

P R O F I L E



Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition

by Cynthia Cumfer

There is a different kind of presidential candidate running a different campaign this year. In years past, it has often been hard to distinguish between the candidates for president. Frequently, the various candidates would attempt to project an image, sometimes offer a program and make a stab at getting elected. Someone would get elected and four years later, we would do it all over again.

This year, Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition (not a musical group!) offer something different. Reverend Jackson has put together a movement of what he calls "the dispossessed," the old minorities (and in the case of women, the dispossessed majority) that can become a new majority. Reverend Jackson is appealing to a variety of different groups, including blacks, hispanics, Native Americans, Jews, gays and lesbians, the elderly, peace activists, and the poor to unite and build a movement that represents the interests of those of us who are not in power. This concept of unity Reverend Jackson is calling the Rainbow Coalition. One of the

primary purposes of the Rainbow Coalition and the Jackson campaign is to register voters who are unregistered and to see that the Voting Rights Act is fairly enforced. Another is to encourage politicians interested in the Rainbow Coalition concept to run for local offices. What is exciting about Reverend Jackson's campaign is that many of the groups he is trying to reach have finally, for the first time possibly ever, begun uniting, making contact with each other, and learning about each other.

Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1941. While at the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina in Greensboro, Jackson became involved in the civil rights movement. By 1963, he was leading daily student sit-ins and protest marches which eventually brought about desegregation of Greensboro's theatres and restaurants. In 1964, Jackson graduated and worked briefly for the governor of North Carolina, organizing Young Democrat Clubs. In 1965, he entered Chicago Theological Seminary and was ordained a Baptist minister in 1968.

In 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked Jackson and the Chicago-based Council of Community Organizations to help in a national drive to organize black communities to boycott discriminatory businesses. Jackson was named head of the Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket which successfully won its fight with nine Chicago area companies in its first five months of operation. In 1967, Jackson was named National Director of Operation Breadbasket. Jackson also assisted in organizing the SCLC-sponsored Poor Peoples' Campaign to dramatize the plight of the poor in Washington, D.C.

In 1971, Reverend Jackson organized PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) and served as its national president until October 1983, when he decided to seek the presidential nomination.

Reverend Jackson's position on the important issues in the 1984 campaign is consistent with his life-long commitment to justice. This is a summary of some of his positions:

- 1. Defense (or Life):** Reverend Jackson supports a mutual and verifiable nuclear freeze. He opposes the resumption of nerve gas production, the MX missile, the B-1 bomber, the neutron bomb, and deployment of the Pershing and Cruise missiles in Western Europe.
- 2. Civil Rights:** Reverend Jackson believes that the Voting Rights Act needs to be

enforced and the dual system of registration (in Mississippi) as well as other forms of political oppression imposed on blacks and Hispanics be abolished. He supports the Equal Rights Amendment. Reverend Jackson advocates, in the area of immigration, one standard for admitting people to our country, regardless of their color.

- 3. Full Employment:** Reverend Jackson believes that one of the most pressing domestic issues is to provide employment for all. He is opposed to President Reagan's theory that if we support the right, the rest of the country will also prosper.
- 4. Women's Issues:** In addition to supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, Reverend Jackson believes that a woman should make her own choice about abortion. He opposes the Hyatt Amendment, which denies welfare funding for poor women needing abortions.
- 5. Middle East:** Reverend Jackson believes that Israel must be allowed to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders. The Palestinians must have the right to self-determination or a homeland. Lebanon should not be partitioned.
- 6. Gay and Lesbian Rights:** Reverend Jackson supports H.R. 2624, the bill which would add sexual orientation to the list of prohibited discriminations under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He prefers this to the Senate counterpart (S. 430) because he believes the House bill is more comprehensive than the Senate bill. Reverend Jackson has promised to extend the mandate of agencies dealing with Civil Rights to include cases of anti-gay and lesbian bias, and to classify anti-gay and lesbian violence as a civil rights violation. He has promised to issue, within three months of taking office, an executive order banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in all areas of federal contractors and, the military, the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the FBI. Reverend Jackson is also committing to completely overhauling the nation's immigration laws to eliminate anti-lesbian and gay bias. He is interested in promoting greater cooperation between federal, state and local agencies dealing with the AIDS crisis, and in obtaining more funding for lesbian and gay health clinics and counseling centers. He has already established a lesbian/gay issues desk in his national campaign office.

An issue of concern to many of us is the Rainbow Coalition, as well as those not in the

coalition, has been Reverend Jackson's much publicized remarks about Jews. Reverend Jackson has apologized for his comments, has stated that he was wrong, and has indicated his hope that the attention drawn to the issue of anti-semitism can be a starting point for a dialogue between blacks and Jews on issues of concern to both.

On the local level, Portland's Jackson for President group has been recognized by the national headquarters as the official Jackson committee in Oregon. The Portland committee is itself a Rainbow group with a Steering Committee co-chaired by Alma Hill and Ron Herndon. There are more women than men on the steering committee, which is approximately 1/2 black and 1/2 white. The steering committee includes Jews and lesbians. Since it began, the steering committee has dealt with issues concerning racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism within the Portland organization. Some members of the local steering committee are working on arranging a meeting between progressive Jews and blacks to discuss the concerns of both groups.

One goal of the Oregon campaign is to register voters. In order to vote for Jesse Jackson in the Oregon primary, which will be held May 15, you must be a registered Democrat. The local committee is also working on getting delegates to the national convention. Oregon has 50 delegates. In order to get one delegate from District 3 (Ron Wyden's district, which encompasses most of the east side of Portland), 14% of the voters must vote for Jesse Jackson. The local committee is also working on trying to arrange an appearance by Reverend Jackson in Oregon.

Upcoming events for the local Jackson campaign include breakfast and a gospel music evening set in the beginning of May. The more volunteers and support the Rainbow Coalition has, the further it will go. For more information on the Jesse Jackson campaign, come by the campaign headquarters at 3606 N. Williams.

One of the major differences between the Jackson campaign and that of other presidential campaigns is that Jackson's Rainbow Coalition has the potential to live on and continue its work after this election. Although its primary focus is now on the Jackson campaign, after the campaign is over, the Rainbow Coalition will be deciding where to go from here. You can be a part of that.

Cynthia Cumfer is a Portland attorney. She has recently been conducting workshops on racism.

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