

Testimony of Dr. Olivia J. Hooker
before the United States House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights
Tulsa Greenwood Riot Accountability Act of 2007
April 24, 2007 9:00 am

My name is Dr. Olivia J. Hooker, and I currently reside in the State of New York. I was born on February 12, 1915, and I am a survivor of what is known as the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, but what was really a massacre of the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, then called the "Black Wall Street."

My parents Samuel and Anita Hooker came to Tulsa from Holmes County Mississippi. At the time of the Riot, I lived on Independence Street in the Greenwood District of Tulsa with my parents and four siblings.

At the time of the riot, my parents owned a home on Independence Street valued at \$10,000 and a clothing store at 123 North Greenwood Avenue that was one of the most prominent stores in Greenwood. My home was severely damaged but not destroyed in the riot, however, the mob completely destroyed my parents' business, which was described as "a total loss."

Furnishings valued at \$3000 were either stolen or deliberately smashed or destroyed. Jewelry valued at \$1000 furs valued at \$1000 and silver valued at \$500 were also stolen. The estimated total loss of goods displayed at the store was \$100,000. That makes a total loss of \$104,000 to our parents during that riot.

My parents were distraught over the loss of the many beautiful things they had purchased with their hard-earned money. The mobs hacked up our furniture with axes and set fire to my grandmother's bed and sewing machine. I still remember the sound of gunfire raining down on my home and that the mob burned all my doll's clothes. After the riot, my mother saved all the artillery shells that mobsters had put in all of our dresser drawers.

As a child, I had believed every word of the Constitution, but after the riots happened, I realized that the Constitution did not include me.

After the Tulsa violence, my mother took our family to Topeka, Kansas, while my father remained in Tulsa to try to restore his bombed out business. My father filed a lawsuit against the insurance company for the value of the destroyed property, but a judge threw the case out in 1926 or 1927.

Later, we moved to Columbus, Ohio, where my sisters and I graduated from Ohio State University. After teaching third grade for seven years, I enlisted in the United States Coast Guard, becoming the first African American woman to enlist and go on active duty in the Coast Guard, then a part of the U.S. Navy during World War II. I earned an M.A. from Columbia University Teachers College on the GI Bill, and a Ph.d Degree at the University of Rochester where I was one of two black female students. I taught in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Fordham University, retiring as Associate Professor in 1985.

We did go on with our lives after the riot but the memories of what happened to us then will never go away. The injustices we suffered the two days of the riot and the injustices we suffered after the riot when insurance companies failed to pay riot victims for their losses and when court officials summarily threw out our riot victims cases are a blot on Tulsa's image that have not been erased to today.