

Race, memory and implication in Tulsa's Greenwood Rising

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journals.sagepub.com/home/mss**Amy Sodaro**

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Abstract

This article analyses the new Greenwood Rising museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which tells the largely forgotten story of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Greenwood Rising is influenced by the broader global proliferation of memorial museums created to confront historical violence vis-à-vis today's 'politics of regret' and works to centre slavery and racial inequality in American history as well as in contemporary society, representing a new intervention in the mnemonic struggles over slavery and its legacies in the United States. In its adherence to global memorial ethics, Greenwood Rising also places (White) visitors in the position of what Michael Rothberg has theorized as the 'implicated subject'. However, Greenwood Rising has been highly controversial among Tulsa's African American community, many of whom see the museum as a 'symbolic gesture' intended to obscure ongoing racism and replace material reparations. This controversy raises questions about the limits of memory in the face of ongoing injustice and highlights tensions between increasingly globalized ethics of remembrance and local mnemonic struggles.

Keywords

ethics of remembrance, Greenwood Rising, implicated subject, memorial museums, politics of regret, race and memory, Tulsa Race Massacre

In August 2021, the Greenwood Rising Historical Centre was opened in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to counter the long silence around the Tulsa Race Massacre and serve as a space of 'truth-telling and education [. . .] aimed at repairing lingering historical racial trauma' (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, 2021). This lingering racial trauma is at the heart of today's mnemonic battles over slavery and its legacy in the United States, which have manifested in debates over critical race theory, Confederate symbols, police violence epitomized by the May 2020 murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Greenwood Rising represents a new intervention in these mnemonic struggles, one that is influenced by the broader global proliferation of memorial museums created to confront historical violence vis-à-vis today's 'politics of regret' (Olick, 2007). The museum works to centre slavery and racial inequality not only in American history but also in contemporary society, thus challenging hegemonic historical narratives and implicating White Americans in past and ongoing racial injustice.

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Michael Rothberg (2019) developed the concept of the implicated subject as

neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator [. . . implicated subjects] help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present. (p. 1)

In the duelling memories and ideologies of race in America, the notion of implication is making its way into memorial museums like Greenwood Rising and in turn shaping the global memorial museum movement. At the same time, Greenwood Rising has been highly controversial at the local level. Many members of Tulsa's African American community see the museum as a symbolic gesture intended to obscure ongoing racism and supersede material reparations. Greenwood Rising thus raises questions about the limits of memory in the face of ongoing injustice and highlights tensions between increasingly globalized ethics of remembrance and local mnemonic struggles. It also suggests that without being tied to concrete action, 'implication' may have limited practical efficacy when confronting deeply rooted racial inequality in memorial museums.

Memorial museums and the politics of regret

While the memory of slavery and racial injustice seems particularly fraught today, the United States has long grappled with this difficult past. Much of this struggle has been particular to national and local contexts, but it also reflects global memory practices and normative demands. For much of modern history, commemoration of violence took the form of triumphant celebrations of national glory or sacrifice in the name of a righteous cause. In the United States, this meant that wars in which the United States prevailed were commemorated in bombastic, celebratory monuments; for more ambiguous conflicts, like the losing Confederacy in the Civil War, commemoration focused on sacrifice for the 'heroic' and 'righteous' cause. Woven into the modern project was the effort to bolster the nation state as an 'imagined community' unified around past triumphs and future glories (Anderson, 1991), while forgetting difficult or controversial aspects of the past (see Renan and Giglioli, 2018).

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, this began to change. The modern temporal orientation towards the future – with past as glorious prologue – gave way to a new focus on past conflict and violence (see Assmann, 2020; Bevernage, 2015; Olick, 2007). As Aleida Assmann (2020) writes, 'the burden of the violent histories of the twentieth century weighs heavily on the present, demanding attention and recognition and forcing us to take responsibility and to develop new forms of remembrance and commemoration' (p. 5). The memory boom arose in tandem with the global human rights regime, manifesting as an 'expression' of a new human rights framework (Rothberg, 2019: 57) and shaping societal norms around confronting abuses. This new 'politics of regret' (Olick, 2007) has led to the development of international norms regarding memory of historical justice – what Lea David (2020) has termed 'moral remembrance'. Thus, a constellation of new memory mechanisms, including truth commissions, political apologies, reparations, and memorials and museums, have emerged as requisite modes of addressing historical violence through a lens of political regret. However, as the case of Greenwood Rising demonstrates, it is not always clear for whom these initiatives are intended and there is often tension between global normative demands of memory and local needs and desires.

Memorial museums are an especially popular form of historical reckoning and have swept the globe, from Germany, South Africa and Rwanda to Armenia, Chile and Cambodia. While they originated with early efforts to remember the Holocaust on the sites of the historical atrocities themselves (Sodaro, 2018; Young, 1993), many of today's memorial museums are not built on the

sites of atrocities and thus go beyond preservation and interpretation of historical sites. These ‘purpose built’ memorial museums (Jinks, 2014) are hybrid institutions that combine the educative functions of history with the affect of memory in order to morally transform visitors to embrace an ethic of ‘never again’. To impact visitors in this way, they not only use history to impart knowledge – incorporating archival photographs, videos, documents and artefacts as evidence of what happened – but they also use experiential, affective exhibits that create an encounter with the past intended to make visitors empathize with victims, thus shaping their attitudes and behaviours (see Arnold-de-Simine, 2013; Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021; Sodaro, 2018; Williams, 2007).

The emergence of memorial museums reflects an ethical obligation ascribed to memory, particularly in the wake of mass violence. Philosopher Avishai Margalit (2004), for example, has conceived of an ‘ethics of memory’ that binds individuals and groups together and Jeffrey Blustein’s (2008) moral philosophy argues that memory holds ‘moral demands’ vis-à-vis our responsibility for the past. As Alison Landsberg (2007) writes regarding the affective experience of memory in mass culture, ‘with memory comes a sense of obligation and responsibility: remembering is a moral injunction’ (p. 628). The idea that memory is an ethical obligation has become firmly embedded in today’s culture of commemoration, manifesting in a ‘memorial ethics’ that invites visitors to bear witness to historical violence (Ionescu, 2017). Memorial museums, with their broad public reach and powerful forms of storytelling, are an especially popular form of ethical commemoration and are often considered essential for coming to terms with historical violence.

Yet even while many nations are being pushed to embrace political regret, Aleida Assmann (2020) argues that a parallel ‘politics of self-assertion’ has meant that powerful nations like the United States ‘have no reason to change their historical self-images of strength’ (p. 222). Thus, until recently, the most prominent memorial museums in the United States were dedicated to the Holocaust and 9/11, instances of historical violence in which the United States is not (explicitly) implicated. And although there are over 200 African American museums in the United States today, most adhere to triumphalist narratives of racial progress that suggest violence and oppression are a thing of the past (see Autry, 2013; Theoharis, 2018), reminding us that very often ‘the cost of achieving a moral consensus that the past was evil is to reach a political consensus that the evil is past’ (Meister, 2012: 25).

This has begun to change with a new wave of museums that challenge narratives of racial progress. Perhaps the most prominent is the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which was opened in Montgomery, Alabama, in 2018. The Legacy Museum was created by legal activist Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), an organization fighting injustice in the criminal justice system. The museum is intended to demonstrate that today’s racial inequality is the result of centuries of systemic racism; it argues that the institution of slavery did not end but has evolved over the years from racial terror, lynching and segregation into today’s system of mass incarceration. Despite its challenging narrative, the Legacy Museum is wildly popular; not only is it critically acclaimed, but people travel to Montgomery from all over the country, and indeed the world, to visit the museum, helping to revitalize the local economy and demonstrating the potential of memorial museums to drive tourism and economic growth (Schneider, 2019).

The Legacy Museum envisions itself as ‘an engine for education about the legacy of racial inequality and for the truth and reconciliation that leads to real solutions to contemporary problems’ (Legacy Museum, n.d.); it hopes to prompt visitors to come away thinking ‘never again’ (Capeheart, 2018). This sweeping mission is clearly influenced by global memorial museum norms, as is its sophisticated use of digital technology, such as holograms of enslaved individuals who address visitors or a simulated prison visitation room in which visitors ‘speak’ to prisoners. The museum also reflects a growing willingness of many in the United States to confront historical racial violence in public memory and discourse through the lens of regret that has come to

dominate the global ethics of remembrance. Accordingly, the Legacy Museum has also served as a model for similar institutions, including Tulsa's Greenwood Rising.

'After a century of silence'

While Greenwood Rising is hailed as ending 'a century of silence', its genesis dates back to the 1997 creation of the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Race Riot of 1921 (Greenwood Rising, 2021–2022). The state-appointed commission extensively investigated the massacre, producing a report in 2001 that became the basis for the story told in the museum and which included recommendations, such as monetary reparations and the creation of a memorial. Despite the report's conclusion that reparations, in particular, are a 'moral obligation' (Ross, 2001: viii), the closest the city and state came to enacting the commission's recommendations was the creation of the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation in 2007. The centre, a public-private partnership, still does not have a dedicated building but hopes 'to transform the bitterness and mistrust caused by years of racial division [. . .] into a hopeful future of reconciliation'.¹ However, its primary manifestation, Reconciliation Park, a peaceful green expanse that tells the story of Greenwood and the massacre through a series of bronze sculptures, is tucked under a freeway well off the beaten track, suggesting that this history is not a priority for many Tulsans.² Monetary reparations were never even considered.

The story of the massacre gained new interest with the creation of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission in 2015 by Oklahoma State Senator Kevin Matthews.³ Matthews hand-picked a group of political, corporate and community leaders in Tulsa, including individuals from the John Hope Franklin Center, the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce and the Greenwood Cultural Center,⁴ to 'outline projects which would commemorate history, tell the whole Greenwood story and create [economic] opportunity' (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, 2021). The commission presented itself as building on the work of the Oklahoma Commission; however, from the beginning, the Centennial Commission was focused on the creation of a museum as a 'platform where issues [like reparations] can be discussed and moved forward in a meaningful manner' (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, 2021).

To develop their plans for the museum, the commission looked to similar institutions to better understand how societies musealize past atrocity. While they took inspiration from Holocaust and other memorial museums around the world, it was in Montgomery that they found their model in the Legacy Museum. For help with exhibit design, EJI had hired the experience design firm Local Projects, known for its work on the 9/11 Museum. Learning this, the commission immediately hired Local Projects to take the lead on Greenwood Rising.⁵ They also recruited Hannibal B. Johnson, local lawyer and historian of Black Wall Street, as head curator.

Local Projects and the commission then reached out the Greenwood community, asking individuals from the Cultural Center and John Hope Franklin Center, as well as leaders of local churches and businesses, and other community members what they would like to see in a history centre dedicated to the massacre. During this process of community engagement, the commission brought in Philip Armstrong, a local businessman, entrepreneur and chair of the Greenwood Cultural Center board, to be project director. While Local Projects developed the museum's design using feedback from the community – in particular that people wanted the story told but did not want the museum to focus solely on the massacre (Arthur-Mensah and Armstrong, 2021) – Armstrong and the commission set to work fundraising. They ultimately raised \$30 million from a combination of private funds from individuals, corporations and foundations as well as some state funding, approximately \$20 million of which went to the creation of the museum.⁶



Image 1. Greenwood Rising exterior.
Photo: Author.

Greenwood Rising

The finished museum is sleek and technologically sophisticated and conforms to many of the memorial museum tropes that have become part of the global standard, particularly the affective experience of the past that it creates. While the museum's location on a corner of Greenwood Avenue that was once a gateway to Black Wall Street evokes the authenticity of place, its concrete structure employs the 'affective architecture' common to memorial museums that are 'purpose built' and not located on authentic historic sites (Jinks, 2014). The façade incorporates both references to the historic brickwork of Black Wall Street and to contemporary memorial architecture, like the Jewish Museum Berlin or the 9/11 Museum and Memorial, in its ascending series of 'voids' (Image 1).⁷ Allowing light and shadow to 'activate' the building, the voids are intended to be 'representative of a commitment to the sustained presence and revitalization of the historic district' (Selser Schaefer, 2021) seemingly reflecting the hope that Greenwood Rising can do for Tulsa what the Legacy Museum is doing for Montgomery.

Local Projects believes that museums can 'humanize history' in a transformative way by creating 'empathy and understanding' through exhibits, like those in Greenwood Rising, that give visitors an experience of the past (Arthur-Mensah and Armstrong, 2021: 5:10; 18:45). Greenwood Rising is small and displays few artefacts, instead relying on text, reproductions of photos and documents, and, especially, film and digital displays to create a visitor experience. A visit takes the form of a tour, on which guides offer brief descriptions of the exhibits, but primarily usher visitors through the space following a carefully timed schedule to ensure they see all of the digital displays.⁸ The experience begins with a time-lapse film that provides an overview of the development of Greenwood and then visitors are swept back in time to a period barbershop (Image 2). Recreated in painstaking detail, the barbershop invites visitors to become 'part of the community' by sitting in barber chairs while holograms appear to cut their hair while they talk about the ups and downs of life in Greenwood (Arthur-Mensah and Armstrong, 2021: 19:12). These holograms are intended to give visitors an 'affective, embodied experience' that, according to media and memory scholar Victoria Grace Walden (2022), places the visitor 'between past and the present in critical ways that encourage them to take on the responsibility for [. . .] memory' (p. 6). However, Walden (2022)



Image 2. Recreated Greenwood barber shop.

Photo: Author.

points out that many digital memory projects fall short of generating this ethical relationship to memory because they simply recreate the past for visitors instead of asking visitors to do the hard work of ‘reactualizing’ the past and thus taking on responsibility for its memory (pp. 9–10). While the barbershop creates an experiential encounter with the past, the barbers talk to each other, not to the visitor. This is markedly different from the Legacy Museum’s holograms that appeal directly to the visitor; in Greenwood Rising, visitors are mere spectators. Nevertheless, the barbers’ witty and prescient banter about the pervasive racism just outside the neighbourhood sets the stage for the centrepiece of the museum: the ‘immersive journey’ into the massacre.

After exhibits in a small room outline the ‘Systems of Anti-Blackness’ that led to the massacre, visitors enter a darkened room, where a stylized film titled ‘It was an Ordinary Day’ is projected across ragged pillars that evoke Greenwood’s post-massacre devastation. Images and film that recreate the events are set to audio testimony of massacre survivors, which is drawn from the accounts collected by the Oklahoma Commission. As images shift and morph to depict the violence, individual memories meld into one narrative of the day. The survivors, who were young children at the time, recall the morning of 31 May when excitement over that evening’s high school prom gave way to rising tension, as word spread that a young Black man who had been arrested for assaulting a White woman was going to be lynched. They recall being woken that night by armed White men setting fire to their homes and they describe carloads of White men indiscriminately shooting, mobs torching homes and businesses, and Greenwood residents fleeing for their lives. One man remembers his father pleading ‘Please don’t set my house on fire’ to no avail, and a woman recalls ‘black birds’ – bullets and turpentine bombs – dropping from the sky. The sounds of the massacre surround the visitor: planes zoom overhead and bullets rain down while fires burn and smoke builds until it covers the pillars. As the smoke clears and billows through empty streets, images emerge of the neighbourhood reduced to rubble, calling to mind Dresden, Hiroshima or Syria.

It is not just the images of destruction that transport visitors to other sites of atrocity; the entire experience references the affective practices of memorial museums around the world. The moving testimony of survivors has become a fixture of Holocaust and memorial museums, from Rwanda to Germany to Chile, inflecting historical exhibits with the affective power of memory. Bearing witness



Image 3. Immersive journey into 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.
Photo: Author.

to testimony is considered an act that demands individuals take responsibility for what they see. Roger Simon (2014) has theorized this responsibility as a ‘pedagogy of witness’ that occurs in spaces like memorial museums, where ‘the animation of specters [. . .] has the potential to deeply haunt the formation of contemporary consciousness and conscience’ (p. 2). The trembling voices of the elderly survivors, whose trauma is still palpable decades later, act as these haunting spectres demanding that visitors bear witness.

The dim lighting, audio effects and other theatrical tropes, like the melding of individual stories into one, further provide ‘a highly mediated, technologically savvy, multi-sensory mnemonic experience, instilling an experiential, embodied awareness of a historic event’ for visitors (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021: 10) – what Alison Landsberg (2004) calls a ‘prosthetic memory’ (p. 2). By creating this mnemonic experience, the Greenwood Rising team hoped to ‘change hearts and minds’ (Armstrong, 2021: 19:28), ensuring that visitors come away committed to preventing such atrocities in the future. However, as problematic as the concept of ‘never again’ is in any memorial museum – let alone in the politics of genocide prevention when it is regularly evoked – it is especially problematic when considering ongoing systemic racial injustice and violence. And in Greenwood Rising’s depiction of the massacre, once again the visitor is placed in the position of spectator to history, leaving unclear their individual responsibility *vis-à-vis* the idea of ‘never again’.

While the massacre is the emotional centrepiece of the museum, the exhibits proceed to discuss its aftermath, outlining the number of city blocks (35) and homes and businesses (over 1200) that were destroyed, the number of people displaced (10,000), and discrepancies in the death toll, from the 1921 official count of 37, to the Oklahoma Commission’s estimate of 150–300. The exhibit describes efforts to prevent the Black community from rebuilding Greenwood, through the riot clause that insurance companies used to deny claims and a new fire ordinance that would make rebuilding prohibitively expensive. It also describes how Black Tulsans overcame these obstructions and rebuilt. By the 1940s, Black Wall Street was again thriving. However, their success did not last long. In panels on Greenwood’s second decline, the museum challenges triumphant narratives of the Civil Rights Movement by pointing out that it was in part *because of* its successes that Greenwood declined; when segregation ended, Black Tulsans were able to shop and seek entertainment elsewhere, pulling business away from Black Wall Street. Furthermore, the museum explains



Image 4. Commitment Wall.
Photo: Author.

that so-called ‘urban renewal’ projects, in particular the highways that continue to provide easy access to downtown Tulsa and other (White) neighbourhoods, but the construction of which bisected Greenwood, again robbing Black Tulsans of their property, this time through eminent domain.

Greenwood Rising ends with the ‘Journey toward Reconciliation’, where visitors learn about contemporary forms of racial injustice in Tulsa: inequality in the criminal justice system; the debate over reparations; systemic racism in Tulsa’s housing, public health and education – for example, the massacre only entered public school curricula in 2020; and gentrification – as Greenwood tries yet again to rise from the proverbial ashes, most of the trendy new businesses are White-owned and the few remaining Black residents are being priced out. With these ongoing inequalities in mind, visitors are asked to write a commitment to racial justice to be projected onto the Commitment Wall, stressing the museum’s efforts to not only connect past and present, but to include visitors in this connection. In this way, it resists relegating racial violence to the past and instead asks visitors to consider their role and responsibility in contemporary problems, thus implicating White Americans in past and present injustice.

The implicated subject

Michael Rothberg’s (2019) concept of the implicated subject aims to move beyond the victim-perpetrator binary, instead considering those who ‘occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; [implicated subjects] contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes’ (p. 1). Through the concept of implication, Rothberg highlights ‘the grey zone’ surrounding not only instances of past violence but also the forms racial violence takes today. For while guilt may lie only with the perpetrators of historical violence, ‘implication’ – and the responsibility that accompanies it – persists in the structural injustices such violence perpetuates (Rothberg, 2019). Rather than the simple, linear narrative of ‘never again’, implication suggests that both violence and responsibility for it are ongoing entangled processes.

Thus, implication has its own temporality; it is ‘produced and reproduced diachronically and synchronically’ (Rothberg, 2019: 11), which makes museums particularly important social spaces

for its representation. Most museums operate diachronically, presenting the past as separate from the present. Greenwood Rising, however, attempts to demonstrate the connection between past violence and present injustice, ‘drawing attention to the simultaneously historical and contemporary production of the scene of racialization and racial violence’ (Rothberg, 2019: 10). The museum does this both when its historical narrative extends to contemporary forms of racial injustice, but also in the way that it takes visitors back in time to viscerally experience the massacre. Past and present are elided in the museum experience.

In addition to this effort to bridge diachronic and synchronic forms of racial violence, Greenwood Rising also seeks to go beyond the victim-perpetrator dichotomy. Many memorial museums present innocent victims and evil perpetrators as one-dimensional and essentialized in a sharp juxtaposition of good and evil that can obscure the complexities and ongoing ramifications of violence. In Greenwood Rising, though some individual victims and perpetrators are identified – such as in the well-known photograph of ‘Whipped Peter’ as victim of slavery, or a roster of Tulsa KKK members that lists individual names – most of the narrative focuses on systemic anti-Blackness.⁹ The exhibit emphasizes racism structured into social systems, such as government institutions like the police and fire departments, media, urban planning agencies and others. Thus, there is little emphasis on individual perpetrators and victims, but rather on collective, systemic oppression. In this way, the diachronic-synchronic and victim-perpetrator binaries are dissolved in Greenwood Rising to implicate visitors in past and ongoing anti-Blackness. And it is not just White Tulsans who are implicated; for, as Rothberg (2019) writes,

implication does not require the continuities of genealogy or the intimacies of the family [. . . it derives from] a structural position in relation to groups, classes, and modes of production that make some people the beneficiaries of histories ‘not their own’ and disadvantages others regardless of their genealogical connection to the past. (p. 80)

This expansion of categories and temporalities to include the implicated subject is something very new in memorial museums, particularly in the United States. Many more traditional memorial museums, like the USHMM or the 9/11 Museum, despite being manifestations of political regret, are quick to assign guilt to the perpetrators and innocence to the victims, and their packaging of historical violence in museological form means that it can stay safely differentiated from the present. This is particularly true in US museums focused on racial injustice, where the prevalent narrative is one of racial progress. The narrative of implication in Greenwood Rising, however, suggests a move towards a more meaningful confrontation with the ongoing legacies of historical violence. In the mnemonic wars over the legacy of slavery in the United States, this shift in the memorial museum paradigm is an important one; as understanding of the historical dimensions of racism collides with present systemic injustices, it is perhaps becoming more difficult for White Americans to absolve themselves of responsibility. The implicatory narrative reflects a deepening commitment to political regret and the assignation of responsibility for historical wrongs – a commitment shaped in part by the murder of George Floyd (and many others) and the Black Lives Matter movement, and one that will help shape future memorial ethics (Arthur-Mensah, 7 April, 2022, personal communication).

The limits of implication

Despite the important work that Greenwood Rising is attempting to do (and unlike its inspiration, the Legacy Museum), it has nonetheless been controversial among the African American community in Tulsa. Many see the museum as a ‘symbolic gesture’ intended, in the words of Tulsa’s only

Black elected official, Vanessa Hall-Harper, to ‘make Tulsa appear not to be the racist-ass city that it is’ (Smithson, 2021). Activist organization Justice for Greenwood echoed this sentiment in a March 2021 tweet:

Dear @GreenwoodRising: We don’t want your Tulsa Race Massacre-themed Disneyland. Shiny buildings, museums and coffee shops won’t make us forget how you and the City of Tulsa refuse to acknowledge the inherent anti-blackness Tulsa is built upon.

The controversy surrounding the museum stems in large part from ongoing and unmet demands for reparations to survivors and their descendants. Property losses in the massacre were estimated at \$1.8 million by the Oklahoma Commission (\$27 million today),¹⁰ yet the only claim ever paid was a few thousand dollars to a White pawn shop owner for stolen weapons (Human Rights Watch, 2020: 11). Though the Oklahoma Commission’s report listed financial compensation as its first recommendation, reparations have not yet been enacted.¹¹ Yet the ongoing economic impacts of the massacre are still acutely felt in Tulsa, a highly segregated city with rampant inequality. The majority of Black residents are concentrated in North Tulsa where poverty and unemployment rates are 2.5 times that of White neighbourhoods, life expectancy is 6 years lower than in South Tulsa, schools are underfunded and underperforming, and aggressive policing, crime and criminal debt ravage the neighbourhood (Human Rights Watch, 2020: 20–21).

Against this backdrop, critics of Greenwood Rising argue that the \$20 million spent on the museum should have gone towards reparations or programmes that more directly benefit Black residents of Greenwood. Reparations are central to today’s politics of regret but have rarely been paid in the United States and are not popular: a recent poll found that two thirds of Americans – and 90% of Republicans – oppose reparations for slavery (Sharpe, 2021). With Tulsa’s (White, Republican) mayor prioritizing development over reparations, which he deems divisive (Hemeon, 2021), and a Republican-led state government that recently passed legislation protecting motorists who injure or kill protesters and banning teaching about race in schools, the fight for reparations is an uphill battle.

Philip Armstrong (2021), Greenwood Rising’s founding director, argues that the museum is not the culmination of the process of remembrance and repair, but the beginning. However, this sentiment is not sufficient for those who see the museum as the result of a closed, politically elite process that excluded key stakeholders. While there were descendants of victims and survivors of the massacre on the Centennial Commission – according to Senator Matthews, he is a descendant and had engaged another, Brenda Alford, to do much of the community outreach – many descendants felt that they were excluded from the process (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The few remaining living survivors have been particularly alienated. The testimony used in the exhibit is only from survivors who passed away before the museum was opened even though there are some still alive; for example, 106-year-old Lessie Benningfield ‘Mother’ Randle, issued a cease-and-desist notice to the Commission to stop using her name after she was not asked to be involved in its activities (Trotter, 2021). And in response to the frequently asked question on the commission’s (now defunct) website ‘What has the Centennial Commission done to honour survivors and descendants’ the commission writes, ‘The Greenwood Rising creative team read survivor testimonials and listened to recordings of survivor interviews to inform the exhibits that will educate present and future generations’ (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, 2021). Thus, many descendants and members of the African American community, like Randle, feel that the museum is primarily for tourists, not for them. As Chief Egunwale Amusan, a descendant and activist who leads ‘The Real Black Wall Street Tour’¹² and is involved in the fight for reparations, told me: ‘Jewish people visit Holocaust museums and feel that they have come home; I visit the Montgomery

[Legacy] museum and feel that I am home; Greenwood Rising is not home'. Greenwood Rising, for many in Tulsa, feels like just another piece of the gentrification that is yet again dismantling their neighbourhood.

It is almost impossible to visit Greenwood Rising and its surrounding neighbourhood without thinking about the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa. That museum also recalls a vibrant community that was destroyed by racist ideologies and policies of the Apartheid regime. But the District Six Museum, which was founded in 1994 by an activist group, Hands Off District Six, was from its very conception created by and for the local community. The museum places little emphasis on the violence of the forced removal, instead serving as a space for remembering, healing and restoring – it's a 'home' for the community that was torn apart. And it goes further: it has been central to the land restitution movement in Cape Town and has become internationally recognized for its activist memory work, becoming a global model for similar community museums. Though these two museums remember and educate about similar histories, District Six was a grassroots community effort that retains that spirit today, aiming much of its work inward towards its community, while Greenwood Rising was a top-down official commemoration project and as such has little connection to its community.

Conclusion

While Greenwood Rising has many detractors, it also has supporters who believe it provides an important form of acknowledgement and that it has potential to bring much needed tourism and investment into the neighbourhood (Smithson, 2021). It has also been critically praised; *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter (2021) writes, 'In Greenwood Rising the links [between past and present] are made overt and we're urged to ponder them, to recognize that the white-on-Black violence of 1921 is still with us, and that Black disenfranchisement, like racism, remains entrenched'; another critic writes that the museum 'challenges guests with frank presentations of America's, Oklahoma's and Tulsa's racial hatred and violence' and should be 'a mandatory American History and civics pilgrimage for every citizen of the United States' (Scott, 2021). *USA Today* named it 2021's seventh best new attraction in the United States.

Despite this praise, many in Greenwood's fractured and disenfranchised community feel that the museum is a political project meant to replace monetary reparations and foreclose ongoing confrontation with racial injustice by relegating it to the past, neatly packaged away in a slick and shiny new museum. For survivors and descendants in particular, Greenwood Rising is not a memorial museum that attempts the difficult work of telling the truth about the past and serving as a place of healing and repair – the 'home' that Chief Egunwale Amusan is looking for. Rather, it is a simulacrum of the memorial museum form – a hollow imitation that uses the museological rhetoric of political regret, but in fact packages and commodifies the painful memory and trauma of the massacre for tourists to consume. In many ways, Greenwood Rising also commodifies a sense of repair and healing. Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject opens important new avenues for thinking about responsibility for historical violence, particularly as a departure from narratives of racial progress in the United States, but as Greenwood Rising demonstrates, merely presenting implication is not enough. If implication is not 'transfigured' into 'collective action' (Rothberg, 2019: 200), it risks becoming a way for (White) visitors to walk away content that they have reckoned with the burdens of the past and their own implication through their museum visit.

For implication is aimed at the majority subject – White visitors, further limiting its efficacy as a mode for reckoning with the past. In writing about the potential for museums to be 'useful' to marginalized communities, Bernadette Lynch (2020) argues that museums must engage in 'collaborative, reflective' activism that is rooted in solidarity (p. 16). This kind of activism is the basis

for the District Six Museum's land back advocacy and EJI's legal work alongside the Legacy Museum. But in Greenwood Rising, significant parts of the marginalized community that the museum is meant to represent were further marginalized by their exclusion from the process. Thus, the activism on display in the museum, through its narrative of implication and its 'slacktivist' invitation to write a commitment to racial justice, is what Lynch (2020) would call 'performative activism' that, with its 'glossy highlighting of injustices and atrocities' (p. 13), 'conceal[s] the ongoing realities of discrimination, non-recognition and violence' (Ahmed in Lynch, 2020: 13).

Despite its world-class exhibits and implicatory narrative, Greenwood Rising demonstrates the limits of memorial museums as mechanisms for confronting historical violence when they are not engaged in meaningful action to confront its ongoing legacies. The Tulsa centennial project, given a limited mandate and headed by political appointees who were not sensitive to the needs of the community, was constrained by local *realpolitik*, reminding us that memorial museums are highly political institutions. But Greenwood Rising is also constrained by the global ethics of remembrance, which have manifested in increasingly standardized forms of commemoration *vis-à-vis* the politics of regret. These forms of 'proper' memorialization (David, 2020), like memorial museums, are often viewed as a panacea for historical wrongs. However, the 'abstract remembrance' that they present – such as the digital displays that make visitors spectators – can serve as a screen for ongoing forms of violence and injustice (David, 2020: 54). Thus, Greenwood Rising presents a warning to memorial projects around the globe that without attending to the needs of their local communities, no matter how well they represent and perform political regret, they may end up as empty gestures that cannot truly confront the deep roots and lasting legacies of historical violence.

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Notes

1. The centre is also a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience; see: <https://www.jhfcenter.org/about-us>.
2. When I visited, the only other people there were homeless.
3. Arguably, what sparked the greatest public awareness of the Tulsa Race Massacre was HBO's 2019 series *Watchmen*, which is set in Tulsa and opens with a graphic, well-researched depiction of the massacre.
4. The Greenwood Cultural Center is a modest neighbourhood institution with a small, outdated exhibit on the massacre.
5. The Legacy Museum itself was inspired by Holocaust and memorial museums around the world, such as the Information Centre at Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre.
6. The remaining funds went towards the Greenwood Art Project; the 'Pathway to Hope', a walkway hugging an elevated highway that cuts through the neighbourhood; neighbourhood historical markers; a modest renovation of the Greenwood Cultural Center; and centennial programming (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission, 2021).
7. While the Jewish Museum Berlin is not a memorial museum, Libeskind's architecture has been deeply influential in other memorial museum projects, such as the 9/11 Museum, where architecture that incorporates voids and 'negative form' is increasingly common (see Young, 2016).

8. Local Projects' website has an excellent overview of the museum: <https://localprojects.com/work/museums-attractions/greenwood-rising/>.
9. Of course, Oklahoma is still a very conservative state and many elites have historical ties to slavery and to the KKK – Tulsa's mayor, G.T. Bynum, for example, is believed to come from a slave-holding family – so naming individual perpetrators would no doubt be politically sensitive.
10. This number does not include the cost of rebuilding, something many residents did; some estimate the property loss to be between \$50 and \$100 million in today's dollars and up to \$1 billion in lost intergenerational wealth (Ibarra, 2021).
11. In 2001, the Tulsa Reparations Coalition sued the City of Tulsa for 'restitution and repair' but the case was dismissed based on Oklahoma's 2-year statute of limitations for civil actions (Human Rights Watch, 2020). A second lawsuit was filed in fall 2021, this time under the public nuisance statute and the three remaining survivors, together with descendants and advocates in the fight, testified before Congress in 2021, but there is as yet no resolution.
12. Amusan started the tour in 2019, saying he believes he has a 'duty to share the TRUE story of what happened to the Greenwood community' (<https://www.realblackwallstreettour.com/>).

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