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MOLD-EN OUR YOUTH FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE, INC

Black History Essay Contest

16 February 2022 Cultural Enrichment and Societal Change Through Black Economic Success in
the Greenwood District

Imagine an entire neighborhood full of prosperity. Busy businesses and beautiful storefronts and well-maintained roadways. A safe harbor from oppression and a community in which all people could experience life in a prosperous environment. This was Black Wall Street. The Greenwood neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma was built in 1906, just ten years after Plessy v. Ferguson, establishing a precedent for racial segregation in America, as a community for Black people to prosper in a country which at the time was hostile and dangerous. If Black Wall Street were to still exist today, it would allow Black people a space to flesh out their culture as well as present a more anti-racist future through the success and prosperity of Black-owned businesses throughout the neighborhood.

If Black Wall Street still existed today, it would have established a culture of mutual aid and collective prosperity in Black people that was not created in the Jim Crow Era world that constantly established Black people as the enemy of society. The economic prosperity seen on Black Wall Street created a new sense of affluence within Black people in the neighborhood. “This economic growth was driven by a community-centered vision of mutual support and, in part, by the segregated nature of Tulsa. Many of the newly wealthy Tulsans hired Black employees from Greenwood for housekeeping and other service-based jobs. Because of the

limited ability to shop in Tulsa's white-owned stores, plus the desire to support their community, employees would purchase from the Black businesses in Greenwood. These businesses, in turn, made purchases from other businesses and hired residents of Black Wall Street, supporting the community's economic growth and prosperity," (Gines). The culture created on Black Wall Street was directly related to the mutual aid stemming from the wealthy within the neighborhood. A sense of togetherness and family allowed Black people to explore who they are in relation to one another. This wealth is mainly derived from the amount of money being given back to the community. Black employers would pay their Black employees who would then purchase from Black-owned businesses, allowing money to filter back into the community to be put towards the betterment of Greenwood as a whole. In a world that viewed Black people through the lens of submissive stereotypes, the actions taken by the Greenwood elite established a precedent of mutual aid and a familial culture within the community (NMAAHC). If Black Wall Street existed today, it would have shared these ideas with Black people across America, leading to Black people giving back to Black people, and diminishing the prevailing stereotypes we see of Black people today.

If Black Wall Street still existed today, it would continue dismantling Black stereotypes and would reconstruct the way that society views Black people as a whole into the future. Black Wall Street was a major civil rights experiment, and if it was allowed to remain standing up to today, it would have a major impact on the social norms typically associated with Black people as seen in modern political thought. "Using cross-sectional, historical data on U.S. civil rights protests during 1960-65 combined with contemporary public opinion data...whites from counties that experienced civil rights protests tend to be more liberal today, especially with respect to racial attitudes," (Mazumder 2). The Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s has had objective

lasting impacts on America today. The actions of Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X are all remembered today and have influenced the political thought of people in the United States. If Black Wall Street was not razed to the ground, it would have also been in the Hall of Fame of Civil Rights leaders. The wealthy in Black Wall Street and the environment they created would have made a more anti-racist sentiment prosper in Oklahoma and eventually spread across the nation, creating a new culture of Black prosperity nationwide. Today, most wealthy Black people have either used sports or music to rise up in the world. Black Wall Street, if it existed today, would have created a precedent of successful Black business owners and prosperous culture of Black prosperity in the United States.

If Black Wall Street was never destroyed and still existed today it would have allowed Black people to establish a culture of family, support, and economic prosperity, thus dismantling the stereotypes associated with Black people then and now. The affluent Black business owners in Greenwood created a culture of mutual support by giving money back to the community, breaking down stereotypes, and if it survived today, establishing new norms of financial prosperity for Black people in America. In closing, remember this, Black people today and Black people one- hundred years ago have one thing in common: American society is a hostile environment. The Americans of one hundred years ago and those of today have one thing in common, they can help create a welcoming society for Black people.

Works Cited

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