



Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr.,

## Biography

(1941-)

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Founder & President of  
Rainbow PUSH Coalition

The Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr., founder and president of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, is one of America's foremost civil rights, religious and political figures. Over the past forty years, he has played a pivotal role in virtually every movement for empowerment, peace, civil rights, gender

equality, and economic and social justice. On August 9, 2000, President Bill Clinton awarded Reverend Jackson the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Reverend Jackson has been called the "Conscience of the Nation" and "the Great Unifier," challenging America to be inclusive and to establish just and humane priorities for the benefit of all. He is known for bringing people together on common ground across lines of race, culture, class, gender and belief.

Born on October 8, 1941 in Greenville, South Carolina, Jesse Jackson graduated from the public schools in Greenville and then enrolled in the University of Illinois on a football scholarship. He later transferred to North Carolina A&T State University and graduated in 1964. He began his theological studies at Chicago Theological Seminary but deferred his studies when he began working full-time in the Civil Rights Movement with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was ordained on June 30, 1968 by Rev. Clay Evans and received his earned Master of Divinity degree from Chicago Theological Seminary in 2000.

For his work in human and civil rights and nonviolent social change, Reverend Jackson has received more than 40 honorary doctorate degrees and frequently lectures at major colleges and universities including Howard, Yale, Princeton, Morehouse, Harvard, Columbia, Stanford and Hampton. He was made an Honorary Fellow of Regents Park College at Oxford University in the UK in November 2007, and received an Honorary Fellowship from Edge Hill University in Liverpool, England. In March 2010, Reverend Jackson was inducted into England's prestigious

Cambridge Union Society. In April 2010, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

In October 1997, Reverend Jackson was appointed by President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as “Special Envoy of the President and Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa”. In this official position, Reverend Jackson traveled to several countries on the African continent and met with such national leaders as President Nelson Mandela of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Daniel T. Arap Moi of Kenya, and President Frederick J.T. Chiluba of Zambia.

Reverend Jackson began his activism as a student in the summer of 1960 seeking to desegregate the local public library in Greenville and then as a leader in the sit-in movement. In 1965, he became a full-time organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He was soon appointed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to direct the Operation Breadbasket program. In December of 1971, Reverend Jackson founded Operation PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) in Chicago, IL. The goals of Operation PUSH were economic empowerment and expanding educational, business and employment opportunities for the disadvantaged and people of color.

In 1984, Reverend Jackson founded the National Rainbow Coalition, a social justice organization based in Washington, D.C devoted to political empowerment, education and changing public policy. In September of 1996, the Rainbow Coalition and Operation PUSH merged to form the Rainbow PUSH Coalition to continue the work of both organizations and to maximize resources. Long before national health care, a war on drugs, direct peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, ending apartheid in South Africa and advancing democracy in Haiti became accepted public policy positions, Reverend Jesse Jackson advocated them. Reverend Jackson’s advocacy on these and other issues helped bring the American public to a new level of consciousness.

Reverend Jackson’s two presidential campaigns broke new ground in U.S. politics. His 1984 campaign registered over one million new voters, won 3.5 million votes, and helped the Democratic Party regain control of the Senate in 1986. His 1988 campaign registered over two million new voters, won seven million votes, and helped boost hundreds of state and local elected officials into office. Additionally, he won historic victories, coming in first or second in 46 out of 54 primary contests. His clear progressive agenda and his ability to build an unprecedented coalition inspired millions to join the political process.

In 1991, Reverend Jesse Jackson was elected Senator of Washington, D.C., advocating for statehood for the nation’s capital and advancing the “rainbow” agenda at the national and international levels. Since then, he has continued to promote voter registration and lead get-out-the-vote campaigns, believing that everyone should be encouraged to be a responsible, informed and active voter. He has spearheaded major organizing tours through Appalachia, Mississippi, California and Georgia.

He has continued to be a leading advocate for a variety of public policy issues, including universal health care, equal administration of justice in all communities, sufficient funding for enforcement of civil rights laws, and for increased attention to business investment in underserved domestic communities (a theme that the Clinton administration picked up as the “New Markets Initiative”).

Reverend Jackson also supports a broad range of policies to improve education, eliminate poverty, and remind everyone that we are a “One-Big-Tent-America,” with room for all, and none left in the margins. A current campaign is “Restructure Loans, Don’t Foreclose on Homes,” tackling today’s housing crisis and the economic crisis gripping the world.

As a highly respected and trusted world leader, Reverend Jackson has acted many times as an international diplomat in sensitive situations. For example, in 1984 Reverend Jackson secured the release of captured Navy Lieutenant Robert Goodman from Syria, and the release of 48 Cuban and Cuban-American prisoners in Cuba. He was the first American to bring home citizens from the UK, France and other countries held as “human shields” by Saddam Hussein in Kuwait and Iraq in 1990. In 1999, Reverend Jackson negotiated the release of U.S. soldiers held hostage in Kosovo. In August 2000, Rev. Jackson helped negotiate the release of four journalists working on a documentary for Britain’s Channel 4 network held in Liberia. He has traveled extensively in the Middle East and Asia, and was a special guest of President Fernando Cardoso of Brazil in honoring Zumbi, the leader of slave revolts that led to the end of slavery in Brazil.

On November 2, 1985, Reverend Jackson joined with Oliver Tambo, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Ken Livingston, Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng, Diane Abbot (who would become MP) and others at the 120,000-strong demonstration in London’s Trafalgar Square to protest apartheid in South Africa and call on the South African government to free Nelson Mandela. He later met with PM Margaret Thatcher, appealing to her to drop Britain’s support for apartheid.

In February 16, 2003, Rev. Jesse Jackson keynoted the rally held in London’s Hyde Park with over 1 million people protesting the expected invasion of Iraq by the United States.

In August 2007, Equanomics-UK invited Rev. Jackson to help launch the new organization in a historic nine city UK tour: London-Bristol-Liverpool-Manchester-Leicester-Nottingham-Bradford-Sheffield-Birmingham. The tour coincided with the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade Act in Britain, including the official London GLA ceremony with Mayor Ken Livingston. At the conclusion of the tour, Rev. Jackson joined international dignitaries in the unveiling of the statue of Nelson Mandela in London’s Parliament Square.

In 2009, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown bestowed the “Global Diversity and Inclusion Award” on Rev. Jackson at 10 Downing Street.

In January 2008, Rev. Jackson delivered the international keynote address on the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi at an event in New Delhi, India marking the 50th anniversary of

Gandhi's martyrdom. The global event celebrated the strength of non-violent, peaceful protest that Gandhi demonstrated in his uncompromising quest for peace and justice.

A hallmark of Reverend Jackson's work has been his commitment to youth. He has visited thousands of high schools, colleges, universities and correctional facilities encouraging excellence, inspiring hope and challenging young people to study diligently and stay drug-free. Reverend Jackson has also been a consistent and vigorous supporter of the labor movement in the U.S. and around the world. He is known as someone who has walked more picket lines and spoken at more labor rallies than any other national leader. He has worked with unions to organize workers, protect workers' rights, and mediate labor disputes. In 1996, he traveled to Asia to investigate treatment of workers in the Japanese automobile industry and in athletic apparel factories in Indonesia.

A renowned orator and activist, Reverend Jackson has received numerous honors for his work in human and civil rights and nonviolent social change. In 1991, the U.S. Post Office put his likeness on a pictorial postal cancellation, only the second living person to receive such an honor. He has been on the Gallup List of the Ten Most Respected Americans for more than a dozen years. He has received the prestigious NAACP Spingarn Award in addition to honors from hundreds of grassroots, civic and community organizations from coast to coast. From 1992 to 2000, Reverend Jackson hosted "Both Sides With Jesse Jackson" on CNN (Cable News Network). He continues to write a weekly column of analysis which is syndicated by the Chicago Tribune/Los Angeles Times. He is the author of two books: *Keep Hope Alive* (South End Press, 1989), and *Straight From the Heart* (Fortress Press, 1987). In 1996, Reverend Jackson co-authored the books *Legal Lynching: Racism, Injustice, and the Death Penalty* (Marlowe & Company, 1996) and *It's About The Money* (Random House, 1999) with his son, U.S. Representative Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.

Reverend Jackson married his college sweetheart Jacqueline Lavinia Brown in 1963. They have five children: Santita Jackson, Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., Jonathan Luther Jackson, Yusef DuBois Jackson, Esq., and Jacqueline Lavinia Jackson, Jr.