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“My Two Years with Jesse Jackson Sr.”, Part 4

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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 IV (Jackson’s dilemma, to run or not to run, the Hotel Room meeting that changed history); In the Final installment of this series.

Jesse Jackson Sr. has made many pilgrimages, negotiating and freeing many American’s in the sensitive world of formal and informal diplomacy. None were more dramatic than in his run for President in 1984. December of 1983 he traveled to Syria and successfully freed an American Soldier (Lt. Goodman) who had been captured and held hostage by the Syrian government. Later in June of 1984, Jackson freed American and Cuban prisoners, capping a dramatic exercise in personal diplomacy with President Fidel Castro of Cuba. Mr. Jackson's chartered Boeing 707 arrived at Dulles International Airport just before midnight with 16 American prisoners aboard and 7 Cuban political prisoners. Jackson took a large retinue on these trips, but in both cases asked me to stay in the US and keep the campaign operation running smoothly. I agreed, but begrudgingly. I sought the excitement that I knew would come during and after the trips. I often reflect, I should have insisted on traveling on those historical journeys. One of Jackson’s long-term associates and one of President Carter’s Labor Department appointees, Lamond Godwin, did not work for the campaign but quite honestly, was my constant rival for Jackson’s favor. Often, he and I were mistaken for each other. (In the cover picture: on Jesse’s right was my dear friend and the late, Dr. Ron Waters, Political Science Professor at Howard University, myself on Jesse’s left and the aforementioned Mr., Godwin on my left.)

One trip Jackson made, received little or no media coverage, yet, the trip was maybe his most significant historically speaking. Jesse Jackson made this little-known trip to Europe in the fall of 1983. The trip had several objectives, primarily it was an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Russians to release several Jewish Dissidents, who sought to escape from the oppressive treatment there. Jackson flew and set up base in a hotel in Europe with a large entourage including some Jewish followers, and Lamond Godwin, my nemesis. I was charged to continue the preparation for the pending formal announcement of his run for the Presidency.

I forget the number of days the delegation was away, but soon there emerged a problem. Jesse called and informed me that there wasn't enough money for the delegation to check out of the Hotel. At that time the pending campaign was unable to assist, nor would the expense be determined to be within the rules of the FEC. Jesse asked me to reach out to many of his wealthy celebrity friends and supporters and he would do the same. In a few days the money was raised and Jackson and the delegation checked out of the Hotel and flew into Washington DC, he was met by a small crowd of insiders and myself.

When the dust settled, Jesse, Mr. Godwin and myself were in Jesse's hotel room, snacking and talking about the trip. Jackson was very, very discouraged and expressed to Mr. Godwin and I that he had second thoughts about running. He went on to describe the horror of the experience of being not able to raise the money to get out of the hotel in Europe and to him it was a sign that he wouldn't be able to raise enough money to run for president, surely if he couldn't check out of a hotel. Mr. Godwin who was along on the trip agreed whole heartily. Jesse was ready right there in the hotel in DC to halt immediately his run for President. He and Godwin were feeding on each other and the momentum was growing, no run. I remained mostly quiet and in shock.

Finally, Jesse turned to me and said "Preston, what do you think?"

I made a 5 to 6-minute case for why he should run, but my final pitch was this sentence: "Jesse, you don't have a choice, this race is bigger than you are, the people demand that you run". There was silence in the room, for what seemed like an hour but more like 5 minutes. The next thing said was by Jackson, he said, "Let's order room service and get to work"!!! The rest is 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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