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Oklahoma Governor Kicked off Commission for Signing Bill Banning Critical Race Theory

The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commissioners have decided that because Oklahoma's governor, Kevin Stitt, signed a bill that prohibits the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) in Oklahoma schools, they are kicking him off the commission.

The commission was established a few years ago to study the history of the infamous episode in 1921 when a race war between black and white citizens of Tulsa resulted in the deaths of scores of individuals, mostly black. The event is a controversial event in the history of Oklahoma.



AP Images

At the time the commission was established, some feared that it would degenerate into a tool for certain left-wing politics. That has proven to be the case, as U.S. Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma, a Republican, was publicly lambasted by the commission for voting to object to the counting of the Electoral College votes from certain states in dispute in the 2020 presidential election. Now, Governor Kevin Stitt, another Republican, has become a target of the supposedly non-partisan commission.

In a statement released late last week, commissioners said they had decided to part ways with Stitt. "While the Commission is disheartened to part ways with Gov. Stitt, we are thankful for the things we accomplished together. The Commission remains focused on lifting up the story of Black Wall Street and commemorating the centennial."

Evidently that focus includes support for Marxist critical race theory — which teaches that white people are born racist and that American society is systemically racist.

The Oklahoma Legislature recently enacted House Bill 1775, which not only bans such teaching, but also prohibits mandatory gender and sexual diversity training for students enrolled in Oklahoma colleges and universities. Representative Kevin West, a Republican from the Oklahoma City suburb of Moore, is the author of the legislation. He argued that CRT presses "a grim and pessimistic narrative" based on Marxist ideology about gender and race in America.

Opponents of West's bill contend that the law will prohibit teaching about slavery, segregation, and racial discrimination in American history, but West disputes that. The schools can teach all of American history, West explained, which includes teaching about segregation, slavery, and other unpleasant parts of our history, but teachers will not be able to make anyone feel guilty today for what has happened in the past.

Stitt's office also issued a statement that disputes the characterization of his support for West's bill. He noted that he had never been invited to attend a meeting of the commission until last week. "It is disappointing to see an organization of such importance spend so much effort to sow division based on falsehoods and political rhetoric two weeks before the centennial [of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot] and a



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month before the Commission is scheduled to sunset. The governor and first lady will continue to support the revitalization of the Greenwood District, honest conversations about racial reconciliation and pathways of hope in Oklahoma.”

So what exactly was the Tulsa Race Riot (now generally referred to as the Tulsa Race Massacre)? In 1921, a 19-year-old black man, Dick Rowland, was accused of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl, Sarah Page, on an elevator in Tulsa’s Drexel building. After his arrest, a mob of 75 armed black men converged on the jailhouse, concerned about rumors that he was going to be lynched. The sheriff persuaded them that was not going to happen, but as the crowd of black men was dispersing, a white armed mob showed up and a white man attempted to disarm a black man. This touched off what has been variously called the Tulsa Race Riot, Race War, or Race Massacre.

It is unknown how many were killed in the resulting violence. One figure is 26 black and 13 white persons, but once the white mob had the upper hand, they began to destroy a rather prosperous black area of Tulsa, known as Greenwood. Over 100,000 blacks were left homeless, and \$1.5 million in property damage was inflicted on the neighborhood.

Finally, the governor called out the Oklahoma National Guard and order was restored.

Some have contended that the government of the city of Tulsa was complicit in the destruction of Greenwood. Others have even argued that planes flew over Greenwood, dropping explosives, although no evidence exists to support such a contention. (For an excellent and detailed account of the Tulsa Race War of 1921, Oklahoma author John Dwyer’s upcoming book *The Oklahomans, Volume II*, is highly recommended.)

While the Tulsa Race Riot was a human tragedy, it is unfortunate that a commission set up to supposedly give an accurate accounting of what happened has degenerated into a political tool to advance the Marxist critical race theory. CRT is *not* an attempt at historical accuracy. It is a Marxist effort to divided society into groups — one in a superior position and the other into an oppressed position. Many advocates of CRT contend that the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s accomplished very little, as America is a systemically racist nation, and has been since its inception, and that its founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are racist documents.

CRT views the teaching of American history as a vehicle to advance this hate-filled ideology, complete with terms such as “white privilege.” The Walt Disney Corporation, for example, is using this Marxist theory in employee training, even telling its employees to reject the concept of “equality” in favor of “equality of outcome.” The materials also call for the defunding of the police, for example.

Obviously, none of this has anything to do with what happened in Tulsa in May and June of 1921, but everything to do with pushing Marxist philosophy. Oklahoma’s legislature and governor are right to do what they can to kill this hate-filled ideology in the public schools and colleges of the state. Other states should emulate what Oklahoma has done.

Steve Byas is a university professor of history and government, and the author of History’s Greatest Libels, a challenge to the many falsehoods leveled against certain individuals of history, such as Thomas Jefferson, Christopher Columbus, and Joseph McCarthy. He may be contacted at byassteve@yahoo.com.



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