

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Jesse L. Jackson

PERSON

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

Alternative Names: Reverend Jesse L. Jackson; Jesse Jackson, Sr.

Life Dates: October 8, 1941-

Place of Birth: Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Residence: Chicago, Illinois

Work: Chicago, Illinois

Occupations: Civil Rights Leader

Biographical Note

Prominent civil rights activist and political leader Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr. was born Jesse Louis Burns on October 8, 1941 in Greenville, South Carolina to Helen Jackson and Noah Robinson. His mother later remarried Charles Henry Jackson, who formally adopted Jackson and his brother Charles. Jackson received his high school diploma from Sterling High School in Greenville, and in 1959, he received an athletic scholarship to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. After his first year, Jackson then transferred to North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, North Carolina.

At North Carolina A&T, Jackson continued to excel in sports. He was an honor student and president of his student body. On December 31, 1962, Jackson married college classmate, Jacqueline Lavinia Brown, in Greenville. Returning to North Carolina A&T, he became involved in the Civil Rights Movement joining the Greensboro chapter of the Council on Racial Equality (CORE). In 1963, Jackson helped to organize several sit-ins, desegregating local restaurants and theaters in Greensboro. Jackson was chosen as field director of CORE's southeastern operations, and president of the North Carolina Intercollegiate Council on Human Rights. In 1964, he also served as a delegate at the Young Democrats National Convention. In the same year, Jackson graduated from North Carolina A&T with a B.S. degree in sociology. He then received a Rockefeller grant to begin his postgraduate studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1965, Jackson left the seminary to join Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to march in Selma, Alabama. At this time,

Jackson became an ordained minister, although he had not returned to the seminary. In 1966, Dr. King appointed Jackson to SCLC's Chicago economic program, Operation Breadbasket. The goal of Operation Breadbasket was to foster the economy of African American business owners and provide employment growth for African American workers. On December 25, 1971, Operation Breadbasket was renamed Operation PUSH - People United to Serve Humanity.

Over the next decade, Jackson continued his involvement with local, national, and international politics. In 1983, Jackson negotiated the release of war prisoner, U.S. pilot Robert Goodman, in Syria. In 1984 and 1988, Jackson ran for President of the United States. As a Democratic candidate, he garnered massive support and exceeded expectations for the number of delegates received. Jackson's electoral run also helped to register two million new voters.

Jackson moved to Washington, D.C. in 1989. At that time, the Washington City Council created two positions of shadow senator to lobby for the statehood of Washington, D.C. in the U.S. Congress. Jackson won one of the Senate seats, his first elected position.

In 1991, Jackson gained international acclaim again when he negotiated for the release of hundreds of foreign nationals in Kuwait under the regime of Saddam Hussein. In that same year, his likeness was put on a United States Post Office pictorial postal cancellation. Jackson is the second living person to ever receive such an honor. President Bill Clinton then appointed Jackson in 1997 as a special envoy for democracy in Kenya, later awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in March 2000. Jackson hosted the CNN television program Both Sides With Jesse Jackson from 1992 to 2000. He has written numerous columns and authored/co-authored several books including Keep Hope Alive (1989) and It's About The Money (1999).

Jackson and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition have organized numerous events over the years that bring attention to problems facing all Americans including economic advancement, workers rights, labor conditions, voter registration, education, and racial profiling. He has been awarded over forty honorary degrees, received the NAACP Springarn Award, and been listed as one of the top ten most respected Americans. In 2000, Jackson received an honorary Masters degree from his former school, Chicago Theological Seminary. The seminary recognized Jackson's countless years of civic service to the American community.

In 2003, Jackson created the Wall Street Project. This project aims to build economic opportunities and advancements of African Americans influencing corporate America companies to increase economic growth and opportunity with minority communities and businesses. In 2004, Jackson became a radio host for the nationally syndicated radio talk show entitled, Keep Hope Alive.

Jackson and his wife, Jacqueline, currently divide their residency between Chicago, Illinois and Washington, D.C. They have five children, Santita Jackson, U.S. Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., Jonathan Jackson, Yusef Jackson, and Jacqueline L. Jackson.

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