minimized the historical involvement of Tulsa's leadership – particularly the involvement of white police officers and government officials in conjunction with the acts of the Ku Klux Klan – in planning and executing the burning of Black owned businesses and property. With clear evidence stating otherwise, Gates and the researchers refuted their claims, affirming that after the “examination of the Ku Klux Klan rolls ... [sic] clearly showed that many Tulsans—doctors, lawyers and judges, teachers and preachers, ...—supported the Klan at the time of the riot,” and without particularly mentioning the contributions of Wyatt Tate Brady –another founding father of Tulsa–, Gates asserts that “there was collusion between [both] leaders and mobsters during the riot” (2003).

Following the massacre, life within Greenwood morphed into something handsomely different. In the wake of Jim Crow, segregation, and Black Code, many Greenwood residents migrated to be with extended family or emigrated to places where they felt it was safe to start life over again, raise a family, or make an earnest living. Of those who survived and those who willed to stay and rebuild, approximately 6,000 homeless Greenwood residents pitched tents where their houses and businesses once stood after being released from makeshift internment camps dotted throughout the city (The New York Times, 2021; Lansana and Klar, 2020). In their study on the economic effects of the massacre, researchers at the Harvard University found that “rather than regretting the destruction of Greenwood, authorities and the white population in general

“lamented the fact that it existed in the first place and felt that the Massacre resulted in a better city” (Albright, et. al, 2021).

Accordingly, no one has been charged or held accountable for the ruining of Greenwood while Greenwood and Black residents remained helplessly stripped of their livelihoods, residences, and economic wealth. To make matters worse, the district did “not receive any restitution or rebuilding money from the local, state, or federal government,” and residents were met with futile responses when they submitted insurance claims on homes and businesses that were destroyed in conjunction with “a fire ordinance intended to prevent Black property owners from rebuilding on their own” (Perry, Barr, and Romer, 2021) Despite these political barriers, residents of Greenwood gradually returned to the area and began rebuilding their lives as early as 1922 (Morrison, 2021). By the ‘40s Greenwood has reconstituted over 240 Black-owned business and establishments throughout the neighborhood, and by the late 1940s and 50s Greenwood residents had rebuilt a robust community full of “parades in the streets; bustling sidewalks; shops and homes located side-by-side; crowds gathered to watch musicians, boxing matches and political speeches; [and] young people dressed in their finest gathered in front of a theater to see and be seen” (Perry, Barr, and Romer, 2021; Johnson, n.d.; Moreno, 2021).

According to the Tulsa City Council, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1960 was the 19th most densely populated city in the United States and based on short films shot by the Reverend Harold Mose Anderson, Greenwood had become a town where everyone knew everybody despite citywide segregation. Nevertheless, white politics again meddled in the economics of Greenwood and abruptly dismantled yet another

generation of Black entrepreneurship when the city of Sandy Springs annexed land to the east and south of the city in 1966. Not wanting to be outdone, the Tulsa City Council also annexed parts of Greenwood in its acquisition of 100 square miles to the east of the city. All the while the Tulsa City Council simultaneously colluded to erase the Greenwood identity under the guise of 'urban renewal' as it decided to construct a ring like, inner-city beltway down the middle of the community - leaving thousands of Greenwood residents in the late '60s and '70s homeless once again (Moreno, 2021). Therefore, "a mix of policies that included eminent domain, rezoning, and highway construction led to displacement and plunging [of Black] property values" within the Greenwood community, "while racist redlining policies prevented the injection of new capital into the community" altogether (Albright, et. al, 2021).

Albeit the Greenwood community despite its cultural significance has yet to be registered on the National Register of Historic Places, which prevents it from receiving tax credits and other fiscal benefits that would bring more investment to the community. The reasoning behind Greenwood's lack of designation is the repetitive destruction of its built environment through urban renewal, whereby "almost all remaining buildings of historic significance were destroyed" (Gayle, 2021; Krehbiel, 2012). In the 1980s, the City of Tulsa in a blank attempt to foster direct capital investment -and offer the community a sliver of social restitution-, constructed a multimillion-dollar community center known as the Greenwood Cultural Center. An anchor to the community, the "multipurpose educational, arts, and humanities complex" serves as an advocate to the "history, culture, and positive race relation" of the Greenwood District (Johnson, n.d.). Shortly following the center's completion, the 1997 commission tasked with retelling the

history of Greenwood published its report in 2001. Per its publishing the commission recommended several fiscal policies that would reinvest into massacre survivors and descendants of survivors. Unsurprisingly, such recommendations were only partially implemented – leaving the community alone in its struggle to revive its legacy. With each wave of destruction and disinvestment, Greenwood businesses and resident dispersed amongst manufacturing buildings now associated with the Tulsa Arts TIF District.

Before its ‘arts’ designation, the Tulsa Arts TIF district was known as Brady Village TIF No. 1. The district was first established in December of 1993 and due to expire 15 years later in December 2008. However, the district’s lifespan was extended to a 25-year term in December 2008, and eventually cancelled in July of 2017 before acquiring its current name (Tulsa Development Authority, n.d.). In his prime, the district’s namesake, Wyatt Tate Brady¹, brought and supported considerable amounts of business and wealth to the City of Tulsa. In honor of his memory and financial contributions, some of Tulsa’s most popular buildings and places bore the ‘Brady’ name. Unbeknown to many Tulsans was Brady’s involvement with the Ku Klux Klan and his intentional segregation of Black residents following the events of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, and this realization outraged many Black and Brown residents in the neighboring Greenwood community. Even so, the Tulsa Arts TIF community continued to experience repeat capital investment and community improvements via its TIF designation. To a tourist of downtown Tulsa, unknowable of the city’s history and TIF’s

¹Wyatt ‘Tate’ “Brady and other prominent businessmen signed the charter that established Tulsa as an officially incorporated city” on January 18, 1898 (Chapman, 2012; Gregory, n.d.). In 1903 The Brady Hotel was “Tulsa’s first luxury hotel, catering to local elites, oilmen, and powerbrokers” (Brasher, Alderman, and Subanthore, 2020).

role in it, the latest investment in the Tulsa Arts District is a baseball stadium. Albeit, the ONEOK Field, a minor league baseball stadium, lies within the Greenwood TIF District.

Chapter 5

Case Study: ONEOK Field

The chapter to follow explores the relationship between ONEOK Field and TIF in downtown Tulsa. ONEOK Field as a singular development was a major financial push by both the City and key businessmen to bring fortune and wealth to Tulsa's downtown area. In seeing the potential benefits of capital investment, the City of Tulsa sought to perpetually create opportunities for capital investment and improvement projects by funding business activities provided by private industry, businessmen, and investors – hence the rebirth of TIF. Like the IDL however, ONEOK Field though successful proved to be disadvantageous to the Greenwood community in which it is located. Hence, in understanding the project's stakeholders and examining the fiscal activities involved in the creation of ONEOK Field, the case study provides insight into the renewal of TIF in Tulsa and how the Greenwood community has advanced and regressed in response to the project's financial implications.

In its simplest form, the development, construction, and maintenance of ONEOK Field is the backbone, the cornerstone, and the foundation for Tulsa's current TIF policy, but ONEOK Field is not a TIF district or TIF project. Starting with an economic forecast by economist Dr. Mark Snead, Snead projected in January 2008 that “a ballpark would likely attract 400,000 visitors per year to downtown and generate \$13 million annually in sales, plus another \$4.4 million in payroll and \$485,000 in annual sales tax revenue, including \$160,000 for Tulsa,” and this was all that was needed to put the ball in motion (Morgan, 2010). Former Tulsa Mayor, Kathy Taylor (2008) met with ONEOK President and CEO, John Gibson, Tulsa Drillers owner and President, Chuck Lamson, and William K. Warren, Jr. – a Tulsan business mogul – to discuss each man's interest in

contributing to the new downtown ballpark. Without hesitation, the president and CEO of ONEOK, a Fortune 500 diversified energy company, gave an immediate yes (ONEOK, Inc., 2009). Sticking with Tulsa as its home since 1926, ONEOK was perhaps the most vested in creating a thriving downtown area for its 1,300 employees, but that is not to negate the interest of the Tulsa Drillers who were also on board (Morgan, 2010).

With the assuredness of everyone's interest and commitment to the ballpark, Tulsa officials began exploring various fiscal avenues that would make the project possible. In their statements regarding the feasibility and location of the project, Mayor Taylor and Stan Lybarger, chairman of the Tulsa Metro Chamber board of directors in 2008, recount their experiences in first solidifying Tulsa as the home of the Drillers without bankrupting the city, and second, making sure it would benefit the city's typography:

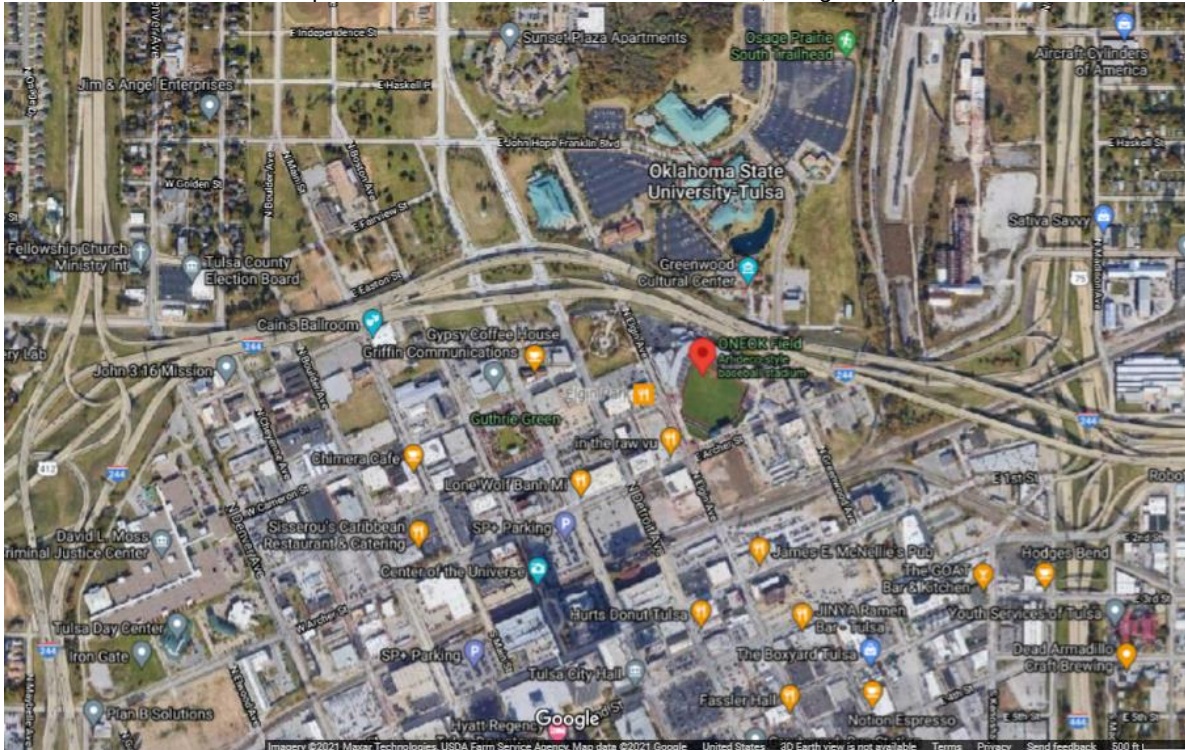
Taylor: We went through a very intense due-diligence period to make sure we could afford the kind of stadium that was needed and that we didn't spend any money unnecessarily. It was a team effort with Chuck [president and owner of the Drillers] and his team of advisers, the city and private investors led by Stan Lybarger (Morgan, 2010).

Lybarger: All of our experience and research said that it is really important for a community to put their entertainment facilities in a single location to mass their attractions so they can benefit fully from ancillary development like restaurants, hotels and the other things that drive economic growth (Morgan, 2010).

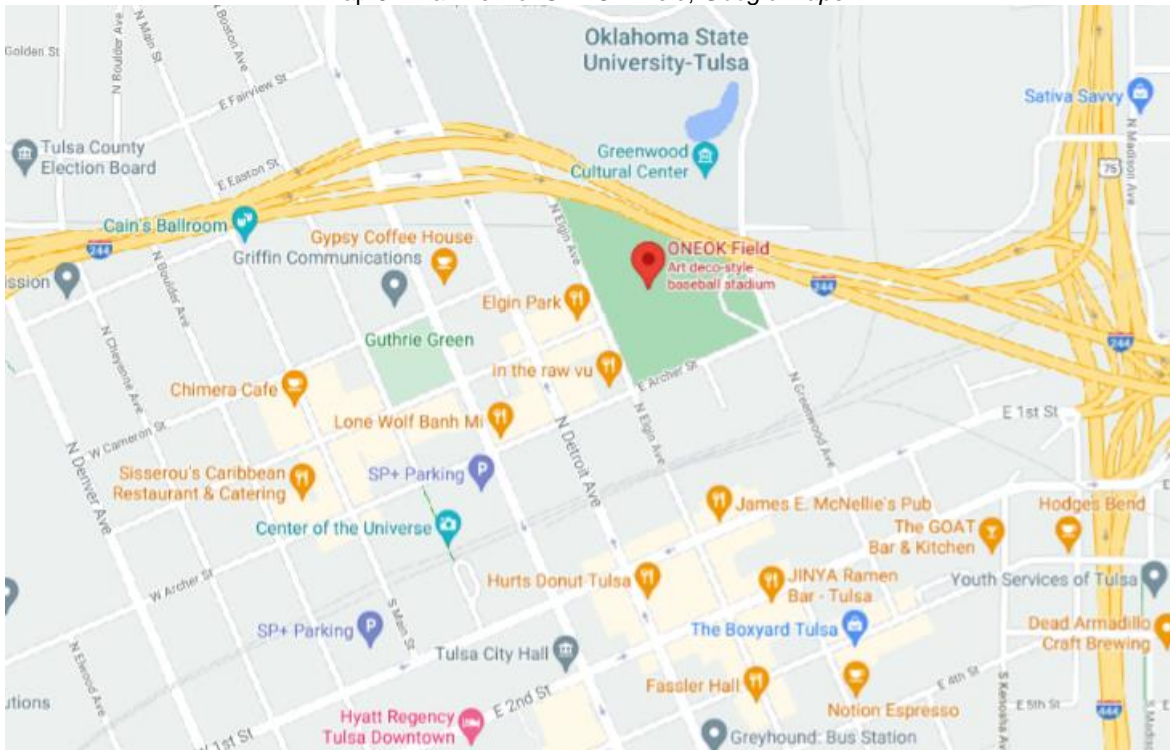
When the dust had settled and all was said and done, Taylor and Lybarger pushed forward with the help of the Tulsa Development Authority who agreed to donate all but the two acres of land. Those acres were eventually purchased for the grand total of \$723,250 (Lassek, 2012).

The ballpark, which is in the historic Greenwood District between Elgin Avenue and Archer Street, and adjacent to the Brady and Blue Dome entertainment

Map 5: All Terrain Arial View of ONEOK Field, Google Maps



Map 6: Arial View of ONEOK Field, Google Maps



districts” consumes seven acres of vacant Greenwood land (Map X.). Shortly thereafter in June 2008, the Drillers publicly announced their intention to move to the new stadium.

With rapid fire the city swiftly formed a five-person construction committee set to report directly to the newly created Tulsa Stadium Trust (Morgan, 2010).

City Trust, Corporate Trustees Trust

As the body tasked with overseeing the financial of ONEOK Field, the Tulsa Stadium Trust is a conglomerate of private and public interests, with private being the reigning majority. By nature, its nature, the Tulsa Stadium Trust is intended to objectively manage the funds, duties, and responsibilities assigned to it by the governing body. With the creation of the Tulsa Stadium Trust came the administrative framework for Tulsa's TIF policies. Created via Tulsa Code of Ordinance Title 39, Chapter 22, Section 2201 (2008), the Tulsa Stadium Trust was inaugurated on September 25, 2008, by and between: "Steven J. Malcolm, James F. Adelson, John-Kelly C. Warren, and Arlo B. DeKraai, (the "Trustors"); and, Mayor of the City of Tulsa, Steven J. Malcolm, Glenn A. Strobel, Larry Lyon, Reuben Gant, James F. Adelson, John-Kelly C. Warren, Arlo B. DeKraai, and Stanley A. Lybarger (the "Trustees")" for the amount of one-dollar. Article III of the same section enumerated purpose and powers to the trust that consist of the following:

- (1) The Trust purpose shall be and the Trust shall have the power
 - (i) to acquire, construct, own, operate, and sell a baseball stadium in downtown Tulsa (herein called the "Tulsa Stadium Project") and
 - (ii) to acquire, construct, own, operate, and sell amenities and facilities necessary or convenient thereto as determined by the Trustees in their discretion; provided, that if the Trustees determine it is in the best interests of the Trust to sell all or substantially all of the assets of the trust, that decision shall be made subject to approval by the City Council; and, provided further, that the Trust shall not acquire any interest in real property located outside of the area bounded by North Detroit Street on the West, the railroad right of way on the South, and US Highway 244 on the North and East (the "Stadium Development Boundary") without the

written consent of the City Council. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Trust shall not acquire real property owned by or contracted for development by the Greenwood Community Development Corporation within the Stadium Development Boundary.

Per its stated purpose, the Tulsa Stadium Trust is to be the sole entity responsible for owning and operating ONEOK Field. To this end the Trust can, at its discretion, determine if, how, and when to sell, own, operate, construct, and acquire amenities and facilities deemed necessary to this fulfill this purpose. From the outside ONEOK Field would appear to be a public project owned by the city as Tulsa's downtown citizens pay a portion of their assessment fees to fund the stadium's construction and maintenance, but the stadium is in fact owned and operated by private individuals.

(2) In addition to the foregoing purposes and powers, the Trust shall have the further purpose and power to engage in other projects related to the Tulsa Stadium Project and approved by a vote of two-thirds of the Trustees, including any maintenance and improvement of property either owned directly by the Trust or under maintenance or improvement contract with the Trust.

Here is where the law authorizes the Tulsa Stadium Trust to oversee maintenance and improvements related to the function and an improvement of the field. Though seemingly small, this provision assigns the Trust power to spend Trust revenues, or public funds, on Trust approved projects and improvements elsewhere –to include other properties within the boundaries of downtown Tulsa and the project area as seen in *Map 3*. Because the Trust is the sole entity responsible for overseeing the operation of the Trust, these said improvements can and do happen without any input or accountability from the public. Still, public funds are used to fund said improvements.

(3) In exercising the powers described above, the Trust may engage in any lawful activity authorized by the Oklahoma Public Trust Act and other applicable statutes of the State of Oklahoma, with or without the participation of other agencies or private entities and may exercise such powers in any lawful manner by the expenditure and depletion of Trust revenues and/or assets. Without

limiting the foregoing, in the exercise of the powers of this Trust, the Trustees may take any or all actions deemed necessary or appropriate by the Trustees, including, without limitation, any one or more of the following:

(a) demolish, clear, assemble, prepare, rehabilitate, repair, refurbish, erect, construct, purchase, lease, mortgage, and sell real or personal property;

(b) incur short term and long-term indebtedness, issue notes and bonds for the repayment thereof, and grant mortgages, liens, and security interests to secure such repayment;

I enter into such purchase and sale agreements, services agreements (including agreements for architectural, real estate, management, legal, accounting, and other professional services), management agreements, and other agreements of whatsoever nature and duration as the Trustees may deem advisable.

In essence, the above provision allocates absolute power to the Trust and only to the Trust. While the Mayor is a publicly elected official and does hold a Trust seat, the mayor is the only Trust member accountable to the public. Thus, the Trust is insulated from accountability to any agent outside of itself — including the mayor — as the mayor's objection to a Trust action is not enough to constitute a one-third vote.

(4) To assist the Trust in the construction of the Stadium and the planning of related amenities adjacent thereto funded by assessments paid pursuant to the Tulsa Stadium Improvement District No. 1. The Trustees shall establish an advisory committee (the "Construction and Planning Committee").

(a) The Construction and Planning Committee shall consist of (i) one or two of the Trustees elected by the Trust representative designated by the Greenwood Community Development Corporation, and (iii) three persons by the Trustees who possess experience and professional qualifications in facility construction and/or project management.

(b) Upon reasonable request by the Construction and Planning Committee, the Trustees shall receive, consider, and act upon recommendations of the Construction and Planning Committee respecting such construction and planning (Ibid).

Finally, with the creation of Construction and Planning Committee, the Trust for the first time acknowledges the professional expertise needed to maintain the stadium and stadium operations.

Prior to its finalization, the Trust found itself in hot water. In August 2008 the then Mayor of Tulsa, Kathy Taylor, and her husband were both proposed to be part of the Trust's board. Taylor's family foundation, the Lobeck Taylor Foundation, was under the control of both the mayor and her husband. With one a donor and the other the mayor, they both legally had access to a seat on the Trust. Consequently, several City Councilors found issue in the mayor's dual involvement, noting that it would be borderline nepotism should her and her husband take part in the Trust simultaneously. On the whole, the structure of the Trust appeared to let donors 'buy a seat at the table' while leaving a "disproportionate number of trustee seats going to project donors compared with those for downtown property owners" (Lassek, 2008). If anything, downtown property owner should have the same level of influence within the Trust as they share equal parts in financing the stadium.

Moreover, the Tulsa Stadium Trust was created and first headed by chairman Arlo DeKraai, both a donor and trustee. As the legal project head, the Trust was tasked with overseeing all of the project's operations. However, DeKraai and the Trust Stadium Trust hired Stonebridge Group – a local Tulsan management firm. In a matter of weeks, Stonebridge Group developed a Request for Proposals and the Trust and City of Tulsa received three responses in return. The president of Stonebridge Group noted that the RFP called for 'design-build services' not to exceed the ceiling of \$39.2 million—whereby "one entity submits a proposal to complete all design work and construct it, completing the whole structure under one contract" (Morgan, 2010). Upon reviewing the returned propels, Manhattan Construction was chosen as the main contractor (Ibid). In turn, Manhattan Construction hired Populous, formerly HOK Sport, of Kansas City,

Missouri to complete all of its architectural needs. So, in total, the ballpark project utilized 35 subcontractors, where approximately 18% of all subcontract work went to minority owned businesses out of respect of Greenwood's history. Additionally, on February 28, 2010, Manhattan Construction transferred ONEOK Field to the stewardship of the Tulsa Drillers, a Double-A affiliate minor league baseball team (Tuttle, 2010a).



Figure 10: Aerial view of ONEOK Field, *Tom Gilbert, Tulsa World*

With so many firms handling so many parts, journalists and onlookers alike were astounded with completion of the stadium in the intended 14-month period (Morgan, 2010). For a project of its size, site selection to final construction should have taken between 24-36 months amidst two feet of snow and one of Tulsa's worst winters in years. But the city's determination and the contractor's project management capabilities proved to be unstoppable forces that yielded a swift completion. Well before its official groundbreaking on December 19, 2008, city officials and prominent businessmen gathered to collectively invest in a new economic opportunity. From the start, investors knew that a stadium like ONEOK Field could change the scene of downtown Tulsa and

bring other business ventures knocking on their doors. As a major economic revitalization project housed in Tulsa's historic African American neighborhood, ONEOK Field was not a TIF project, nor did it create a TIF district in Tulsa's Greenwood community, but it did foster the need for a TIF district to remedy the city's capitalization on Greenwood's history of Black disenfranchisement and displacement.

CHAPTER 6

Capital for Catalytic Development



So then, how much does a field like this cost, and how did the City of Tulsa manage to secure the project's funding? In simple terms, the city used every financial avenue available to it except for tax incentive districting and TIF. When

Map 4: Map of Downtown Tulsa, Tulsa Development Authority, 2018

looking for land and the ideal location to fit the project's needs, Tulsa's Mayor and City Council selected an undeveloped seven-acre site in what is now the Greenwood TIF District. Back in 1987 the TDA purchased a portion of a seven-acre site from the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce for \$400 with a federal, community development block grant. Fifteen years later the TDA spent another \$250,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to purchase the remaining the two acres. While it is customary for the TDA to sell its properties and use the sale proceeds to fund

community revitalization projects, the TDA donated its portion of the seven-acre lot to the Tulsa Stadium Trust and sold the remaining two acres to the Trust for \$723,250. Per CDBG guidelines, “property purchased with CDBG funds must be resold at market value, with the revenue returned to the federal grant program” (Lassek, 2012). the revenues received from the sale of the remaining acres were returned to the federal government. when HUD determined market value for those two acres was more than the Trust paid.

As previously mentioned, ONEOK’s request for proposal capped development costs at \$39.2 million, while total costs for ONEOK Field estimated to be at or about \$60 million. As a primary supporter of the project, ONEOK Inc. and the ONEOK Foundation collectively purchased naming rights to the stadium for a sum of \$5 million dollars. Sources note that prior to investing in the ballpark, ONEOK was looking to make a significant contribution to another local Tulsa project. When plans for that project fell through, the ONEOK Foundation saw fit to contribute \$4.15 million to the ballpark, leaving ONEOK Inc. to contribute the remaining \$850,000 (ONEOK, 2009; Morgan, 2010). With only \$55 million remaining, the Tulsa Stadium Trust in November 2008 approved the sale of \$25 million worth of revenue bonds to finance the stadium, but it was, of course, not without political recourse (SourceMedia Inc, 2008).

Taxes, not tax increment financing, enabled the ONEOK stadium project to proceed. A highly contentious component of the project’s finance package, a “30-year assessment fee [was] levied on property owners within the Inner Dispersal Loop”, or downtown Tulsa (EDITORIAL, 2012). Meaning, those who did not voluntarily support the project were now forcibly becoming project contributors by way of their address, and

those that made charitable contributions may have dually contributed depending on where they lived or established their business. For this reason, City Councilman Bill Martinson believed that Trust membership should reflect a greater percentage of downtown residents and property owners, particularly those south of the park who may not ever see a direct benefit (Lassek, 2008).

The Rebirth of Inequality: Funding Downtown

While this situation is not entirely unamendable, a large part of the problem was the creation of the Tulsa Stadium Improvement District, or TSID for short. Founded in June 2008 – or four months before the creation of the Tulsa Stadium Trust – the Tulsa Stadium Improvement District encompasses all 1.4 square miles –or approximately 1,350 properties– of the downtown Tulsa area (Canfield, 2020). Complementary to the needs of the Tulsa Stadium Trust, the role of the TSID is to fund the construction of ONEOK Field and supplemental improvements and services related to the Field and general downtown needs. Herein lies the same crux of inequality found in Tulsa’s TIF project area. As a preliminary project, the funding of ONEOK through the TSID disproportionately took from those who were to see little or no economic advantage related to the creation of the project while still obligating outside districts to fund the project. To assist with downtown specifically, a 2009 mayoral executive order established the Downtown Coordinating Council (DCC). The DCC as an advisory board is comprised of 19 voting members who are either property owners, business owners, or civic leaders. While an extension of the mayor’s office of economic development, members of the DCC volunteer their expertise and advice “on maintenance,

beautification, public safety and livability services, mobility and public realm planning projects, and place enhancement initiatives” (City of Tulsa, 2019; Downtown Coordinating Council, 2020; Progressive Urban Management Associates, 2020).²

Despite the contentions, the Trust pushed on with many of its proposed plans as outlined earlier in this section, and the remaining \$30 million was funded through cash gifts and charitable donations. Altogether, the lowest pledge was \$100,000; the highest amounted to a hefty \$7.5 million. Parties that contributed \$2 million or more earned a seat with the Tulsa Stadium Trust, which councilman Bill Martinson (District 5) was not in support of it (Ibid). On the contrary, the year of 2013 presented the Trust and downtown Tulsa with quite a surprise. Several years into paying for the stadium, the availability of tax-exempt bonds and lower interests were presented to the Trust, and logically the Trust voted to refinance its bonds – offering projections that residents would save seven years’ worth of payments or about \$14 million (EDITORIAL, 2012) (Journal Record Staff Report, n.d.).

In actuality however, businesses and residents operating and living in the Tulsa Stadium Improvement District saw that refinancing the project’s bonds reduced their payments by \$9.34 million and saved each owner seven months’ worth of payments.

² The following list identifies donors who openly pledged to give in support of ONEOK Field; however, there were donors who chose to remain anonymous. Those listed may or may not have fulfilled their pledge: *Anchor Stone, Ameristar, Case & Associates, Arvest, Bank of Oklahoma, Cox Communications, George Kaiser Family Foundation (the largest charity in Tulsa, OK), H.A. and Mary K. Chapman Charitable Trust (the largest private trust in Tulsa), Helmerich & Payne, Joe Craft Family (billionaire coal and energy famil), Michael Graves, Tulsa World--Lorton Family, Lobeck Taylor Foundation (Tulsa Mayor Taylor and her husband’s foundation), Manhattan Construction Co. (the company hired design, build, and oversee the project start to finish), Nadell & Gussman, Omni Air (Tulsa based-airline), Oneok (the Fortune 500 company for whom the stadium is name), Ruth Nelson –Herman Kaiser Foundation, Samson Energy, Warren Foundation (private foundation of prominent Tulsa billionaire), Williams Co. (another prominent Tulsa oil and gas company), Zink Foundation, and SemGroup (another prominent Tulsa oil and gas company) (Lassek, 2008)*

Because “religious organizations, government agencies and homeowners with a homestead exemption” are customarily tax exempt due to their filing status, they are also exempt from paying toward the assessment (City of Tulsa, 2021b). However, all other downtown property owners currently “pay an annual assessment of 6.6 cents per square foot of their property — 4.4 cents to the stadium trust for repaying the bonds and 2.2 percent to the Downtown Coordinating Council for beautification and safety projects” (Stoycoff, 2013). For the Tulsa Stadium Trust, refinancing the original interest rate of 6.5 percent, and including all the related rates and fees, means that the Trust will have to pay 4.89 percent above the cost of the bond, or approximately \$1.22 million more. With the addition of this overage, the Trust will fulfill its debt service much faster, causing local property assessment fees to drop, and ultimately lessening the amount of debt that owners must pay back (Ibid). As of April 2020, The Tulsa Stadium Improvement District has collected roughly \$36.6 million from its assessments, with a whopping approximately \$32 million in unpaid principal and debt (Canfield, 2020).

Impact Analysis

Following the creation of ONEOK Field, studies show that areas immediately surrounding the site experienced significant increases in capital investment including new luxury residentials, an increase in sales tax, and an increase in game and sports attendance overall (American Residential Group, 2019; Gregory, 2017; Journal Record Staff Report, n.d.). Since the creation of ONEOK in 2010, the Tulsa downtown area has come to host new shops, eateries, restaurants, and high-rise buildings overlooking various aspects of the city. While these amenities spark life in a community that

historically produced its own economic activity, “Black business owners in Greenwood have struggled to pay increasing rents” that have increasingly risen over a period of 3 years. City officials and analysts fail to acknowledge the dichotomy between the increase in investments and the steady erasure of historical African American communities. But, other sources report TIF plans of the city are fueling and directing investment in the neighborhood not its long-term residents and legacy businesses.

State sponsored investment is fueling historical displacement and local gentrification— removing residents and their heritage instead of bringing them community resources and amenities. Currently only about “3% of the metro area’s residents live in Black-majority neighborhoods” after many were pushed out prior to ONEOK Field due to redlining, urban renewal, and the construction of the IDL (Albright, et. al., 2021; Perry, Barr, Romer, 2021). Since ONEOK Field however, “Black people comprise 10% of the Tulsa metropolitan population, [and] Black-owned businesses comprise only 1.25% of the area’s nearly 20,000 businesses” (Perry, Barr, Romer, 2021). Prior to the activation of the Greenwood TIF district, residents from Greenwood openly objected to the new district’s mapping – critically suggesting that the district include more of the historical neighborhood and less of places relevant to Greenwood through the riot (Krehbiel, 2012). Ignoring residents, the city continued with its current mapping of the Greenwood despite resident protests against the ONEOK Field tax. Observing the injustices unfolding, Human Rights Watch undertook a study in 2021 that showed many property owners felt the tax was unaffordable, and by 2009, many of Greenwood’s poorer property owners faced impending foreclosure or the option to move. Retrospectively, many longtime locals complain that ONEOK Field mainly draws white

visitors who rarely patronize local Black businesses while failing to employ the local Black population (Ibid).

Researchers and their data also affirm Greenwood's continual economic decline by approximating current and historical demographics of Greenwood's African American diaspora. Many recreate population samples from Census and American Community Survey data and the National Historical Geographic Information System, and other analytical methods that draw upon statistical extraction processes (Albright et. al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021; Perry, Barr, and Romer, 2021). For starters, recent equality indicator reports show that: midtown Tulsa, which includes the downtown area, has almost three times the number of jobs compared to north Tulsa, yet Black residents make on average \$20,000 less than their white neighbors (Community Service Council, 2019; Perry, Barr, Romer, 2021). With less income than their counterparts, Black Tulsans have fewer Black dollars circulating in their communities and nearly a quarter less capital to invest in entrepreneurial startups and other fiscal opportunities. Moreover, Black residents living in Greenwood also own homes at half the rate of white Tulsans in the same county, which equates to less generational wealth that "that might have shaped and secured the fortunes of Black children and grandchildren" (The New York Time, 2021). In responding to this, several organizations such as the 1921 Tulsa Race Centennial Commission have since joined in partnership with Greenwood's Black and Brown residents fight for justice, equality, recognition of wrongdoing, and change.

All things considered, the ONEOK Field of 2010 would not have been possible had city and state authorities not displaced thousands of African Americans in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and so-called urban renewal of the 1960 and '70s. Subsequently,

“there is a deep connection between the history of racial violence and contemporary racial devaluation,” which is evident in removal of the Black community with developments such as ONEOK Field and the Oklahoma State University nearby (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Contrary to Greenwood’s experiences, Black former City Councilor, Jack Henderson, has always seen ONEOK Field in a positive light and believes that it has brought the area commercial investments and development that would not have otherwise happened (Ibid). Presently the president of Greenwood Chamber of Commerce, Freeman Culver, expects Greenwood’s TIF dollars to fund beautification projects in the year 2023. As of June 2021, the Greenwood TIF district has generated “just a little more than \$2,300” (Modersitzki, 2021); nonetheless, ONEOK Field in the eyes of the Tulsa City Council has accomplished what it has set out to do (Gregory, 2017).

Social and Political Impacts: Tulsa Arts

Advertised as “the revitalization of downtown” and “a cultural haven for the community”, the Tulsa Arts TIF District was activated in December 2017 to eventually represent “a cohesive series of arts, entertainment, restaurant, and increasingly, shopping destinations on the north side of Downtown” under the 2010 Downtown Area Project Plan (Oklahoma Arts Council, 2015; City of Tulsa, 2020). Located between Reconciliation Way and Boston Avenue, the Tulsa Arts TIF District is referenced as one of Tulsa’s oldest neighborhoods and home to many new and local favorites (Oklahoma Arts Council, n.d.). In an effort to reflect the concentration of visual and performing arts within the district, the Tulsa Arts TIF District adopted its ‘arts’ designation in 2009, where “the Tulsa Arts District Business Association, a coalition of local business

owners, oversees the development and promotion of the area” (Tulsa Arts District, 2021a) (Oklahoma Arts Council, n.d.). Following the perpetual cultural and fiscal declines of the Greenwood community, the Tulsa Arts District has come to emerge as the city’s most culturally and socially diverse community despite its racially charged past. Per its ‘cultural district’ distinction, the Tulsa Arts was created to have a “high concentration of arts and cultural facilities or activities serve as the anchor of attraction”; whereas the Greenwood TIF District – with an equally distinct heritage – has yet to see the same or similar investments in its own cultural uniqueness.

Neighboring the Greenwood community, the Tulsa Arts TIF District has a furtive historic culture full of racial marginalization despite its address as the City’s cultural melting pot. To the dismay of many, the past of founder Wyatt ‘Tate’ Brady -whom the district was named after prior to its renaming- was hidden from the public until 2011 when This Land Press published *The Nightmare on Dreamland* (Prolago, 2013). In this tell all expose’, Lee Roy Chapman details the life of Brady and his dealings in all things Ku Klux Klan, the Confederacy, the Tulsa Real Estate Commission, and most importantly his contribution to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre (2012). In light of this, local Black residents protested and lobbied for Brady’s name to be removed from prominent Tulsan business, schools, and one of Tulsa’s busiest streets – ‘Brady Street’. Running through the then ‘Brady’ Arts - and Greenwood, Black residents around Tulsa balked at the notion of Brady being honored for his successive oppression against Blacks and people of color. So, for nearly two years residents fought and petitioned the City Council to rename the street, and local business gradually changed their ‘Brady’ names. To the disappointment of many however, the Brady Arts Business Association

was hesitant – almost resistant– to act before slowly making successive progress towards changing its name. Many non-Black business owners felt that changing the name was a financial cost too great to be considered (Brasher, Alderman, & Subanthore, 2020).

To this end, the Tulsa City Council settled on renaming ‘Brady Street’ to read “M.B. Brady” after Civil War photographer Matthew B. Brady from the state of New York (Ibid). In having absolutely no ties to the culture of Tulsa nor any of its communities outside of his photography as ‘art’, the renaming of ‘Brady Street’ to ‘M.B. Brady Street’ in 2013 was salt in fresh wounds. By their reasoning the Tulsa City Council had considered the problem reconciled in that the street no longer had the association of ‘Tate’ Brady, businesses were able to keep their names and addresses the same, and the cost of changing the street signs was once again wiped away (Wade, 2017). What the City Council failed to address with their ‘solution’ was that the ‘Brady’ name and legacy were still widely associated with an area that had been systematically marginalized and oppressed by a highly influential Klansman, and for the sake of saving the city money and appeasing white businesses owners, keeping the name “Brady” only perpetuated the same racists ideals as set forth by the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups. For this reason, Black and Brown residents of Greenwood and Tulsa Arts toiled over the name change for nearly three years until a nearby outbreak of racial violence in Charlottesville, Virginia spurred new life to the debate. By mid-2018, ‘M. B. Brady Street’ no longer boasted blue signs stating the street’s honorary name, and ‘M.B. Brady Street’ legally underwent a name change to become what is now ‘Reconciliation Way’ in the newly name ‘Tulsa’ Arts TIF district (Ibid).

Chapter 7

Key Takeaways

Following the gradual uncovering of events of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, one could not help but feel that racism was still deeply rooted in the Tulsan government. Not only did the City of Tulsa and local insurance companies refuse to hear cases or claims submitted by Black residents (Albright, et. al., 2021), but the City never so much acknowledged any manner or aspect of wrong committed against the community, as if to justify the violence. This manner of injustice left thousands of residents and generations of survivors to suffer in silence –solemnly and seldomly whispering their experiences only decades after their community’s destruction. In considering this and the circumstances of the massacre, it is clear that there still exists a severe distrust between Black and Brown residents and the City of Tulsa – particularly when it comes to the city recognizing, protecting, and fostering the history, rights, and financial wellbeing of Black and low-income residents. Today, the violence of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, though distant, still plague’s Tulsa in many ways.

In reviewing the relationship between tax financing in downtown Tulsa and ONEOK Field, tax increment financing in Tulsa, Oklahoma found its footing with the creation of ONEOK Field in 2010. During the process of site planning and project development the city and other prominent businessmen looked to capitalize on an opportunity to bring fortune and wealth to the downtown Tulsa area. To this end, ONEOK Field created new cash flows while also laying the foundation for new TIF policies. For Greenwood, ONEOK Field like the IDL of the 1970s and the violence of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre became a daily reminder of how the community continues

to be silenced on how it retells and revives its historic economic activity. All the more, in accomplishing what it was tasked to do, ONEOK Field did renew economic investment in the Tulsa downtown area, but failed to produce financial benefits and investments within the historic Greenwood community or Greenwood TIF district despite the project's Greenwood location. Conclusively, the economic outcomes of ONEOK Field, like prior events, have once again left Black residents fearing the erasure of Greenwood's historic identity at the hand of the city.

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