Grades: High School
Subject: U.S. History, Tennessee History
Time Required: 2-3 50-minute class periods
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OVERVIEW
Race riots of the first half of the 20th century are characterized by white mob violence on African American neighborhoods. In 1921, whites in Tulsa, Oklahoma, invaded the prosperous Greenwood district known as “Black Wall Street,” burning it nearly to the ground and murdering an unknown number of its segregated citizens. In 1946, a similar confrontation, though on a smaller scale, took place in Columbia, Tennessee, with a very different outcome and consequences.

UNDERSTANDING GOAL
Students will compare and contrast news coverage, causes, and responses to the race riots in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921 and Columbia, Tennessee, in 1946. Students will understand that while the news coverage and causes of each riot are similar, outcomes and public reaction are very different.

OBJECTIVES
Students will analyze press coverage of each riot for bias and causation. Students will also compare photographs and accounts of riot consequences. Finally, students will compare public reaction and official response to riots.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS
U.S. History & Geography
U.S.35 Examine challenges related to civil liberties and racial/ethnic tensions during this era, including First Red Scare, Immigration Quota Acts of the 1920s, resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, and the efforts of Ida B. Wells.

US.80 Describe the significant events in the struggle to secure civil rights for African Americans, including: Montgomery Bus Boycott, Integration of Clinton High School in Clinton, TN, Integration of Central High School in Little Rock, AR, Freedom Riders, Tent City in Fayette County, TN, Marches, demonstrations, boycotts, and sit-ins (e.g., Nashville), March on Washington, D.C., Birmingham bombings of 1963, Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Highlander Folk School.

Tennessee History
TN56 Describe Tennessee’s role in the Civil Rights Movement (e.g., sit-ins and Diane Nash, Highlander Folk School, Tent City Movement of Fayette County, Columbia Race Riots, and the Clinton Twelve).

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
What were the similarities and differences between the Tulsa Riot in 1921 and the Columbia Riot in 1946?
RESOURCES

- Topics in Chronicling America: The Tulsa Race Riot (Brief Background)
- CNN Tulsa Story (Video)
- “Nab Negro,” Tulsa World Article
- 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Overview

The Morning Tulsa Daily World Front Pages

- “Two Whites Dead in Race Riot,” June 1, 1921
- “New Battle Now in Progress,” June 1, 1921
- “Many More Whites Are Shot,” June 1, 1921
- “State Troops in Charge,” June 1, 1921
- “Dead Estimated at 100: City is Quiet,” June 2, 1921
- “Grand Jury to Probe Rioting Called,” June 3, 1921

Contrasting Headlines

- “Bitter Race War Rages in Oklahoma-75 Dead,” The Evening Herald, June 1, 1921
- “More Than Two Hundred White and Colored Men, Women and Children Were Killed in the Bloody or Horrible Race Riots at Tulsa, Okla.,” The Broad Ax, June 18, 1921

Photographs Showing Effects and Aftermath

- Ruins after the race riots, Tulsa, Okla. [1921]
- Part of district burned in race riots, Tulsa, Okla. [1921]
- After the mob had passed [1921]
- [Furniture in street during race riot, 1921]
- After the race riots June 1st, 1921, J[Tulsa, Okla, 1921]
- Showing reconstruction in Tulsa, Okla. This part of town was demolished by fire in the race riots of June 1921 [1921]
- Williams Bldg., West side of 100 blk. N. Greenwood Tulsa, Okla. After race riots, June 1921 [1921]
- Entrance to refugee camp on the fair grounds, Tulsa, Okla., after the race riot of June 1st, 1921 [1921]
- Reconstruction period after the race riot in June 1921 at Tulsa, Okla. Type of houses [1921]
- Interior, ARC hospital, Tulsa, Okla. Nov. 1, 1921 [1921]

Reaction, Effects, and Aftermath

- Letter Walter White, National Assoc. for the Advancement of Colored People to Governor J. A. O. Preus, Minnesota, 1921 [October 25, 1921]
- “The Eruption of Tulsa,” Walter White 1921

Interior, ARC hospital, Tulsa, Okla. Nov. 1, 1921 [1921]
“Columbia Race Riot, 1946,” Tennessee encyclopedia

Newspaper Articles and Photographs

“70 Are Held in Local Jail After Seven Are Wounded in Night-Long Racial Riots,” Columbia Herald, February 26, 1946

“Weapons to be Seized By Newly-Deputized Officers,” Columbia Herald, February 26, 1946

“Bomar guarantees full protection to negroes,” Columbia Herald, February 26, 1946

“Proclamation from Mayor,” Columbia Herald, February 26, 1946


Reaction, Effects, and Aftermath

An appeal to the Governor and people of Tennessee [1946]

NAACP Mobilizes Defense [1946]

Letter signed by Eleanor Roosevelt from the National Committee for Justice in Columbia [1946]

Terror in Tennessee: the truth about Columbia outrages [1946]

Marshall Interview, Columbia Race Riots [1946]

Albert E. Barnett to Tom Clark, March 15, 1946 [1946]

David K. Niles to Clark H. Forman, With Attached Telegram from Clark H. Forman to Harry S. Truman, March 28, 1946 [1946]

Memorandum, G.T. Washington to Tom C. Clark, With Attached List of Names Submitted for a President’s Committee on Civil Liberties, October 11, 1946 [1946]

Materials

Library of Congress Document Analysis Worksheets

Venn diagram
**Notes**

This lesson is fairly heavy on print/reading. Teachers can shorten the amount of time spent by having students read headlines instead of whole articles. Also, multiple sources in the same activity can be divided among groups instead of having all students look at each source. Educators may also choose to analyze fewer sources in more depth, in which case I recommend the Library of Congress's primary source analysis worksheet. Estimated time to complete all activities would be two to three block periods. Finally, many of the sources in the lesson are unclear and/or biased or can be interpreted multiple ways. Students might arrive at different conclusions. I recommend embracing the cloudiness of some of the issues—we will never truly know what happened in that Tulsa elevator or what exactly four policemen were doing in the Mink Slide that night.

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### Step 6
Examine the articles and headlines of the *Tulsa World* during the riot. In groups, have students read the front pages and discuss.

- “Two Whites Dead in Race Riot,” June 1, 1921
- “New Battle Now in Progress,” June 1, 1921
- “Many More Whites Are Shot,” June 1, 1921
- “State Troops in Charge,” June 1, 1921
- “Dead Estimated at 100: City is Quiet,” June 2, 1921
- “Grand Jury to Probe Rioting Called,” June 3, 1921

Have students pay attention to the date and edition of each—teachers may have to explain that several editions of the same paper could come out on the same day. Depending on time commitment and quality of internet access, students can simply read over the headlines on each front page OR read through the main articles. This will also give students a chance to use the document viewer used for Library of Congress and other archives sites—the slider at the top to magnify and minimize, and the window in the top left that shows location on the document. For each front page, have students list evidence of bias and loaded language. Finally, have groups report back to the whole class:

- Did the *Tulsa World* contribute to the Tulsa Race Riot?
- If so, how? If not, why?
- Give three examples of bias or loaded language.

### Step 7
(Time dependent) Compare other period sources to the *Tulsa World* sources. Do they present events similarly or differently? Do they use the same language?

- “Bitter Race War Rages in Oklahoma-75 Dead,” *The Evening Herald*, June 1, 1921
- “More Than Two Hundred White and Colored Men, Women and Children Were Killed in the Bloody or Horrible Race Riots at Tulsa, Okla.,” *The Broad Ax*, June 18, 1921

### Step 8
Introduce the Columbia Race Riot. A basic summary the event can be found on the *Tennessee Encyclopedia*.

"Dead Estimated at 100: City is Quiet,” June 2, 1921
### Step 9
Review the press coverage of the Columbia riot in groups. Have students read the articles and headlines, again looking for bias and loaded language.

Did press coverage contribute to the riot? Was the press coverage fair?

If so, how? If not, why?

Give three examples of loaded language or bias in the articles and coverage.

- “70 Are Held in Local Jail After Seven Are Wounded in Night-Long Racial Riots,” *Columbia Herald*, February 26, 1946
- “Weapons to be Seized By Newly-Deputized Officers,” *Columbia Herald*, February 26, 1946
- “Bomar guarantees full protection to negroes,” *Columbia Herald*, February 26, 1946
- “Proclamation from Mayor,” *Columbia Herald*, February 26, 1946

Have groups report back to the whole class for clarification and discussion.

### Step 10
Check for understanding. Have groups compare and contrast newspaper coverage of the Tulsa and Columbia riots using Venn diagrams. What are the similarities and differences?

Students should be able to recognize that while bias and loaded language are still present in 1946, the *Tulsa World* articles almost certainly contributed to the outcomes.

### Part II: Aftermath

**Step 1**
Remind students of press coverage and its role in race riots. In the second part of the lesson, students will compare and contrast the aftermath and results of the riots.

**Step 2**
Review photographs of the Tulsa riot aftermath. For each photograph, student groups should create a headline, title, or Twitter tweet that describes the photograph and how it shows the effect of the riot. Have groups share their best three headlines/tweets, and create a class list of effects of the Tulsa riot.

- Ruins after the race riots, Tulsa, Okla. [1921]
- Part of district burned in race riots, Tulsa, Okla. [1921]
- After the mob had passed [1921]
- [Furniture in street during race riot. [1921]
- After the race riots June 1st, 1921, [Tulsa, Okla. [1921]
### Step 2 cont.

- **Showing reconstruction in Tulsa, Okla.** This part of town was demolished by fire in the race riots of June 1921 [1921]
- **Williams Bldg., West side of 100 blk. N. Greenwood Tulsa, Okla.** After race riots, June 1921 [1921]
- **Entrance to refugee camp on the fair grounds, Tulsa, Okla., after the race riot of June 1st, 1921** [1921]
- **Reconstruction period after the race riot in June 1921 at Tulsa, Okla.** Type of houses [1921]
- **Interior, ARC hospital, Tulsa, Okla. Nov. 1, 1921** [1921]

### Step 3

Have students read [Walter White’s letter](#) to the governor of Minnesota regarding the Tulsa race riots. Walter White of the NAACP arrived after the riot to investigate the event and its aftermath. Students should focus on the aftermath of the riot as reported by White. Return to the question of bias: Is White’s account possibly biased? Does he use loaded language?

### Step 4

Check for understanding: Read [Walter White’s report](#). Students can work individually or in groups to find:

- What circumstances does White believe contributed to the “general causes” of the riot? Do these circumstances fit with what you have learned about the riot?
- What event was the “spark that set off the blaze?” Does White’s report match what you have read in the “Nab Negro” article? Which account do you trust more? Why?
- Read the last paragraph carefully. What is the lesson that White believes can be learned from what happened in Tulsa? Compare to what you have learned about American history. Did Tulsa change American attitudes towards segregation and racial violence?

### Step 5

Compare and contrast the reaction to the Tulsa Riot to the reaction to the Columbia riot twenty-five years later. What is very different in 1946? Have students read and report back to class for discussion. (To save time if needed, the first three sources would be most important to prove the point, the second three show how public opinion had changed.)

- **Marshall Interview, Columbia Race Riots** [1946]
- **NAACP Mobilizes Defense** [1946]
- **Letter signed by Eleanor Roosevelt from the National Committee for Justice in Columbia** [1946]
- **An appeal to the Governor and people of Tennessee** [1946]
- **Terror in Tennessee: the truth about Columbia outrages** [1946]
- **Albert E. Barnett to Tom Clark, March 15, 1946** [1946]
Step 6

Check for understanding. Have students read two more sources:

David K. Niles to Clark H. Forman, With Attached Telegram from Clark H. Forman to Harry S. Truman, March 28, 1946 [1946]

Memorandum, G.T. Washington to Tom C. Clark, With Attached List of Names Submitted for a President’s Committee on Civil Liberties, October 11, 1946 [1946]

Report back to the class: What was an important outcome of the Columbia riot? Compare to Mr. White’s “lesson” from the Tulsa riot. What important factors have changed since 1921 (court cases argued successfully, shifting public opinion, and changed government reaction).

EVALUATION

1. Essay comparing and contrasting the events and effects of the Tulsa and Columbia riots.

2. Poster/museum display that compares and contrasts the events and effects of the Tulsa and Columbia riots. Use three important primary sources from each event.

EXTENSIONS

• Compare press coverage of modern race riots (Watts Rebellion 1965, LA 1992) to the coverage of Tulsa and Columbia.

• Write a blog or email to a government representative that explains how Columbia and Tulsa can help create historical context for modern movements highlighting violence against African Americans.