A CENTURY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
Greenwood: From Ruins to Renaissance

May 8 - May 30, 1993

Opening Reception: 5 - 7 p.m., May 8, Featuring live jazz

Thirty-two black-and-white photographs illustrating the rise, fall, and rebirth of Greenwood, an African-American community located within TULSA, OKLAHOMA, will be shown from May 8 through May 30 at the University of Oklahoma's Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in the exhibition titled "A CENTURY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Greenwood: From Ruins to Renaissance."

Many of the historic and contemporary photographs that tell the Greenwood story come from family albums and have never before been exhibited.

In its heyday, Greenwood was cited as the "Black Wall Street of America." The successful African-American business district fostered the arts as well, hosting outstanding jazz performers such as Cab Calloway, Dizzie Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, Louis Armstrong, and Nat "King" Cole.

Despite Greenwood's prosperity and autonomy, racial tension existed between the community and surrounding Tulsa. A report that a black man had assaulted a white woman triggered a race riot on June 1, 1921. In three days, thirty-five blocks were demolished and property losses exceeded $5 million. More than 1,000 homes, 23 churches, and scores of business lay in ashes.

Without outside help, Greenwood's residents rebuilt their community, and the district prospered through the Depression. Ironically, desegregation laws passed in 1968 contributed to Greenwood's decline, as African-Americans gained broader consumer opportunities and began spending their money elsewhere. In the 70s, the Greenwood business district ceased altogether when an expressway was built through its urban center.

Beginning in the early 1980s, however, efforts of Greenwood’s leaders resulted in a renaissance for the community. Today there is a university, a thriving commercial
district, a cultural center and gallery, a number of annual civic projects, and the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame. Present-day Greenwood Jazz Festivals include performers such as Natalie Cole and Clark Terry.

"A CENTURY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Greenwood: From Ruin to Renaissance" records the history of this particular community from the turn of the century to the present day. At the same time, it illustrates the universally shared experiences of African-Americans throughout this century as it poignantly documents the struggle for equality in spite of continuing social, economic, and political boundaries.

Development for the exhibition was provided by Representative Don Ross, Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus, with exhibit coordination provided by the State Arts Council of Oklahoma, research assistance from the Oklahoma Historical Society, and financial assistance form the Phillips Petroleum Foundation, Inc..

The exhibition is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a National Division of Mid-America Arts Alliance with the State Arts Council of Oklahoma. The Mid-America Arts Alliance is sponsored by the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund and is assisted by its six-partner state agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, and private contributors.

Following the closing of the Greenwood exhibition on May 30, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art will close for routine maintenance during the month of June. The Museum will reopen on July 1.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, located at 410 W. Boyd St., is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from noon until 4:30 p.m.; Thursdays from noon until 9 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays from 1 until 4:30 p.m. Admission is free and free parking passes for use in reserved spaces on the Parrington (north) Oval may be obtained at the museum's security desk.

For further information, please call (405) 325-3272.

Accommodations on the basis of disability also are available by calling (405) 325-3272.