

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 52 | Number 1

Article 9

---

September 2023

## Letter to the Editor, Response, and Note

Donald Elgersma

James C. Schaap

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Elgersma, Donald and Schaap, James C. (2023) "Letter to the Editor, Response, and Note," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 52: No. 1, 51 - 52.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol52/iss1/9](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol52/iss1/9)

This Letter to the Editor is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

## Letter to the Editor — June 26, 2023

---

Dr. Dengler,

I wait for, and enjoy, every *Pro Rege* publication. I also love James Schaap's articles. However, recently and especially this recent one on "Huck and the Vans and Me and You," troubled me. His narrative was a very good account of the terrible bigotry and treatment of native-born peoples and obvious slave ownership and subsequent racism. However, his conclusion in the last two paragraphs I found racist and prejudging itself. To be born of European ancestry in the 20th or 21st century, a person is not guilty of anything that another person did prior to that. Is an African American guilty for what an African tribesman did when he sold some of his fellow tribesman

into slavery? Obviously not! What would you call blaming a whole race for what some individuals or group did? It seems to me he is trying to do that. Also, he seems to reduce CRT, or critical race theory, to seeing another side of the story. Anyone who knows anything about CRT knows it views most things through a racial lens, thus distorting even the founding of the USA, not in 1776 but 1619, when the first slaves were introduced in this country. This to me is not up to Dordt's standards based on truth and a Reformed, Reformational perspective, in my opinion. Thank you for your continued good work on *Pro Rege*.

Donald Elgersma,  
Bradenton, Florida

## Dr. James Calvin Schaap's Response to Elgersma Note

---

What seems so clear is the cause/effect sequencing of the entire, awful story—how this led to that and that led to this and so forth and so forth and so forth, an almost inexorable chain of events.

Begin here. I have no desire to be unkind to Oklahomans, but what needs to be said is that its white founding fathers were not Puritans. Oklahoma, once called Indian Territory, was home to more than its share of tough hombres.

After the Civil War, scores of ex-slaves left the cotton-picking South following dreams of what the West offered. In Oklahoma, those emigres were Southerners especially, many of whom had hated Lincoln, and considered "emancipation" talk astutely unnatural, a foul attempt to change an entire way of life.

By 1890, the Five Civilized Tribes, who'd suffered through the Trail of Tears (1830-1850), assessed their plight in Indian Territory and signed on to the provisions of the Dawes Act (1887), which offered land ownership to Native people if they would give up their tribal governance and associations. The effect, in Oklahoma as elsewhere, was to free up land for

thousands more white pioneers, many of whom were embittered Southerners, not so much leaving Dixie behind as lugging losses and grievances with them.

Thus, while freed slaves moving into the region expected self-governance—freedom itself, in Indian Territory—the movers and shakers in city hall were, often as not, ex-Rebs who were not particularly interested in the freedom of ex-slaves, or "equality" (whatever that meant!) for, well, the people for whom they used the n-word.

Thus, a town like Tulsa, before the oil strikes, was the very model of segregation in the late 19th century and racism that was maybe not as blatant as it was in the Jim Crow South, but as racially divided as apartheid South Africans. There was Tulsa—the white world—and there was Greenwood—the black. It was very simple, very clearly drawn.

Segregation or not, those ex-slaves not only survived but flourished. Right there on the streets of Greenwood, their city, they did well, did better than well, in fact, so much so that some people called the place Black Wall Street.

Then something happened. Exactly how, no one knows. Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old African American who made his living by shining shoes, touched a white girl when the two of them were in an elevator and was, soon after, arrested for attempting to assault her. Rowland admitted he put a hand on the girl, but he denied trying to harm her. For a moment in time, old Dixie-level racism threatened the barriers already set between the races in Tulsa. To white folks, what a black boy did to a white girl was an abomination that often ended in lynchings throughout the South.

It all seems so perfectly understandable. Thus, when a couple thousand white men began milling around the courthouse where Rowland was held, dozens of African Americans in Greenwood, some of them WWI vets who'd only recently returned, determined that what seemed inevitable was, this time, not going to be. They went, single-file, to the courthouse and offered their protection to the Sheriff, who waved them off.

Tulsa became a tinderbox. On May 31, at 10:30 at night, a white man attempted to disarm an African-American World War I vet. A shot rang out. Thus, it began.

An estimated \$1.5 million in damages resulted. An estimated 10,000 residents were left homeless, 6000 were interned, 1256 homes were burned, 215 looted. Almost 200 businesses were burned; almost 200 people were hospitalized. No one knows the number who perished; estimates range from 55 to 300. For a century, the whole story was locked up tight in some psychic vault, not to be spoken of.

Two years ago, Tulsa stopped willfully forgetting. The horror, created by white supremacists, arose from the kind of grave we dig for our most awful stories.

## Note to the Editor

---

James Schaap may be, in person, for all I know, a snooty, unbearable, self-righteous snob. I doubt it, but it could be. In print, however, he is a treasure. Thanks for giving him a venue. I never miss what he writes and I'm never disappointed. And you can tell him he has a fan in Florida. Maybe two, but at least one.

Anonymous

Today, Oklahoma, like many other states, has created legislation to make teaching Critical Race Theory illegal. Definitions remain vague. The letters "CRT" stand for something difficult to identify except to MAGA politicians who use it self-righteously—and often. Just this week, Ryan Walters, who ran on a campaign to eradicate CRT and "wokeness" and thereby became Oklahoma's Superintendent of Schools, told an audience that teaching students about the 1921 Tulsa Riots wasn't wrong, but that it had to be done in a fashion that didn't make students feel bad. Most specifically, it had to be done in a fashion that wouldn't make white students feel bad or in any way responsible.

There's a kind of silly sweetness to his idiocy. But, honestly and truly, how can one teach the truly horrifying stories of our past without horror, without—in this case—the reality of the evils of Jim Crow? Without talking about who was truly guilty and who was truly innocent and why? You can teach students about the Tulsa Riots, but you really shouldn't mention much about race, or so said the Superintendent.

The sequence by which the Tulsa Riots developed has a clearly present cause-and-effect structure—this, then this, then this, then that. All of it, perfectly understandable. That may be the Ryan Walters' lesson plan: what happened in Greenwood in 1921 was inevitable because of the background of the individuals involved. There's a silly sweetness operating here. "Don't mention race. Don't let white kids feel bad." I get that. But I can't help thinking that if I were African American, I'd call it something other than "silly sweetness." I'd likely call it racism, and that, of course, would make me unforgivingly "woke."

Maybe so.