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“My Two Years with Jesse Jackson Sr.”, Part 3

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Black Votes Matter
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Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter

“My Two Years with Jesse Jackson Sr.”- Part III (Jesse Jackson, our week at Bill Cosby’s House and why!)

With the recent announcement that Rev. Jackson has Parkinson’s disease I thought Omaha Star readers would enjoy some of my reflections from the historical times I spent with this civil rights icon. *Part I and II* is recommended reading)

Jesse Jackson’s intelligence was totally underestimated by all, including myself. Jesse was as smart as any man I had ever met. He was not expected to be able to sit on the debate stage with six US Senators and one former Governor, handle himself and be able to have command and knowledge of the issues of the US and the World. Jesse surprised us all.

When Rev. Jesse Jackson decided to run to be the Democratic nominee for President of the US against the sitting President, Ronald Reagan the black community went wild. But the story behind the excitement has hardly been told. The white political establishment dismissed Jackson’s candidacy, as not serious and in fact somewhat of a joke. Twelve years prior in 1972 black congresswoman Shirley Chisholm had been symbolic at best and never taken seriously. After all, Rev. Jackson was a country preacher full of cute rhythmic rhetoric for black folk but spoke to nothing of substance. While Jackson was a good talker, the perception was that he lacked the depth, knowledge and intelligence to understand and speak on the national and international issues. Black leadership felt the same way, but only privately. There was a fear that Jackson would embarrass himself and black people. Maybe even undermine the black cause. Surely, he wouldn’t be able to raise the millions of dollars needed to run a credible campaign.

The biggest hurdle, everyone felt, was he lacked the scope and intellect to address the global issues of the day. There were 6 past and present United States Senators and a former Governor also running. There were going to be dozens of nationally televised debates. With the prospect of Jackson on stage, there was unilateral dismay at that possibility. That is with one exception, Jesse Jackson; he was not intimidated. Jesse had a plan.

After long conversations with the actor/comedian Bill Cosby, a plan was hatched. Cosby would make his residential complex in Massachusetts to the Jesse Jackson for President Campaign. First let me describe the environment. For one, you did not visit the Cosby complex. The location was unknown and to visit you were picked up via a limo and escorted to some remote part of Massachusetts, the complex.

The Complex consisted of a former farm, lots of land and four major structures. 1. The Cosby residence, (more bedrooms than you could count), 2. a residence for his mother, 3. a building housing equipment, etc. and lastly a “Guest House”.

The guest house was a former barn converted to accommodate 16 guest with bedroom and bath, a conversational pit for about 20 people, 16 apothecary jars full of all sorts of goodies, raisins, orange slices, chips, etc. The Cosby main attraction and toy, was a huge Espresso contraction that could produce all sorts of steamed coffee, it was “Starbucks”. For the record I spent much time at the Cosby’s with my hand in the orange slices. (by the way somebody was constantly replacing any intrusions into the jars)

The Plan. For one solid week experts on national and international issues were flown into Boston, picked up by limo, taken to the Cosby’s, brought to the Guest House. Each day those experts spent hours briefing Rev. Jackson on the complex issues of the era. Hours, and to my amazement Jesse Jackson, not only assimilated the issues but committed his lessons to both his memory and his own perspectives, day after day. The experts were treated at the end of the day with a private dinner with the entire Cosby family. Each night, Cosby called on one of the three chefs he had on staff for a masterful meal. At a table were the experts, Cosby’s family, Jesse and I and two other staff members. Each night about 16 people at the table, each night a different magnificent set of matching table ware (never the same that week). The next morning the previous day experts were bided farewell and the next day’s experts arrived. The pattern continued for 5 days.

At the end the week, I realized how brilliant Jackson was. He had in one weeks’ time accumulated the working knowledge of the global issues of the day and retained the knowledge throughout the campaign and was a competitive debater on the national stage for the world to see. Jesse Jackson gained the respect of the nation and never was underestimated again.

In the Final installment of this series: **“My Two Years with Jesse Jackson Sr.”- Part IV (Jackson’s dilemma, to run or not to run, the Hotel Room meeting that changed history)**

To review previous Black Votes Matter column articles, visit Omahastar.com. Or prestonlovejr.com. Preston love can be reached at prestonlovejr@gmail.com

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