

Your Letters

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Cortez Ewing remembered fondly

David Levy's wonderful remembrance of Cortez Ewing highlighted one of the greatest teachers the University has ever had. We were among the lucky students who benefited from the Cortez Ewing Foundation's program to send students to Washington, D.C., for a summer internship. The experience fundamentally changed our career paths, taking us places we could not have imagined we would go. Skip Stephens worked for Speaker of the House Carl Albert; Peter Robertson served as Chief of Staff and Deputy Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency under President Clinton.

Marcus Cohn met with the Ewing interns every summer and loved to tell stories about Professor Ewing. He was frequently moved to tears when he recounted that Cortez Ewing, without informing Marcus, got him admitted to the University of Chicago, and purchased Marcus' train ticket to Chicago for him. Marcus Cohn then received both his undergraduate degree and his law degree from the University of Chicago. It was his affection for Cortez Ewing and OU, though, that led him to start and endow the Ewing Foundation, to the benefit of hundreds of OU undergraduates. We thank Professor Levy for helping keep the important story of Cortez Ewing alive.



*Skip Stephens
Ewing intern 1971
'73 ba hist
Arlington, Va.*

*Peter Robertson
Ewing intern 1976
'78 ba phil
Arlington, Va.*

Thoughts on Tulsa Race Massacre

Congratulations on OU's recognition of the Tulsa race riot in *Sooner Magazine's* "Lessons from the Tulsa Race Massacre." It's a shame that 100 years were necessary to open people's eyes. It should be scandalous that Tulsa's 100

years were not known to other communities and/or used as a basis for corrections by them as well. The "Lessons" article prompted memories and the following thoughts. The obvious question is, "Where did 100 years go?" The greater questions are, "Where do we go from here and how do we best get there?"

As a freshman at OU in 1953, I was fortunate to meet George McLaurin and to see him several times at the Law School. Yet, if George's history and presence as a Black at OU was important at the time, it was a well-guarded secret.

Now zeroing in on the age of 86, I sometimes look back on the good fortune that resulted in my being named to Pe-et and later receiving the Letzeiser Award for the top graduating 1957 Senior Male. But more important, these lead to retrospection. Being the 1956-57 OU Army ROTC student commander began to open my eyes to evaluation of others, not simply working on skills of leadership. Following graduation, my four years of active-duty Army service brought me into contact with and command of Black soldiers who were prominent in the Big Red One of World War II fame—and an opportunity to become a student of life from their tutoring and sharing of life experiences. They also formed a base for recognizing things that I either wasted, was not afforded, and/or did not exist in the OU experience. This was in my mind when I returned to OU to work on a master's degree in economics in 1961. I was offered a number of lucrative career opportunities after I completed my master's degree program but chose to accept a role as assistant director of the Tulsa Renewal Authority in 1962. The Downtown Northwest urban renewal program fit well in my career path and my degrees. I was given a major responsibility for the planning portions of "renewing" downtown Tulsa and placed in charge of the Seminole Hills program occupying Tulsa's "near north side" and a part of the Greenwood area. Few people mentioned "Greenwood" when I began my activities in Seminole Hills. I was totally unaware of the race massacre until a small group of leaders in the Black community sat down with me for "a tough love visit" after I had gained their confidence. They recognized that I was sincere in wanting to help solve the poverty, medical issues, family separations and pressures, and lost opportunities of the Black families and individuals who lived in the project area (and elsewhere). But they also had tough questions, some of which were just unanswerable. Even though the massacre was rarely mentioned, it was an unexplained and still-festering wound.

Tulsa Mayor James Maxwell was exceptional in his love and hopes for Tulsa. Because a portion of my master's program focused on urban and regional planning, he asked that I

expand my studies to include race. I had written a master's thesis on the economic effects of the development of the Tulsa Civic Center and shared with him that racial problems were clearly identified as issues in my research for the thesis. They were also factors in the Urban Renewal Authority's studies I had performed. After months of discussions about what to do to help both the Black community and [all of] Tulsa we concluded that geographic diversity in Tulsa as a whole was needed. The mayor asked me to head a program to develop an open housing ordinance for Tulsa. I made a brief study of the bleak outlook reflected from national and regional urban development activities, but we decided that the issues were too important to ignore. So, I created a draft and we were successful in obtaining the adoption of the Tulsa Open Housing Ordinance. Upon adoption of the ordinance, a number of neighborhoods welcomed new Black neighbors with open house events and a low-key program of expanding the geography of Black lives in Tulsa began.

My story of these years and experiences is symbolic of the fact that not enough focus has been made on Tulsa's lost 100 years of Black lives after the deaths occurred. And what has happened in the years before and after an attempt to aid Blacks called the "Seminole Hills Urban Renewal Project?" Should that have been called "The Seminole Hills Experiment?" Where are the missing years before and after the riot? I hope these experiences might suggest further steps for OU, its faculty and students, and Oklahomans at large to fill in the blanks—not simply to chronicle history, but to better understand and evaluate where we are and where/how we should be going a defined "somewhere."

*John D. Dorchester Jr.
'57 ba bus/account; '64 ma econ
Mesa, Ariz.*



I would like to add a bit to your article in the spring 2021 issue of *Sooner Magazine*, "Lessons From the Tulsa Race Massacre." I'm 70 and did not hear of the Tulsa Massacre until 60, around 2010. I should have learned of this in high school, at the latest. History cannot be undone, but for the attempt to correct the past. It should be taught going forward in public schools from an honest and articulate view, not whitewashed as a race riot. Students are now more acceptant of teaching that racial discrimination is wrong than any time in the past. Your article addresses this and I do not disagree, but I felt it focuses on one symptom of a huge problem.

Lessons from the [race massacre] should be taught, but

other crimes plague our state, as well. The lead poisoning of children in Picher, Oklahoma, from 1913 to 2013, is omitted from our public education. The same is true for dismissing water problems for Flint, Michigan. These were highly publicized during discovery but did not become a part of public education.

The importance of knowing history was stressed in your article and especially reiterated at the end, of which I agree. I was taught in school that the Women's Suffrage Movement was a group of women that marched in front of the White House during the First World War, so President Wilson gave them the right to vote. Wow, was this way off. I was not told that during WWII Japanese were put in detention camps. The first I heard of it was at OU, I believe, in a sociology class. Neither in grade school did I learn of Native American genocide or the Trail of Tears.

What I am suggesting is a way to implement teaching to include a broader disclosure of facts and [problem-solving skills] so that students may learn for themselves rather than just lectures and rote.

*Lawrence A. Wilcox
'73 bs elec eng
Shakopee, Minn.*

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