



Olivia Hooker's story is a teaser for a pilgrimage being planned by the Diocese of Nebraska for 2026 to see and learn about the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and the Trail of Tears.

Hooker was living in Tulsa when the Greenwood District, also known as Black Wall Street, was destroyed by Ku Klux Klan members and others. 300 people were killed and 10,000 were left homeless. When rioters ransacked their home, Olivia and her siblings hid under a table covered with a tablecloth. In 2018, she recounted, “It was a horrifying thing for a little girl who’s only six years old, trying to remember to keep quiet so they wouldn’t know we were there.”

Hooker earned a bachelor’s degree from Ohio State University and became an elementary school teacher. After being denied admission to the U. S. Navy’s WAVES division in 1945 due to her race, she became the first Black woman to enter the U. S. Coast Guard. In 1946, the Women’s Reserve program was disbanded, and Hooker used the G.I. Bill to complete a master’s degree from Columbia University in psychological services.

She later earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Rochester and served as a professor of psychology at Fordham University, where her research focused on child psychology and children with developmental disabilities. She received many honors for her career as a psychologist, teacher, researcher, and mentor, and for her professional service. Hooker died in 2018 at the age of 103.