

**OLIVIA  
JULIETTE  
HOOKER  
1915-2018**



**TIRELESS  
VOICE  
FOR  
JUSTICE**

On May 31, 1921, Greenwood District, a thriving Tulsa community known as “Black Wall Street”, was burned to the ground by whites who believed that a black teen had assaulted a white girl in a downtown elevator. Six-year-old Olivia Hooker, who was born in Muskogee in 1915, hid under the kitchen table with her three siblings as her family home was destroyed. “They took an ax to my sister Irene’s beloved piano and even set fire to my doll’s clothes.”

The massacre (it would be later renamed) left 300 people dead and 9,000 homeless. Afterwards the Hooker family cashed a bond they had hidden and moved to Columbus, Ohio. "Our parents tried to teach us not to spend time agonizing over the past," Olivia said. "They encouraged us to look forward and think how we could make things better."

Hooker completed her Bachelor’s degree at Ohio State University in 1937 and became a teacher. While at OSU, her sorority advocated for minority women to be admitted to the Navy, after she was rejected twice on “technicalities.” In defiance, she joined the Coast Guard, becoming the first black woman to enlist in the Women’s Reserve. Hooker was assigned to the Boston Separation Center, where she typed paperwork and discharges. After the women’s reserve was disbanded in 1946, she typed her own discharge papers!

Hooker used her GI Bill benefits to earn a Master’s degree in psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1947. She took a job in a women’s correctional facility in upstate New York, where many inmates were diagnosed with severe learning disabilities. Hooker felt they were capable of getting jobs so she re-evaluated them by “approaching them with an open mind.”

In 1961, she received her Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Rochester. From 1963 to 1985, she was a professor at Fordham University. Her areas of expertise included people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Hooker continued her work at the Fred Keller School in Yonkers until she retired at age 87.

In 1997, Hooker founded the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, in hopes of demanding reparation for survivors. In 2003, they filed a civil rights lawsuit against Tulsa and Oklahoma. The United States Supreme Court dismissed the lawsuit without comment in 2005.

Dr. Olivia Hooker received the American Psychological Association’s Presidential Citation in 2011 for her efforts to spread the massacre’s story. In 2015, two Coast Guard training facilities at Staten Island and Washington DC were named in her honor and President Obama praised her at the Coast Guard Academy commencement as a “tireless voice for justice and equality.”

In November, 2018, she was honored in a Google Doodle for Veterans Day. She died at age 103 later that month in White Plains, New York. From her crusade to publicize the “catastrophe” of the Tulsa Race Massacre to her ground-breaking service in the Coast Guard to her pioneering career as a psychologist, Dr. Olivia Hooker’s strength and spirit has enriched our society.