

Carton 10:31 THE BROTHERHOOD of SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Canson, Virna

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Obituaries

Virna Canson, 81, former NAACP regional director

By Edgar Sanchez
BEE STAFF WRITER

Virna Canson, a tireless civil rights worker who was western regional director of the NAACP for 14 years, died Monday in Sacramento. She was 81.

Mrs. Canson had called Sacramento her home since 1940. But, while serving as the NAACP's regional director from 1974 to 1988, she lived part time in an Oakland condominium from which she commuted to her office in San Francisco.

In the post, she led 30,000 members in nine states from Alaska to California, Idaho to Hawaii.

"My mother knew no distinction of color," said her daughter, Faythe Canson of Sacramento. "She knew that human rights, above all, were most important."

"I'll remember her as a role model, a pioneer, an all-around excellent woman and a leader."

Robbin Ware, former president of the Sacramento branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said Mrs. Canson "will surely be missed."

"She was a giant for the advocacy of civil and human rights," he said.

A native of Oklahoma, Mrs. Canson was a home economics major at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, starting in 1938. On that campus she met a Californian, Clarence B. Canson, a tailoring major, and they were wed in 1940.

The young couple returned to Mr. Canson's home in Sacramento, where he eventually became a lawyer.

In 1953, Mrs. Canson became the manager of the NAACP's local credit union. For a dozen years she ran the credit union, making credit available to African Americans at the lowest possible interest rates, while the union's assets grew from \$35,000 to \$400,000.

In the mid-1960s, she left the NAACP to work for the state in a similar position - as a credit union specialist in which she taught poor people better money management.

Mrs. Canson returned to the NAACP in 1967 and worked for the national office as a field di-



Sacramento Bee file

One former NAACP official called Virna Canson of Sacramento "a giant for the advocacy of civil and human rights."

rector and legislative advocate. Seven years later Mrs. Canson became the San Francisco-based regional director.

Her duties included responding to the needs of NAACP branches in the nine states.

One of her first challenges was in San Francisco, where the police had begun stopping and questioning hundreds of African American men in connection with a series of random murders dubbed the "Zebra killings." The slayings got their name from the "Zebra" radio channel set up by police to discuss the case.

Mrs. Canson and the NAACP successfully pursued a motion that enjoined the city from questioning more African American men.

Mrs. Canson was preceded in death by her husband.

Besides her daughter Faythe, survivors include her son, Clarence B. Canson Jr. of El Sobrante; a brother, William A. Dobson of Hill City, Kan.; and two grandchildren.

Friends are invited to a public viewing from 1 to 8 p.m. Monday at Thompson's Rose Chapel, 3601 Fifth Ave., Sacramento. Funeral services will be at 1 p.m. Tuesday at Faith Community United Church of Christ-Congregational, 7486 Center Parkway. Interment will follow at Odd Fellows Lawn on Riverside Boulevard.

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The Bee's Edgar Sanchez can be reached at (916) 321-1132 or esanchez@sacbee.com.

6/13/02

Art 502

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VIRNA CANSON

(916) 442-8925

Redwood, OR 514 town
near 2500
+ 800 /

- ✓ Please tell me about your family background? When/where born, parents, schooling, how came to Calif.
- ✓ How did you get involved with the NAACP? When/how did you become Regional Director? What do you think was your main contribution to the NAACP? (credit union?)
- ✓ How did you meet CL Dellums? What was his position in the NAACP? Why was he sometimes referred to as the Chairman? Of what?

11 pm
Lange

What was your first impression of him?

What projects did you work on together? Did you work together on the FEP? How did you like working with him? How would describe his style of working with people?

- ✓ What would you say were his strengths and weaknesses as an organizer?
- ✓ What were CL's major accomplishments?
- ✓ What stands out in your mind about him as a person?
- ✓ How were you affected by working with him over X years?

Lee Conroe - volunteer
1210 900
Oak 94683
635-3342

- ✓ Who else would you suggest I interview about CL?

new contact

Virna made arrangements
for Remond to get
NAACP Regional NAACP
Archives

Bill Lee
Sachs observer
Albuquerque Blvd
Blk New York
Virna Redwood
Redwood paper

Leonard
Carter's son
wrote "the plane"
book/article

Find

Kenn Carter

NAACP

worked with him
in regional 74

Oliver Jones
6834 Telegraph Ave
Oak 94509
650 655-7786

suggests I interview
Bill Pollard, dir of
Comm relations in
National AFL-CIO

12074 Flint Rock Trail
Marina Valley, CA 92057
(909) 242-0743



[Click Here to View Video Profile of Virna Canson](#)

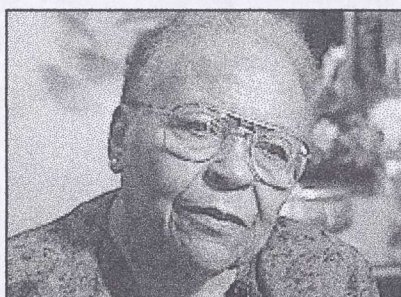
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Profiles of African-American Achievers: Virna Canson

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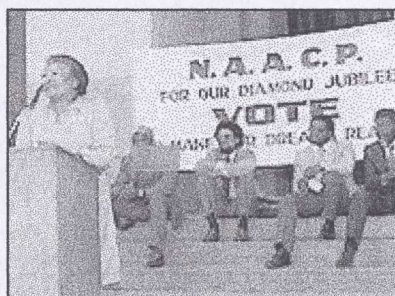
There are some people who step out into the world with the intent of changing it for the better. Virna Canson is one of those people.

Virna's involvement in the struggle for equal rights started not long after she came to Sacramento from Oklahoma in 1940.

"Californians generally had a 'Well here comes another one of those southerners.' Not only did the white Californians have that

attitude, but some of the black Californians," she said. Virna couldn't sit back and accept that. She wanted to be a role model for her children and was convinced her new neighbors had something to learn. "So we had to sort of indicate to them that we were not savages coming from the South," she said.

Virna dove into the community, becoming a soldier for equal rights. She served in the local and regional offices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She occupied a number of positions of responsibility, including Legislative Advocate and West Coast Regional Director



One of the accomplishments she is most proud of was helping create and manage the NAACP Credit Union. "Do you realize black people had difficulty getting loans from the banks?" she said. Providing a financial boost helped many blacks move into the business world and take their place in the economic mainstream.



Virna notes there is still a long road to travel. "I think that blacks can progress in the area of economics," said said. "I don't think they have even a toehold as they say."

There have been struggles, but when Virna looks back, she's overcome by a sense of accomplishment. "I have seen immense progress. And I am very proud of Sacramento,

<http://www.news10.net/news-special/achievers/canson.htm>

CH 10 interview 2002

it is my home. A home shaped in part by Virna Canson