

A DESCRIPTIVE POEM
of
THE TULSA RIOT AND MASSACRE



The above is a family group picture of A. J. Smitherman, former editor and publisher of the Tulsa Star. His plant, valued at more than \$40,000.00, and his home were destroyed in the massacre of June 1, 1921, he and his family miraculously escaping with their lives.

THE TULSA RIOT AND MASSACRE

Whence those sounds in all directions
Firearms cracking everywhere;
Men and women all excited,
Cries of rioting fill the air.

Men with guns and ammunition,
Rushing madly to the fray,
Shooting, cursing, laughing, crying,
"Come on, boys, come on this way!

"They are trying to lynch our comrade,
Without cause in law deft;
Get your guns and help defend him;
Let's protect him, win or die.

'Twas the cry of Negro manhood,
Rallying to the cause of right,
Ready to suppress the lawless,
Anxious for a chance to fight.

So they marched against the mobbists,
Gathered now about the jail,
While the sheriff stood there pleading,
Law and order to prevail.

Thus responding to their duty,
Like true soldiers that they were,
Black men face the lawless white men
Under duty's urgent spur.

Cries of "Let us have the nigger"
"Lynch him, kill him" came the shout,
And at once there came the answer
When a sharp report rang out.

"Stand back men, there'll be no lynching"
Black men cried, and not in fun
Bang! Bang! Bang! three quick shots followed,
And the battle had begun.

In the fusillade that followed
Four white lynchers kissed the dust,
Many more fell badly wounded,
Victims of their hellish lust.

Quick they fled in all directions,
Panic stricken, filled with fear,
Leaving their intended victim
As the news spread far and near.

Scattered now in great confusion,
Filled with vengeance all anew,
Leaders of the lynching party
Planned for something else to do.

"Blacks Prevent a Negro's Lynching"
Read a bold newspaper head,
In an extra night edition,
"Fifty Whites Reported Dead."

Rallied now with reinforcements,
Brave (?) white men five thousand strong
Marched upon the black defenders
With their usual battle song:

"Get the niggers" was their slogan,
"Kill them, burn them, set the pace,
Let them know that we are white men,
Teach them how to keep their place.

"Forward! March! ! command was given,
And the tread of feet was heard,

Marching on the Colored district,
In protest there came no word.

In the meantime rabid hoodlums,
Now turned loose without restraint,
Helped themselves to things of value,
More than useless to complain.

Guns were taken by the hundreds,
Ammunition all in sight,
Reign of murder, theft and plunder
Was the order of the night.

But our boys who learned the lesson
On the blood-stained soil of France
How to fight on the defensive
Purposed not to take a chance.

Like a flash they came together,
Word was passed along the line:
"No white man must cross the border;
Shoot to kill and shoot in time!"

"Ready, Fire!" And then a volley
From the mob whose skins were white
"Give 'em hell, boys", cried the leader,
"Soon we'll put them all to flight."

But they got a warm reception
From black men who had no fear,
Who while fighting they were singing:
"Come on Boys, The Gang's all Here."

Rapid firing guns were shooting,
Men were falling by the score,
Till the white men quite defeated
Sent the word "We want no more."

Nine p. m. the trouble started,
Two a. m. the thing was done,
And the victory for the black men
Counted almost four to one.

Then the white went into council,
Hoping to reprise their loss,
Planned the massacre that followed,
Dared to win at any cost.

June the First at five a. m.,
Three long whistle blasts were heard,
Giving sign for concert action
To that cold blood-thirsty herd.

At the signal from the whistle
Aeroplanes were seen to fly,
Dropping bombs and high explosives,
Hell was falling from the sky!

On all sides the mob had gathered
Talking in excited tones,
With machine guns, ready, mounted,
Trained upon a thousand homes.

Hark! the sounds of roaring battle
As they charged without relent,
Shooting women, men and children,
Plying torches as they went.

Here and there the fight was waging
Never ceasing, not a pause,
Black men, like the ancient Trojans,
Fought and died to save a cause.

All night long a mother waited
For her husband to return,
Every minute filled with horror,
Lest the worst she soon would learn.

Great I

"Children!" sadly called a mother,
"Father's been away all night,
In the fray where duty calls him,
But we know he's in the right!"

(Dialogue)

"Mother, dear, I see them coming!
White men dressed in khaki brown!"
"Oh, dear son, all night I've worried,
I'm sick and tired, I must lie down."

Mother, look! they're coming nearer;
See, they're not a block away—
Oh! let's hide down in the basement,
Come on, mother, please, I pray!"

To the basement they descended
Thinking that they might escape,
Hoping that some friend would find them
And make their rescue ere too late.

"Mother, please let me phone Daddy"
"Oh! if Dad was only here!"
"I know Dad would make 'em leave us"
"Poor little darlings, have no fear."

"Let us trust the heavenly Father,
If you're shot make no outcry;
If I'm shot console each other—
More than this I scarce could die!"

"Quiet children; do not murmur!
"Come to me," the mother called,
"If they learn that we are in here
They will surely kill us all."

Fondly she caressed her children,
And to each she said farewell,
Kneeling then they prayed together
Feeling pangs no tongue can tell.

(Prayer)

"Father, God of all creation,
Do not leave us thus to die;
Oh, dear Savior, spare these dear ones;
Let this danger pass us by."

Once more they caressed each other,
Mother, children, all in tears;
But, thank God, there's room for courage
'Till the last hope disappears!

Strangely mingling with their sorrow
As they faced apparent doom,
Came the soft, sweet strains of music,
Pealing forth "One Day in June."

Music has its many virtues,
Plays its part with young and old,
Sometimes soothes the aching heart, but
Not the anguish of the soul.

Bent on murder, out for plunder,
Hoodlums on their mission gay,
Pausing just inside the parlor,
Set the phonograph to play.

Thus they stood there, heartsick, speechless,
Hearing plainly every sound,
Heard the fiends cry out "All ready"
Saw the coal oil trickle down.

Then they heard the roaring blazes
When the torch had been applied,
Soon they heard the falling timber,
"Oh we're lost!" the mother cried.

Through the smoke and almost stifled,
Groping, gasping for their breath,

Mother saved herself and children
From a cruel and fiery death.

Not alone their home was burning,
Not alone they suffered so,
Clouds of smoke ascending skyward
Told the awful tale of woe.

Picture now a quaint old cottage,
Gray with age and weather wear,
Like the aged couple in it —
Man and wife who knelt in prayer.

In they rushed—the mob—the cowards!
"Get out niggers, quick!" they said,
Then a flash from two revolvers
And their victims lay there—dead!

Fifty years they'd lived together,
Loyal, faithful, every day,
As defying death to part them,
Hand in hand the two now lay.

When at last the fight was over,
Might not right had won the day,
Blocks of homes and business places
Now in ruins and ashes lay.

Through the streets we all were driven
At the points of sword or gun,
To detention camps provided
'Ere the massacre began.

In the ball parks, in the churches,
In the halls the throngs were packed
Women, men and little children,
Scarcely clothing on their backs.

Some were sick and some were dying,
Some in sorrow, some in mirth,
Women suffering from excitement
Prematurely giving birth.

In this state of terrible horror
Standing out in bold relief
Was the work of Red Cross women
Working silently in grief.

From their eyes the tears were welling,
Tears of sorrow and regret,
Trying their best to soothe affliction
Which their brothers had beset.

You have heard the awful story,
How it made the world see red,
When the Huns invaded Belgium
On the strength of might, 'tis said.

But such crimes against the Negro
In these proud United States,
Meet the plaudits of the masses
Even burnings at the stakes.

Tulsa with her teeming millions
Paid the toll for racial strife,
But her black men won a victory
With their blood they paid the price.

Nobly they had stopped a lynching,
Taught a lesson for all time,
Saved a man the Court has since found
Innocent of any crime.

Though they fought the sacrificial
Fight, with banners flying high,
Yet the thing of more importance
Is the way they fought—and why!

EULOGY TO THE TULSA MARTYRS

If I could stand in the midst of the dead bodies
Of those brave black men who fell in the Tulsa riot and
massacre.

As martyrs to the greatest cause it has ever been human
privilege to espouse,

I would lift my eyes in adoration and gratitude
To the great God of the universe who gave us their being
And my voice to their fellowman throughout this broad
land,

And on behalf of a grateful race pay homage to their
blessed memory.

By way of eulogy it may well be said, that
Because of them, the hope of our race looms brighter
And the world has been made some better;
Not because they lived in it, but because they died as
they did —

True martyrs to a sacred cause!
Fighting against overwhelming odds, and without hope
of surviving the conflict,

These men gave their all that a great principle might
triumph.

Tis better to fight, and die if need be,
Than to live, if to live means to compromise manhood
And to sacrifice the sacred things that life is made of.
There is no choice for the man who is a man,

No matter what the realms of life may hold,
Nor how sweet the unveiled future may appear,
But to fight when contumelie is the sting,
And in fighting die, if perchance he cannot win.

Tis to the honor and glory of any man
To give his all for the things he holds dear.

Sleep! sleep on, my fallen comrades,
Rest complacently in the joy that must come to you,
Even beyond the veil of death,

In the consciousness that you have contributed a full
measure

To the cause of human justice,
Your active beings we have no more—

These, and all that in them was,
You freely gave on the alter of human
But your spirits abide yet with us
A glorious inspiration to twelve million
And their posterity to unborn generations
Who shall ever cherish your memory
And emulate the noble example you have
Sleep! sleep on, brave souls,
And may God give peace to your ashes

A. J. S.

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Yale University Library
The James Weldon Johnson
Memorial Collection of
Negro Arts & Letters
Founded by Carl Van Vechten

1941

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