



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shirley L. Huntley

3/24/2010: Resolution Honoring Dr. Olivia Hooker

SHIRLEY L. HUNTLEY March 23, 2010

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On Wednesday, March 24th, the New York State Senate passed a Legislative Resolution honoring Dr. Olivia Hooker, a psychologist and former college professor at Fordham University who resides in Greenburgh, New York. Dr. Hooker, who became the first black woman to enlist in the United States Coast Guard during World War II, is a survivor of the Tulsa Riot of 1921. Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins introduced the resolution in recognition of Dr. Hooker's outstanding achievements and contributions to the advancement of women and civil rights.

The tragic events of the week of May 31, 1921, later known as the Tulsa race riots, resulted in the deaths of more than three hundred people - some buried in mass graves, and the burning of more than one thousand black homes and businesses. Although one of the bloodiest altercations in the history of U.S. race relations -- the death toll surpassed the totals of the Watts riot, the Detroit riot, the Washington riot and the Los Angeles riot combined -- these events have largely been omitted from most accounts of history. But, Dr. Hooker continues to recount her experience, educating our communities and serving as a role model for future civil rights activists. In 1997, Dr. Hooker and other survivors helped found the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, which drafted recommendations for restitution, took their case to the Oklahoma State Legislature and to Capitol Hill where she and others testified before the United States Congress and initiated a federal lawsuit which was argued by Harvard law professor and civil rights lawyer Charles J. Ogletree, and became the subject of a recent documentary, "Before They Die."

After graduating from Ohio State University, Dr. Hooker went on to become the first black woman to serve in the United States Coast Guard. Following her time in the military, she earned a Master's Degree in psychology from Teachers College at Columbia University and a Doctorate in psychology from the University of Rochester. After a long and accomplished career as a Fordham University professor, she worked as a psychologist at the Fred Keller School in Yonkers until 2002.

"As we continue to celebrate Women's History Month, it is fitting to honor Dr. Olivia Hooker for her outstanding contributions to the women's rights and civil rights movements, service to the United States and tireless advocacy for the victims of the Tulsa race riots," said Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins arranged for a group of New York State Senate interns to have the opportunity to hear Dr. Hooker speak about her experiences. "Learn everything you

can,” Dr. Hooker told the student interns. “You never know which experiences or people will teach you the most in your life, but it is this knowledge that will help you to overcome adversity. Each of us must be willing to take risks in our lives, especially to help others. Each action that we take for others can serve as a beacon for future generations.”