

Police likely took part in 1921 Tulsa massacre

Justice Department says there are 'credible reports'

Jasper Ward

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WASHINGTON – Some law enforcement members participated in arson and murders that occurred during the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, according to a U.S. Department of Justice report released Friday.

The report, which was released in the final days of President Joe Biden's administration, follows decades of advocacy efforts from massacre survivors, descendants and civil rights groups.

Efforts to rebuild the historic community have been underway for years but advocates have continued to seek justice – including reparations and an official federal review. The DOJ's civil rights division launched the review and evaluation last September into the massacre, where white attackers killed as many as 300 people, mostly Black residents, living in Tulsa's prosperous Greenwood neighborhood.



Viola Fletcher and Hughes Van survived the massacre of Tulsa's black community in 1921.

CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS FILE

But despite the gravity of the findings, the DOJ said "no avenue of prosecution now exists for crimes that occurred," citing the expiration of relevant statutes of limitations and the youngest potential defendants being more than 115 years old.

The report found law enforcement officers, both from the Tulsa Police and the National Guard, "disarmed Black residents, confiscated their weapons and detained many in makeshift camps under armed guard."

"In addition, there are credible reports that at least some law enforcement officers did more than arrest and detain Black men; some participated in murder, arson and looting," the report said.

It pointed to witness testimony.

An officer, according to the report, also "captured" six Black men in Greenwood "roped them together in single file, and led them running behind his motorcycle to detention at Convention Hall."

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