

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4

Key Vocabulary

Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building

Oklahoma Standard

Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum

Gates of Time

Survivor Tree

MAPS

OKC Thunder

Vision 2025

Gathering Place

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

Learning Outcomes:

The learner will be able to...

- Identify the causes and consequences of the Murrah Building domestic terrorist attack, including the responses to the attack.
- Describe the Oklahoma Standard and explain what it looks like in action.
- Evaluate economic growth in Oklahoma City and Tulsa due to MAPS and Vision 2025 initiatives.
- Analyze how the evolving relationship between state and tribal governments impacts gaming, taxation, and self-determination.
- Examine the migration of Latinx populations into Oklahoma and the contributions Latinx individuals and businesses make to their communities.

Compelling Question:

- To what extent can painful events contribute to stronger communities?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, students will learn about the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. Oklahomans responded with support and resilience, or what became known as the Oklahoma Standard. This period also saw a major movement for urban revitalization and renewal efforts in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, made possible by the MAPS and Vision 2025 voter initiatives. Indigenous nations expanded businesses, health care facilities, and tribal governments.

On April 19, 1995, Andrew Eppler was far from his rural Oklahoma home. He was in Mysore, India, studying advanced Ashtanga yoga. When he arrived at practice, his eighty-five-year-old Indian teacher did not give Andrew his usual greeting. Instead his teacher said, "Oklahoma is finished. Big bomb!" It would be several hours before Andrew was able to reach his parents to learn what had happened. Oklahoma was not finished, but it had suffered a devastating attack. At 9:02 a.m., a two-ton fertilizer bomb in a rented Ryder truck exploded in front of the **Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building** in downtown Oklahoma City. The Murrah Building housed most of the federal offices in Oklahoma City.

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4



Fig. 15.1: The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City prior to the bombing in 1995. Approximately 550 people worked in the building. In addition to offices, it also housed a daycare center on the second floor.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 15.2: As this photo shows, the bomb blew up the entire north side of the Murrah Federal Building and destroyed the rest of it. It also caused great damage to the surrounding buildings and area. It caused car and home alarms to go off in nearby areas as well. The force from the blast was so strong that some people reported feeling an earthquake-like sensation almost one hundred miles away.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The bombing killed 168 people including 19 children who were in the America's Kids Day Care Center in the Murrah Federal Building. The explosion destroyed the building, collapsing most of the north side. The explosion also damaged nearby buildings including the Water Resources Board, the Athenian, the YMCA, the Journal Record Building, the Regency Tower Apartments, and multiple churches. Windows were shattered along a ten-block radius. Beyond those who were killed, approximately 850 people were injured. Around 7,000 lost their workplace.

In the hours and days following the bombing, Oklahomans participated in and witnessed both great horror and great acts of kindness and bravery. For several days following the bombing, local TV and radio stations covered nothing but the rescue efforts, which eventually became recovery efforts. As faces of victims flashed across television screens, Oklahomans watched with dread to see if the images would include people they knew and cared about. Most drivers kept their headlights on as a show of support for first responders and as a sign of hope and solidarity.

As Oklahomans were reeling from the events of April 19, someone made a bomb threat against the children's hospital in Oklahoma City. Doctors and nurses stayed with their patients, knowing that if the threat were real, they would not have time to evacuate all of the children. Fortunately, the threat was a hoax. But it only strengthened the resolve of Oklahomans to come together and help their community through what at the time was the worst terrorist attack on American soil in the nation's history. The way that Oklahomans responded with resilience in the face of adversity would later be known as the **Oklahoma Standard**.

Firefighters and other first responders were on the scene of the bombing within minutes of the explosion. Nurse Rebecca Anderson was one of the responders. She rushed into the building to help and was struck by falling concrete. She died four days later. She was an organ donor, and her heart, liver, kidneys, and eyes were transplanted to other individuals. Meantime, members of the Oklahoma Restaurant Association mobilized to prepare meals for rescue workers. They served somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 meals 24 hours per day for ten days.

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4



The fence surrounding the space where the Murrah Building had stood quickly became a memorial site. When people visited, they left notes, American flags, and teddy bears. People around the world reached out to Oklahomans to show their support.

Nationally, as a direct result of the Oklahoma City bombing, improved security and safety standards were required in all federal buildings. Childcare centers were no longer permitted in federal buildings. In addition, President Bill Clinton signed an antiterrorism bill one year after the Oklahoma City bombing.

Fig. 15.3: This photograph shows a collection of items left outside the Murrah Building after the bombing. These included notes, art projects, stuffed animals, crosses, rosaries, and other sacred items. At the time, this was the worst terrorist attack on American soil in the history of the country. People from around the world expressed shock and sorrow over the attack.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 15.4: The 1995 Oklahoma City bombing shocked the nation. People across the country shared in the grief of Oklahomans. President Bill Clinton visited Oklahoma City four days after the bombing where he spoke at a prayer service for the victims and met with families. He is shown here (seated right) speaking with Governor Frank Keating while surrounded by first responders.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Antiterrorism Bill in Response to the Oklahoma City Bombing

One year after the Alfred P. Murrah federal building bombing in Oklahoma City, President Bill Clinton signed a new antiterrorism bill. Called the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), the act was part of a broader national response to the bombing. Its main purpose was to prevent future acts of terrorism. Though well-intentioned, the act received mixed reactions. It had some shortcomings. It also brought some positive changes.

One major criticism of the bill related to the limits it placed on the appeals process for capital punishment cases. AEDPA made it harder for those sentenced to death to appeal their convictions or receive a stay (or a pause) of execution. Opponents of the bill warned that such restrictions would undermine the due process of law. They said it would do this by raising the chance that a wrongly convicted or innocent person would be sentenced to death. The bill also sought to address terrorism. It did this by increasing immigration restrictions for people from certain regions of the world. These were places, mainly in the Middle East, that US government officials saw as having ties to terrorism. The terrorist provisions in AEDPA drew criticism because they seemed to discriminate against immigrants of certain backgrounds.

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4

Despite these more controversial elements, several parts of the act helped combat domestic and international terrorism. Perhaps the most important aspect of AEDPA was that it defined terrorism as an offense designed “to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct.” AEDPA also made it harder for terrorist organizations to raise funds. It did this by banning donations to groups that the US government deemed as “terrorist” in nature. Finally, the act required chemicals known as “detection taggants” to receive classification as explosives. Classifying them in this way allowed easier tracing and identification of explosives during post-blast investigations by law enforcement. Yet in spite of these tough measures, many saw the act as too weak. Even President Clinton stated that the AEDPA “should have been stronger.” not think that ICWA broke any laws found in the Constitution. Native Americans across the country saw this ruling as another step toward affirming tribal sovereignty.

Oklahoma Standard, Oklahoma Values

Oklahomans demonstrated an immediate and sustained outpouring of generosity in response to the bombing. And, in turn, when tragedy struck elsewhere, Oklahomans were quick to apply the Oklahoma Standard and lend their support. Right after the bombing, Governor Frank Keating ordered flags to be lowered at half-staff as a sign of mourning for the victims. Sixty-seven days later, on July 4, 1995, Governor Keating stood on the steps of the state capitol and ordered flags across Oklahoma to be raised once again. Ten years later, in 2005, Governor Brad Henry talked about the Oklahoma Standard in his State of the State Address. “Something called ‘the Oklahoma Standard’ became known throughout the world,” Henry said. “It means resilience in the face of adversity, it means a strength and compassion that will not be defeated. Most of all, it means coming together as a family, the family that is Oklahoma.”

One person who demonstrated such “strength and compassion” was Anthony Fernandez III, a colonel in the US Marine Corps Reserve and a firefighter and paramedic in the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department in Florida. He was deployed to Oklahoma City as part of a canine search-and-rescue unit. Fernandez’s dog, Aspen, a golden retriever, was trained in body recovery, and used her sense of smell to direct rescue workers where to dig during their twelve-hour shifts. “I could not for a moment forget the citizens of Oklahoma City,” Fernandez said, in many ways explaining the Oklahoma Standard.



Fig. 15.6: Anthony Fernandez III with his dog, Aspen. Fernandez came from Florida to Oklahoma to help in the rescue efforts following the Oklahoma City bombing. Rescue dogs like Aspen were very important in the effort to find people caught in the rubble. Hundreds of volunteers from across the country traveled to Oklahoma to help in the rescue and cleanup efforts. Photograph by David Allen, April 26, 1995.

Courtesy of the Oklahoman.

“They were as busy as we were; they worked with purpose and calm. It was their city, their building, and their neighbors in there. But they spirited us on as they grieved. They were different. They supported us every moment of our days. They fed us, saw to our every need, and cheered us on. Although they suffered loss, although they were victims, their spirit was boundless.” And then he went on to say, “They personified what I knew to be the unbreakable American spirit, people with grit and heart.” The Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association set up twenty-four-hour medical care centers for the rescue dogs, who often suffered cuts from walking on the sharp glass and whose eyes required saline treatment due to all the dust.

Bob Blackburn, who served as executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society for more than twenty years, has also described the Oklahoma Standard. The personality of the state, according to Blackburn, is to react to disasters and acknowledge that the disaster happened, but to believe that tomorrow would be brighter. The Oklahoma Standard explains why so many people rushed back into the building immediately after the bombing. Oklahomans are proud of surviving disasters

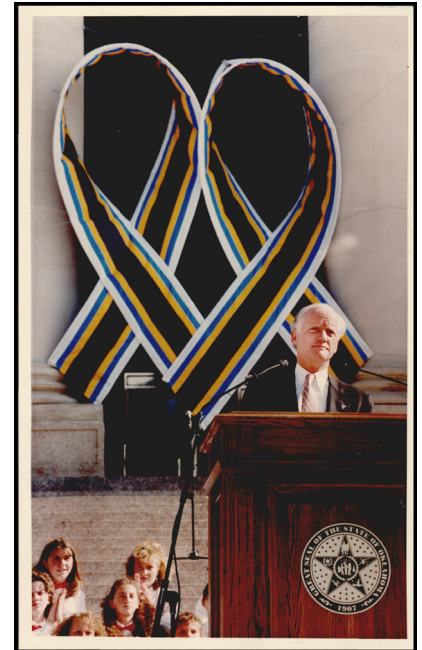


Fig. 15.5: In the days and weeks following the Oklahoma City bombing, Governor Frank Keating called on Oklahomans for unity and perseverance. Flags were lowered at half-staff immediately after the bombing. On July 4, 1995, Governor Keating gave a speech ordering the flags to be raised from half-staff. Each year on the anniversary of the attack, flags have been lowered again in memory of all those affected by the bombing.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

such as the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, destructive tornadoes, the rise and fall of the oil industry, and the Oklahoma City bombing. Many Oklahomans take pride in the Oklahoma Standard because it is rooted in shared values of compassion, sacrifice, and resilience. However, Blackburn also noted another strain in Oklahoma history: the “long tradition of exploitation in the state, beginning with the dispossession of Native Americans which made many rich, and our long history of slavery. Alongside our hardy optimism runs a pessimistic strain that emerges from our exploitation of others.”

Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum

“The bombing in Oklahoma City,” as Edward T. Linenthal has explained in *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, “immediately became part of the nation’s public culture.” Visitors to the bombing site come from all over the world. In conducting the research for his book, Linenthal “learned that the stories of acts of kindness, the selfless work of rescue and recovery, and the pride in the Oklahoma Standard were not an evasion of the realities of the event but an important part of people’s reaction to it.”

The **Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum** was dedicated on April 19, 2000, five years after the bombing. The memorial is a National Park Service historic site. The outdoor memorial includes the Gates of Time, two bronze gates that mark the entrance to the space where the building used to exist. The 9:01 on the eastern gate, represents the last moments before the bombing, and 9:03 on the western gate represents the first moments of recovery. The 168 chairs, with smaller chairs for the children, have a bronze back and glass base. The chairs are etched with the name of each person killed. The chairs are arranged in nine rows, representing the nine floors of the building.

The museum contains exhibition space, archives, and offices for the Memorial Foundation and for a time the Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. The memorial includes the Survivor Tree, an American elm across the street from the Murrah Building that against all odds survived the bombing. Like the fence, the Survivor Tree became a gathering place for family members and survivors.

After an intense investigation, the FBI identified Timothy McVeigh as the person who carried out the bombing, and Terry Nichols as his accomplice—the person who helped McVeigh build the bomb. The trials of these two suspects dominated the headlines for years. Both McVeigh and Nichols were convicted for their roles in the bombing in 1997. Charged as domestic terrorists, the two men chose April 19 as the bombing date on purpose, in response to the FBI’s attack on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, which had occurred on April 19, 1993. At Waco the 51-day standoff ended in the deaths of 80 Branch Davidians, including 21 children, and 4 federal agents. McVeigh was executed in 2001 for his role in the bombing. Nichols was sentenced in 2004 to life imprisonment for his role as an accomplice in the attack. Both had served in the US Army for a few years. And both had participated in white power survivalist militia culture bent on performing acts of domestic terrorism in the United States.



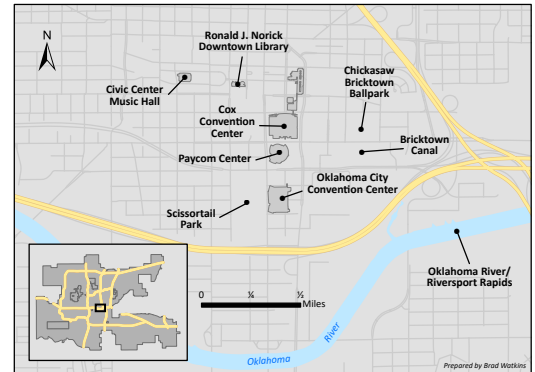
Fig. 15.7: The eastern gate of the Gates of Time serves as a backdrop to the glass-and-bronze chairs at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. The time at the eastern gate is set to 9:01 to reflect the last moment of calm before the bombing took place. On the west side of the Gates of Time there is a large reflecting pool.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Oklahoma City's Downtown Renewal and MAPS

In the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, the Oklahoma Standard and other civic renewal efforts charted the way forward from tragedy to remembrance to revitalization. Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area Projects, a sales-tax-funded initiative known as **MAPS**, focused on public projects to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

The purpose of MAPS was to make improvements to Oklahoma City so that it would be a fun place to live and so that young people would want to stay in Oklahoma rather than move away. In 1993, voters approved a special five-year sales tax to support a \$300 million renovation for downtown Oklahoma City. To achieve this overall plan, MAPS proposed construction or renovation of nine urban projects: a Triple-A baseball park (opened in 1998), the downtown canal (opened in 1999), the Civic Center Music Hall (opened in 2001 after a three-year renovation, originally constructed in the 1930s as a New Deal project), the Oklahoma City Convention Center, a sports arena (opened in 2002 as the Ford Center, then the Chesapeake Energy Arena, and later renamed the Paycom Center), riverfront areas, a trolley system, a new downtown library (opened in 2004), and new facilities in the fairgrounds.



Map 15.1: The effort to revitalize the downtown Oklahoma City area generated varied opinions as to what to prioritize and how best to proceed. Ultimately, money generated by a special city sales tax helped make the process a success.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.



Fig. 15.8: The downtown canal was built in Bricktown in 1999. The canal was part of a revitalization project in Oklahoma City designed by architects, who envisioned a riverwalk with restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues on either side. The route for this canal appears in the map on page 217.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 15.9: The Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark opened in 1998. It is now home to the Oklahoma City Baseball Club. Around the stadium there are statues of famous Oklahoma baseball players, including Mickey Mantle, Warren Spahn, and, as shown in this photo, Johnny Bench. The stadium attracts visitors by the thousands and has become a fixture in the downtown architectural landscape.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The river project later evolved into an Olympic training site for rowing. The new ballpark opened in the downtown neighborhood of Bricktown and would serve as the home stadium of the Oklahoma RedHawks, the Triple-A team for the Texas Rangers. Since 2015, the Oklahoma City Dodgers (now called the Oklahoma City Baseball Club) have played their home games at the ballpark, now renamed the Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark. They are the Triple-A team for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

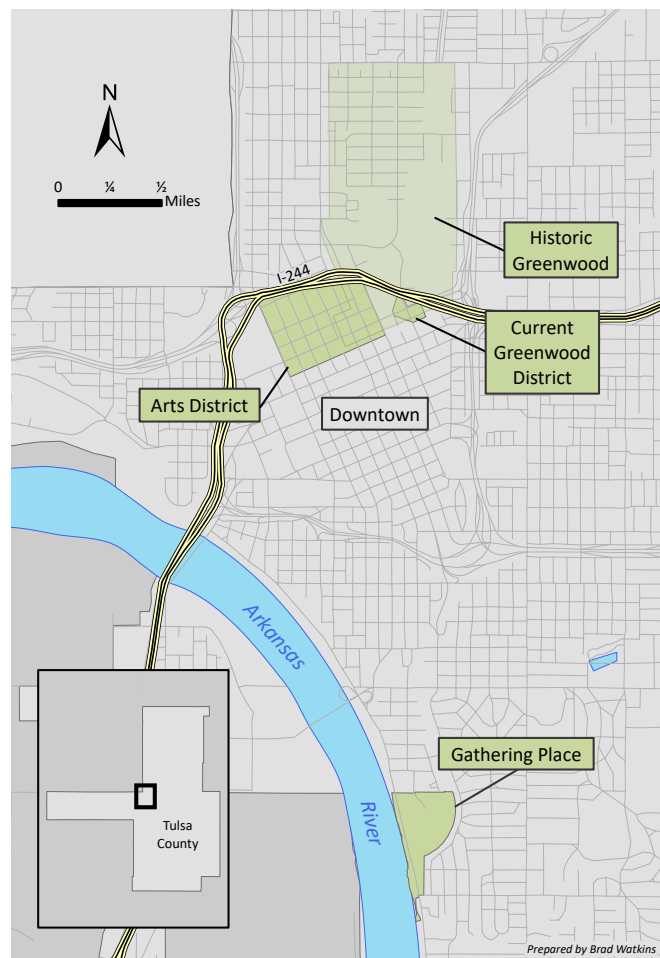
In 2001, voters also approved the MAPS for Kids proposal. It aimed to improve student achievement in Oklahoma County and rebuild or renovate every public school and school district in the county. In 2008, Oklahoma City residents approved a short-term, one-cent sales tax to fund improvements to the downtown arena and build a practice facility for the new National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise, the **Oklahoma City Thunder**. Devon Energy CEO Larry Nichols said that the team would not even be in Oklahoma City if it were not for MAPS.

The long-term vision for capital improvements in Oklahoma City continued with MAPS 3 and MAPS 4 programs. Oklahoma City citizens passed MAPS 3 in December 2009, a \$777 million package of eight projects. The initiative included a new convention center, a downtown streetcar, a 70-acre downtown park, improvements to the Oklahoma River rowing course, improvements to the state fairgrounds, sidewalks, trails, and senior centers. The one-cent sales tax funding MAPS 4 began in 2020 with plans to end in 2028 with projected revenue of just over \$1 billion. MAPS 4 projects include the Clara Luper Civil Rights Center, improvements to Paycom Center, the Fairgrounds Coliseum, two new mental health crisis centers, senior wellness centers, youth centers, parks, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

Oklahoma City endured the 2008 recession better than most. Energy prices dropped 50 percent within a few weeks. The housing market plummeted forcing many people to foreclose on their homes. However, by 2011–12 Boeing moved several hundred aerospace industry jobs to Oklahoma City from California and Kansas, an indication that the state of Oklahoma was recruiting businesses to Oklahoma and diversifying the state economy beyond oil and gas. In 2012, Devon Energy Corporation, a large oil and gas company, built the Devon Tower in downtown Oklahoma City. Standing at 844 feet, it is the state's tallest skyscraper, almost twice as tall as any previous skyscraper in Oklahoma City and taller than the Williams Tower in Tulsa.

Oklahoma City Thunder

By 2000 the Oklahoma City metro had a population topping 1.1 million but did not have a major league sports team. At the time, Oklahoma tended to focus on college football rivalries such as the famous Bedlam football game between OU and OSU. Attracting an NBA team to Oklahoma City would alter the dynamics of sports in Oklahoma and provide the opportunity for all citizens of the state to rally behind one team.



Map 15.2: Much like Oklahoma City, Tulsa went through a significant revitalization, which led to the development of new attractions and opportunities for growth.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.

Section 1

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4

Oklahoma City temporarily hosted the New Orleans Hornets, after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005. This was Oklahoma City's chance to demonstrate that it could support a major league sports team. The team, led by Rookie of the Year Chris Paul, was officially called the "New Orleans/Oklahoma City Hornets" and played thirty-five games at the Ford Center in downtown Oklahoma City. As David Holt, later elected mayor of Oklahoma City, described it in *Big League City*, "Oklahoma City fans loved their Hornets like nothing the city had ever seen." The status of hosting an NBA team brought nationwide credibility to the city almost overnight. Holt continued, "There was also a newfound sense of local unity. Instead of fighting over OU and OSU, everyone loved the same team unconditionally. The Ford Center had become the city's meeting place, where people of all races, classes and ages came together to cheer a common cause." NBA commissioner David Stern attended a Hornets game in Oklahoma City and said that the city was at the top of the relocation or expansion list. As it turned out, New Orleans needed more time to recover after Hurricane Katrina, and the Hornets would play a second season in Oklahoma City before returning to Louisiana.

In 2006, Clay Bennett and a group of Oklahoma City investors created Professional Basketball Club, LLC, and purchased the Seattle SuperSonics of the NBA and the Seattle Storm of the WNBA. His investors included Chesapeake Energy cofounders Aubrey McClendon and Tom Ward, MidFirst Bank CEO Jeff Records, and others. The Oklahoma City group purchased the Sonics and Storm for \$350 million, almost as much as the entire MAPS program cost. Bennett said he would give Seattle one year from the date of the close of the sale to approve a funding plan for a new modern arena in Seattle. More than a year later, with no arena funding plan in place in Seattle, the Oklahoma City group asked the NBA to approve a relocation to Oklahoma City. Meanwhile, the WNBA announced that the Storm would stay in Seattle under new ownership.



On March 4, 2008, to prepare for a possible NBA team in their city, Oklahoma City voters approved the "Big League City" initiative to continue a one-cent sales tax to fund renovations to the Ford Center. Then, on April 18, 2008, thirteen years after the Oklahoma City bombing, the NBA Board of Governors approved the relocation of the Sonics from Seattle to Oklahoma City. The team was renamed the Thunder. Oklahoma City Thunder players such as Kevin Durant, Russell Westbrook, and James Harden helped build the early foundation of an organization committed to excellence on and off the court, particularly in the area of community service.

By the mid-2020s, a new generation of Thunder players had emerged, including Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Jalen Williams, and Chet Holmgren. In 2025 the Oklahoma City Thunder defeated the Indiana Pacers in a seven-game series to become the NBA champions. They became the youngest team (their average age is 25.6 years old) to win the NBA championship in almost fifty years. Oklahomans celebrated this victory with the most largely attended parade in state history.

Fig. 15.10: In 2008, the Seattle SuperSonics basketball team became the Oklahoma City Thunder. The Thunder quickly became an important fixture in downtown Oklahoma City with Oklahomans from across the state supporting the new team. In the years following the Thunder's move to Oklahoma City, the team has made important philanthropic contributions to the state and has generated a significant source of revenue by attracting fans by the thousands into the downtown arena. This photo shows Thunder memorabilia displayed at the Oklahoma History Center.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Tulsa

Throughout the twentieth century, Oklahoma City and Tulsa had similar populations. The two cities are one hundred miles apart. Both metros combined represent over half of the state's population, or 54 percent. Nationally, most Americans—nearly 80 percent—live in urban areas. During the early 2000s, the City of Tulsa and Tulsa County worked together to achieve **Vision 2025**, a taxpayer-supported plan approved by voters in 2003. By raising \$662 million over 15 years, citizens provided funding for major projects in Tulsa and throughout the county, including in the towns of Bixby, Broken Arrow, Collinsville, Glenpool, Jenks, Owasso, Sand Springs, Skiatook, and Sperry. The plan Vision 2025 selected 32 projects ranging from parks and trails to primary, secondary, and higher education to community centers, museums, and convention centers. In 2016, voters approved an extension to Vision 2025, which was projected to raise \$884 million over fifteen years for improvements to public safety, economic development, and transportation in Tulsa County.

There were other major developments in Tulsa during the first decades of the twenty-first century. In 2010 the Tulsa Drillers, a Double-A baseball team for the Los Angeles Dodgers, received a new ballpark in the historic Greenwood District of downtown Tulsa. Another welcome addition was the **Gathering Place**, funded by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. This sprawling park opened in 2018 along the Arkansas River near Tulsa's Riverside Drive Arkansas River. The \$465 million park on 66 acres features interactive playgrounds, recreational trails, trails, a boathouse pavilion, and skate park. The Gathering Place has become known as one of the nation's largest and most ambitious public parks ever created with private funds.

The George Kaiser Family Foundation also has transformed the arts and culture landscape in Tulsa, especially in the north Tulsa Arts District and Greenwood. Among the projects it has funded are the Woody Guthrie Center, the Bob Dylan Center, and Guthrie Green. Greenwood is home to the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park, dedicated as a literary landmark in 2018, and Greenwood Rising, a museum devoted to telling the story of historic Greenwood and north Tulsa, including the Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921 and its aftermath. In addition, Tulsa is home to the Philbrook Museum of Art and the Gilcrease Museum.



Fig. 15.11: The Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa. The museum showcases exhibits and beautiful outdoor gardens. It features artwork from many different parts of the world. The Philbrook is one of Tulsa's—and the state's—most important cultural treasures.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Fig. 15.12: The entrance to the original Gilcrease Museum building in Tulsa. The museum features art from across North America and makes an important cultural contribution to the state. Thomas Gilcrease moved his collection of art to Tulsa in 1949. Generations of Oklahomans have enjoyed touring the Gilcrease and viewing its eclectic collections.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

National Weather Service

Oklahoma experiences many violent storms, including tornados. It is part of a larger region in the United States known as Tornado Alley, where these violent storms most frequently occur. Because of its heavy storm activity, Oklahoma is a major hub for meteorological research. The National Weather Center (NWC) and the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) are both located in Norman on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. The NSSL is a world-leading facility in severe thunderstorm and weather radar research.

The National Weather Service uses a special kind of technology known as Doppler Radar. This tracking system can detect the movement of storms. It can also identify the features of storms, which allows experts to predict how bad the storms will be. Doppler Radar helps with weather forecasting and disaster preparation. Both the Doppler system and weather research are vital for making air travel safer—a primary concern of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA ensures the safety of Oklahomans and people across the nation when they are traveling by air.

The NSSL has roots in the National Severe Storms Project of the early 1960s. During that time, engineers and researchers began experimenting with Doppler Radar systems to improve storm detection and tracking. In 1971, they began testing the experimental NSSL Doppler Radar system. Using this radar system, researchers could document and record the entire life cycle of a tornado. The radar system could detect the patterns of how a tornado formed, what researchers called the “Tornado Vortex Signature.” The invention of the NSSL Doppler Radar system led to the nationwide use of Doppler Radar. This technological advancement allowed people to prepare for tornadoes with more advanced notice. Since its first development of Doppler Radar, the NSSL has continued to improve weather radar and provide researchers with a better understanding of how severe storms form and move.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

In the early 1990s, Oklahoma recruited a new labor force from Mexico and Central America to work in its meat-processing and construction industries. The **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, ratified by the US government in 1993, made this wave of new workers possible by including Mexico in a more integrated plan with the United States and Canada. Mexican workers then were provided special visas so they could work legally in Oklahoma and other states.

By the 1990s the value of Oklahoma's agricultural production each year ranged from \$4 to \$5 billion. In 1997 the figure was \$4.1 billion. Of this amount, crops were responsible for \$908 million and livestock and poultry products for \$3.2 billion. Wheat had become by far the main commercial crop, leading hay, cotton, sorghums, peanuts, and soybeans by a large margin. By the late twentieth century Oklahoma usually ranked second, third, or fourth in the nation in winter wheat production. Yet by 2000 only a very small percentage of Oklahomans lived on farms.

Seaboard Foods, one of the largest pork producers and pork processors in the United States, relocated from Minnesota to Guymon, Oklahoma, in the Panhandle in the mid-1990s. State and county officials had offered the company an economic incentive package worth \$21 million to come to Oklahoma. Seaboard Foods recruited workers from other parts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America, particularly Guatemala. Most of its 3,000–4,000 jobs went to non-Oklahomans. The hog farms serving Seaboard Foods are located in Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Colorado, and Iowa. Seaboard Foods sells its products to distributors in international markets including Mexico, China, Japan, and Korea. NAFTA was having an effect on Oklahoma's economy, and a new labor force from Mexico and Central America was growing stronger in the state.

John C. Lopez is an example of a person who achieved economic success in Oklahoma in the wake of NAFTA. He grew up in Arizona and became active in La Raza, a nonpartisan Hispanic civil rights organization established to improve opportunities and reduce poverty and discrimination. The economic arm of La Raza introduced Lopez to the McDonald's Corporation, and he moved to Los Angeles to eventually operate and own four McDonald's restaurants. Then McDonald's approached him about taking over an Oklahoma City meat-processing plant that produced frozen beef patties for McDonald's. Lopez acquired the plant and renamed it Lopez Foods in 1995. Today Lopez Foods is the nation's largest Hispanic-owned meat-processing company. Its partnerships include Dorada Foods in Ponca City, a joint venture of Lopez Foods and Tyson Poultry. Among their operations is a chicken-processing facility. Dorada Foods is one of three suppliers of chicken products to McDonald's in the United States.

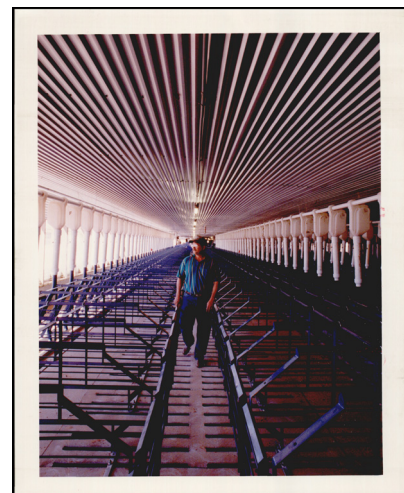


Fig. 15.13: The Seaboard Foods factory before the company brought in its first pigs. The opening of this facility led to important economic development and created many jobs in and around Guymon.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

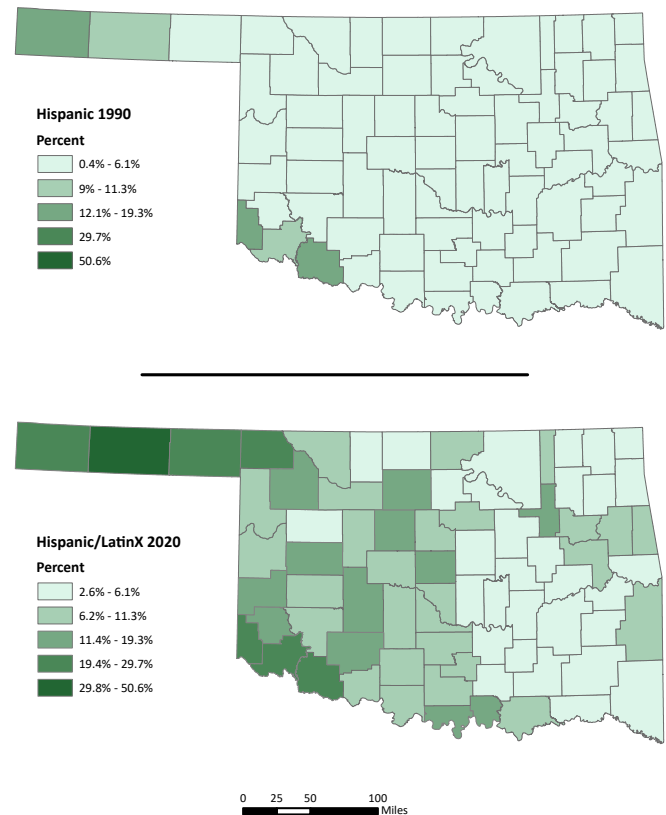
From 1990 to 2010, the Latinx population in Oklahoma increased from 2.7 percent to 9 percent, or 332,000 people. New growth areas included rural areas, particularly in the Oklahoma Panhandle, where Latinos comprised the majority of the population in communities like Guymon. And by 2020, the Hispanic population in Oklahoma increased to 11.9 percent of the general population. Companies hired people for jobs in natural gas drilling, wind energy, feedlots, and meat-processing plants. As a result, service industries, new schools, and banks were established to support these expanding industries and workers.

Concerned about a perceived “illegal invasion,” the Oklahoma state legislature passed an anti-immigration bill in 2007. The bill required employers to check the employment eligibility of all new hires. It also ordered the deportation of undocumented migrants, ended the ability of immigrants to get official government identification cards such as driver’s licenses, and made it harder for undocumented college students to get financial aid in state colleges.

As a result of this legislation, a large portion of the Latinx workforce fled the state. In Tulsa County alone, some 25,000 people left Oklahoma and went to neighboring states such as Arkansas and Missouri. The outmigration included many US citizens. Those who left were concerned about the unfriendly environment in Oklahoma, family separation, and the possibility of deportation. The outmigration of such a significant part of Oklahoma’s workforce posed financial hardship on key sectors of the economy. Construction, hotel and hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries were especially hard hit by the loss of workers.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Dreamers

In 2013, Oklahoma became the fourth state in the United States to allow Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients to reside in the state. “Dreamers,” a specific category of undocumented immigrant under DACA, came to the United States as children. Not all Dreamers are Latinx but many Dreamers in Oklahoma are Latinx. DACA provided eligible Dreamers permission to work and protection from deportation. Dreamers could pay in-state college tuition, receive financial aid, and be eligible for scholarships. Dream Action Oklahoma is a community-based organization that works to empower local immigrants through advocacy and education.



Prepared by Brad Watkins

Map 15.3: Comparing these two maps shows the growth in Latinx population in Oklahoma by county from 1990 to 2020. In 1990, the state had large Latinx populations only in the Panhandle and the southwestern-most counties. By 2020, the population had grown throughout the entire state, but especially in western Oklahoma.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.



Fig. 15.14: Many people, especially those in Latinx communities, have lobbied for the adoption of the DREAM Act. The act would allow a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. In recent years, it has become a focus of the larger political debate over immigration law and policies.

Courtesy of Dream Action Oklahoma.

DACA and the Dream Act

In 2012, President Barack Obama created through executive action the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The purpose of DACA is to protect people who were brought to the United States as children and did not have citizenship or legal residency. The protection lasts for two years at a time.

DACA allows children who come to the United States before their sixteenth birthday to remain in the country. To be eligible for the program, applicants must meet certain other requirements. One is that they must prove that they have lived in the United States since the time when they first came to the nation. They also must be students. The law does not provide a pathway to citizenship and it does not grant citizenship. Instead, it postpones removal. DACA recipients can still apply for citizenship though. The department of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) handles DACA applications.

The largest number of people shielded by DACA are from Mexico, while others are from Asia, Central or South America, and the Caribbean. In some states DACA recipients can work legally and obtain a driver's license. DACA recipients can also qualify for in-state tuition, grants, and loans, depending on the state. Some states allow DACA recipients to qualify for state-supported health insurance. Since 2020 over six thousand DACA recipients have lived in Oklahoma.

While DACA has helped people, there has been pushback. If USCIS officials denied someone DACA protections, they would not turn their case over to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As a result, people who applied for DACA protections did not have to worry about ICE coming to deport them. There were only a few exceptions to this protection. One was if there were signs that the DACA applicant was committing fraud. Another was if the person posed a national security threat. The last was if the individual was a threat to public safety.

Some people have thought that all people denied under DACA should have their information given to ICE. On top of this, DACA has always been a source of conflict between Democrats and Republicans. President Donald Trump's administration terminated DACA on September 7, 2015. Five years later, the US Supreme Court ruled 5–4 that terminating DACA violated the Administrative Procedure Act. According to the Court, the termination of DACA had interfered with the ability of the Department of Homeland Security to make and issue regulations.

USCIS still accepts and processes renewals for DACA. But they do not process new DACA applications filed after July 18, 2021. This policy was due to a court order from the US District Court for the Southern District of Texas. On July 16, 2021, the court ruled in *State of Texas, et al., v. United States of America, et al.* that DACA was illegal. The court found that DACA violated the Administrative Procedure Act. It also found that the executive branch violated the US Constitution.

The DREAM Act had a similar intent to that of DACA. Republican senator Orrin G. Hatch of Utah first introduced the law in 2001. Two decades later, Senators Lindsey Graham and Dick Durbin reintroduced the DREAM Act in 2021. The policy would have granted residency to immigrants who had lived in the United States for five years before the passing of the bill. Immigrants would have to have entered the United States as a minor. There were specific educational requirements. These included completing a degree program or enlisting in the military. The DREAM Act passed the House of Representatives in 2021. All five of Oklahoma's Representatives voted against it, however. It did not then pass the Senate, losing in that chamber by only five votes. Even though the DREAM Act did not become law, many remain hopeful that the act will become law in the future.

President Barack Obama signed DACA as an executive order in 2013 to address the challenges facing Dreamers. In Oklahoma, nearly 10,000 individuals were eligible. Approximately 7,000 participated in the program. It is also important to keep in mind that many Latinx in Oklahoma were and are US citizens. Others are holders of Permanent Resident Cards, known informally as Green Cards, which allow a person to live and work permanently in the United States or to have visas (a document or mark in a passport allowing a person to enter or leave a particular country).

Consulates in Oklahoma

Government-to-government relationships are essential to a thriving economy in Oklahoma. In 2017 Guatemala established its first consulate (official diplomatic headquarters) in Oklahoma due to the state's central location and access to urban areas in neighboring states. Consulate services include the acquisition or renewal of passports and documentation for dual nationality of children of Guatemalans born in the United States. The Guatemalan consulate in Oklahoma also helps Guatemalan nationals with other issues, such as promoting Guatemalan culture, tourism, and commercial relations with Oklahoma. Before the Guatemalan consulate was established in Oklahoma, Guatemalans living in Oklahoma had to travel to consulates in Texas and Colorado, and staff members from those consulates would travel to Oklahoma City once a year to assist Guatemalan citizens.

More recently, the Mexican consulate opened in Oklahoma City in 2023. Previously Mexican nationals had to travel to Arkansas to receive consular assistance for passports and visa processing. In addition to providing services for Mexicans, the consulate serves as a resource for Oklahomans seeking information on travel to Mexico, business opportunities, and cultural exchanges. "Today is the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise to the Mexican community in Oklahoma," Governor Stitt said during the opening ceremony of the Mexican consulate. "I am proud that we kept our commitment to establish a Mexican consulate in Oklahoma and look forward to the positive impact it will have for Oklahomans and our state." Today Oklahoma is home to fourteen consulates representing nations from around the world.



Latinx students represent the majority of students, almost 60 percent, in Oklahoma City public schools. Clearly, these young people are the fastest-growing demographic since the 2010s. The Oklahoma City Public Schools mariachi program engages students, parents, and communities in mariachi music (a style of traditional Mexican music) and other Hispanic cultural traditions. Longtime civic leader and performer Anita Martinez assembled the popular mariachi band Anita y Los Viejos. The band performed throughout the state and represented Oklahoma at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. The Anita Martinez Mariachi Festival, held annually in Oklahoma City, features mariachi bands, singers, and dancers.

Fig. 15.15: A dancer performing at the Fiestas de las Americas, an annual celebration of Latinx culture. The festival started in 2006, the year this photograph was taken. The event happens in Oklahoma City on Historic Capitol Hill every September as part of Hispanic Heritage Month. The event features art displays, music, and dancing.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Tribal Gaming and Casinos

As of 2024, Oklahoma has the second-largest Native American population among US states. Of the state's nearly 4 million people, Native Americans in Oklahoma make up around 13 percent of the population, or a little over 500,000 people. The Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975 and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 (discussed in Chapter 13) still shaped and increased expressions of tribal sovereignty. Tribal gaming, one important expression of tribal sovereignty, continued to grow.

Tribal Gaming

In the twentieth century, many tribes in the United States looked for ways to deal with unemployment. They also wanted to find ways to increase tribal revenue and promote economic development. As a way to achieve these goals, Native tribes began experimenting with running gambling houses and casinos.

The Mashantucket Pequot Tribe of Connecticut was the first Indigenous nation in the United States to run a casino. In 1986 the tribe founded the gaming enterprise as a bingo hall. It then became the Foxwoods Resort Casino. Today it is the most profitable casino in the world. The casino conducts around \$1.6 billion in business every year.

As of 2021, Native nations operated a total of 514 casinos throughout the United States. In 2022, tribal gaming brought in a record \$40.9 billion in Gross Gaming Revenue, which is the total amount people wager when gambling at the casino minus how much they win. Under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 (IGRA), tribes must use casino profits for the benefit of the tribe and its members. Tribes often use this money to fund social services, education, and other community-based programs.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Oklahoma tribes actively lobbied for casino gaming. In 2004, citizens of Oklahoma approved a referendum requiring Native nations that signed gaming compacts with the State of Oklahoma to pay a fee of 4–6 percent of their gaming revenue to the state of Oklahoma. Today, 35 Native nations in Oklahoma collectively operate more than 130 gaming facilities and 20 hotels or resorts. The largest casino in Oklahoma, and one of the largest in the United States, is owned and operated by the Chickasaw Nation. Called the WinStar World Casino and Resort, it is located in Thackerville, near the Oklahoma–Texas state line. Gross revenue paid to the state from tribal casinos increased from \$2.5 million in 2005 to \$118 million in 2010. A large portion of this revenue—88 percent—went to help finance Oklahoma's educational system. Native-owned racetracks include Remington Park Racing and Casino in Oklahoma City, operated by the Chickasaw Nation, and Cherokee Casino Will Rogers Downs in Claremore, operated by the Cherokee Nation.



Fig. 15.16: Remington Park is a horseracing track in Oklahoma City. It was built in 1988 by Edward J. DeBartolo, Sr. The casino was added in 2005. Four years later, a subsidiary of the Chickasaw Nation purchased Remington Park and made further improvements.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

In 2020, tribal gaming in Oklahoma generated over \$2 billion in revenue. Under the state-tribal gaming compacts, Native nations with gaming enterprises in Oklahoma paid \$123.6 million or 6 percent of that revenue to the state of Oklahoma. In 2024, tribal revenue from Class III games and table games was approximately \$3.5 billion, of which tribes paid roughly \$210 billion to the state. Under the state-tribal compact, tribes pay monthly exclusivity fees from Class III game revenues based on a sliding scale. State revenue from tribal gaming continues to grow, and that revenue, in turn, has become an important source of funding for both state and tribal programs. Under IGRA, tribal gaming proceeds must benefit Native nations and their members. Tribal business enterprises including gaming have provided tribal nations and their citizens with programs such as elder care, health care services, and college scholarships.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

In 1989, the enabling legislation for the creation of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC, compelled the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, to consult Native nations about the repatriation, or return, of culturally identifiable human remains, funerary objects, and certain sacred and ceremonial materials to Native nations. One year later, in 1990, Congress passed the **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)**. The act expanded and extended NMAI's requests to all publicly funded museums and repositories in the United States. NAGPRA required museums to share their cultural inventory information with federally recognized tribes and also required museums to consult with tribes upon their request.

As a staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund, Walter R. Echo-Hawk, a member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, worked with the Committee on Indian Affairs to draft NAGPRA legislation on behalf of Native clients. He participated in the implementation of NAGPRA by representing tribes in NAGPRA claims for repatriation and reburial of Native American ancestors. "Indigenous rights are never freely given," Echo-Hawk said. "They must be demanded, wrested away, then vigilantly protected. That is the essence of freedom."

NAGPRA is a federal law that provides for the repatriation and disposition of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. By making NAGPRA a federal law, Congress recognized that human remains of any ancestry "must at all times be treated with dignity and respect." Congress noted that human remains and other cultural items removed from federal or tribal lands belong to direct descendants, Native nations, or Native Hawaiian organizations. After passing the law, Congress worked to encourage an ongoing dialogue between tribal nations and museums to promote greater understanding between them.

The Oklahoma City Bombing and the Oklahoma Standard

UNIT 4

Conclusion

The Oklahoma City bombing was devastating. In its aftermath, Oklahomans found ways to move forward. They learned from what happened and used their experiences to reach out to others who suffered tragedy. The Oklahoma Standard continues to be a source of strength, pride, and hope for many Oklahomans in difficult times. The bombing also gave an added sense of meaning to revitalization efforts in downtown Oklahoma City. By the early twenty-first century, Oklahoma City was becoming a thriving urban center. At the same time, Indigenous nations expanded businesses, health care facilities, and tribal government. They benefited financially from the legalization of casinos on Indigenous land. In the early twenty-first century Oklahoma's population continued to grow more diverse. The economy also diversified even though reliance on oil persisted.

As the first two decades of the twenty-first century unfolded, Oklahomans grappled with a range of new concerns even as they embraced new opportunities for growth. The final chapter explores the challenges modern-day Oklahomans continue to confront. It also examines Oklahoma's place in a rapidly changing world. In this last chapter, we will see the growth of Indigenous power and economic influence. We will see Oklahomans confronting difficult issues like incarceration, reproductive rights, and the COVID-19 pandemic. And what we hope is that you will also see your story, your place in Oklahoma, and your connection to the ongoing process of making, creating, and shaping Oklahoma.

Short Answer Questions

- 1 Explain what the Oklahoma Standard means in your own words.
- 2 Identify two consequences of the Oklahoma City bombing.
- 3 Identify three improvements that MAPS provided for Oklahoma City.
- 4 How did outmigration of Latinx families impact Oklahoma?
- 5 How has tribal gaming benefitted some tribal communities in Oklahoma?

Short Response Questions

- 1 Describe three elements of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and explain what they symbolize.
- 2 Compare and contrast improvements made in Oklahoma City as a result of the MAPS program to the improvements made in Tulsa as a result of Vision 2025.