



Vivian Malone Jones

July 15, 1942 - October 13, 2005

Atlanta, Georgia

Vivian Juanita Malone Jones, who entered the University of Alabama past a governor's blockade and became its first Black graduate, died in an Atlanta hospital on October 13, 2005, following a stroke. She was sixty-three.

She was born on July 15, 1942, in Mobile, Alabama, the fourth of eight children. Both of her parents worked at Brookley Air Force Base and took part in local civil rights efforts, and they made sure their children went to college. She was a member of the National Honor Society at Central High School and earned a bachelor's degree in business education from Alabama A&M University. She wanted an accredited degree in accounting, which A&M did not then offer, so she applied to the University of Alabama. Two white men who said they represented the state came to her family's home to warn them of retaliation. She kept going. Autherine Lucy's earlier attempt to integrate the university, she later said, had left "an indelible impression on me ... I figured if she could do it, I could do it."

With the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, she and James Hood won a federal court order from Judge Harlan Hobart Grooms. On June 11, 1963, they arrived in Tuscaloosa with Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and federal marshals to find Governor George Wallace blocking the door of Foster Auditorium. Katzenbach took her to her dormitory; when she went down to the dining room for lunch, several white students sat with her. Later that day President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard, Wallace stepped aside, and she registered as a junior.

That November several bombs went off near campus, one about 130 yards from her dormitory room. She stayed. In 1965 she received a bachelor's degree in business management with a B-plus average.

No employer in Alabama offered her a job. She joined the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice as a research analyst and attended the signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. In 1977 she became executive director of the Voter Education Project, and she later directed civil rights and urban affairs, and then environmental justice, at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency until she retired in 1996. That October the George Wallace Family Foundation gave her its first Lurleen B. Wallace Award of Courage. The night before, she had met Wallace privately for the first time since their confrontation; she said he apologized and that she had already forgiven him.

Services

Died in Atlanta, GA, October 13, 2005, aged 63. Portrait: Photograph by Yoichi Okamoto, White House photographer, at the signing of the Voting Rights Act, August 6, 1965 (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H274

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