

Biden approves Illinois monument

Site of 1908 race riot now protected by designation

Nandita Bose and Trevor Hunnicutt
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – President Joe Biden on Friday designated a national monument to commemorate a 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois, that left several people dead, hundreds injured and destroyed dozens of Black-owned businesses and homes.

In August 1908, mobs of white residents tore through Illinois' capital city under the pretext of meting out judgment against two jailed Black men. After authorities secretly moved the prisoners to another lockup miles away, the mob took out its anger on the city's Black population.

The riot fueled the formation of the NAACP, an influential civil rights organization, in 1909.

A ceremony held on Friday in the Oval Office featured civil rights leaders and community leaders from Springfield, which is also President Abraham Lincoln's hometown.

"We've made a lot of progress but we can't never stop," Biden said during the event, adding that it was important for people to remember what had happened.

The move came amid efforts, Biden said, to "erase" the country's history, which serves as a warning to Americans about the risks "if we don't fight for this democracy." Books dealing with race issues have been a target for book bans sought by conservative advocacy groups.

"The new national monument will tell the story of a horrific attack by a white mob on a Black community that was representative of the racism, intimidation, and violence that Black Americans experienced across the country," the White House said in a statement.

The event comes a few weeks after the fatal July shooting of Sonya Massey, a 36-year-old Black woman, by a white sheriff's deputy in her Springfield home after she called 911 for help.

Massey's death has reignited the de-



Troops march after an August 1908 race riot in Springfield, Ill., that left several people dead, hundreds injured and destroyed dozens of Black-owned businesses and homes. ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

"The new national monument will tell the story of a horrific attack by a white mob on a Black community that was representative of the racism, intimidation, and violence that Black Americans experienced across the country."

White House statement

bate over police brutality against Black Americans four years after the murder of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis, which led to protests over racial inequality.



President Joe Biden is applauded after signing a proclamation to designate the site of the 1908 Springfield, Ill., race riot as a national monument in the Oval Office of the White House on Friday. ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES