



Jesse Jackson speaks at Lincoln College after receiving an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree

Life
11/21/69

The Jesse Jackson style:
militant but nonviolent

by JOHN PEKKANEN

Black Hope White Hope

On Saturday mornings, just before 10, Jesse Jackson, 28 years old, ambles onstage at Chicago's Capitol Theater for the weekly broadcast of Operation Breadbasket. Resplendent in turtle-neck and bell-bottoms, he strides to the podium and the audience of 4,000, mostly well-dressed black women, rises. Ben Branch's gospel band reverberates with *Hard Times*, the Breadbasket choir belts out the words, and there is rhythmic applause. Jackson gives a palms-down signal and the audience sits, and he offers a prayer, his reverence real and moving.

Then he preaches—often on the economic disparity between rich and poor and what may be required to end it. "They talk about America being a melting pot, but it is more like a vege-

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'When I see a beautiful woman with a miniskirt on, my eyes get big as teacups. Oh, yeah! I ain't gonna be lying'

CONTINUED table soup and we've been pushed down to the bottom of the pot. We are going to come up and be recognized or turn the pot over." Sometimes he preaches on the legacy of slavery, and one senses that as he stands up there, his eyes ablaze, arms flailing, neck veins rigid, he is feeling every lash of every old whip. During these sermons Jackson sweats profusely, the only visible symptom of sickle-cell trait, a chronic blood disease that saps his stamina but which he ignores in the drama of the moment.

Jackson talks about himself at these meetings. Once he told of his days as a waiter at the Jack Tar Hotel in his home town of Greenville, S.C. Just before leaving the kitchen he would spit into the food of white patrons he hated and then smilingly serve it to them. He did this, he said, "because it gave me psychological gratification." It was something everybody in the audience understood. Recently he launched into an angry denunciation of rumors about his personal life which had been spread, he told the audience, by jealous but unspecified people "who seek to divide us." Clearly he felt that, after what he had done for blacks as head of Operation Breadbasket, he shouldn't have to deny venal rumors that had him growing rich off the Saturday morning collections, keeping a harem of white women, living in a wealthy white area, and even that he is homosexual. Typically, he answered the last rumor this way: "When I see a beautiful woman with a miniskirt on, my eyes get big as teacups. Oh yeah! I ain't gonna be lying. They swell up because I'm young and I'm healthy—mentally and physically." Jackson is in fact married to an adoring wife, has three children, lives in a spacious but not luxurious South Side apartment and makes a modest \$8,500 a year.

Operation Breadbasket—the Chicago-based national effort to harness black economic power to promote black economic gains—was a project begun by the late Martin Luther King Jr., and it is to King that Jesse Jackson is most often compared. King appealed to white guilt and white good intentions. Jackson appeals to black pride and the black's desire for a real piece of the action. King was a moralist whose confrontations always became moral questions. Jackson is partly that, but basically he is an economic manipulator and a politician—a far more astute politician than King was. And there is, of course, a difference in style. Jackson's style is essential for black leadership today, and he knows it. It is a style, he says, "that relates emphatically to my people." Bayard Rustin agrees: "Jesse Jackson is the incarnation of all the manly qualities the black community respects."

It is abundantly clear at these Saturday meetings that Jackson is both a man of God and a shrewd, even arrogant, political infighter. He can deal harshly with those who do not go along with him, as one black state senator, a man notorious for his fidelity to himself, found out. The senator, eager for an introduction from Jackson, something any black politician would covet, was not introduced. Instead, Jackson told him to take up the collection, which he did, smiling obsequiously. Jackson's ultimate goal of a better life for black people is the force that reconciles these disparate sides of his nature. And he is driven also by a yearning for recognition for himself, a force equal to his commitment to his people. A poor boy, born out of wedlock, he was once ashamed of his origins

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Ralph Abernathy jokes with Jackson before an SCLC meeting

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but is now proud of them. Possessing a monumental ambition, an iron will and a facile mind, he was Mr. Everything in high school and college—star athlete, student body president, top scholar. Then he became a civil rights leader, and he wants to be a star there too. He likes it up there where the applause is deafening and the adulation endless, and he wants to keep on going. All this explains much about him, including the fact that he is constantly late. He held up two graduation ceremonies at which he received honorary doctorates of divinity, and he was 40 minutes late for an appointment with the mayor of Peoria, whose support he was seeking. About to meet Chief Justice Warren at a graduation ceremony some time ago, he muttered, "A few years ago I'da popped over and said, 'Yessuh, Mr. Chief Justice, Sir.' But no more, brother. Let him come over here." I'm important now, Jackson seems always to be saying, and you're going to have to wait a little bit until I get ready to see you. You can see it when he orders around a coterie of aides, men older than he, who forever get his food, run his baths, pack his bags and laugh when he tells them something is funny. It is an enormous ego at work, one that perhaps grew large before he was fully ready for it, but it is getting results.

Jesse Jackson has been hailed both as the great white hope because he is successfully nonviolent and as the great black hope because he is successfully pursuing economic parity for blacks. Nothing exemplifies this success better than the A&P fight Operation Breadbasket waged in Chicago. It began in July 1968, when staff members of Breadbasket, making their periodic check of businesses in the black areas of Chicago, found that A&P was not complying with its 1967 pledge to hire 770 blacks. When negotiations between A&P and Breadbasket broke down, the alarm to boycott was sounded. The word not to buy at A&P went out to black Chicago from the pulpits of the more than 100 black churches that form Breadbasket's organizational network.

Within a few weeks all of the 40 A&P stores in black Chicago were being picketed. A group of 900 sympathetic whites from the wealthy suburbs that stretch from Evanston to Highland Park joined in the boycott and picketed, hitting an additional 60 stores in white areas. Half the A&P stores in metropolitan Chicago were under siege.

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'What I feared and still fear is that black power would stop with new hair styles'

CONTINUED "It was a process," Jackson recalls, "of squeezing a company's vitals, and a company's vitals is its profit margin."

After 14 weeks, its sales down substantially, A&P capitulated. The "covenant" it signed with Breadbasket is enormous in scope. Beside providing for the hiring of hundreds of black employees, it requires A&P stores in black neighborhoods to use black janitorial, extermination and garbage-collection services; to give prominent shelf display to black products such as Mumbo Barbecue Sauce and Joe Louis Milk; to use black contractors for construction of new stores in black areas; the use of black media to advertise; the hiring of a black public relations firm; the promise of investment in black banks; the creation of "sensitivity seminars" for A&P executives to attune them to the racial situation; and, finally, a monthly meeting between Breadbasket and A&P to assure compliance. "It was," Jackson says, "a historic document for black people." An A&P spokesman will say only that Breadbasket took too much credit for it.

The Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket was formed in February 1966. For two years prior to that, Jackson, after graduating from North Carolina's A&T College at Greensboro, was a student at the Chicago Theological Seminary and also worked part time for the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO), a loose-knit coalition of civil rights organizations which became the local base for Martin Luther King's Chicago Freedom Movement.

In January of 1966, when King came to Chicago, he urged the 60 ministers who were a part of CCCC to begin a local Breadbasket program. The Breadbasket idea, which had enjoyed moderate success in gaining jobs for blacks in Atlanta, was based on the concept of "selective buying," a tactic used effectively in the early '60s by the Reverend Leon Sullivan in Philadelphia. The Chicago ministers quickly put the organization together and suggested Jackson, with whom they had worked, as its director. King had observed Jackson's work in civil rights causes, was impressed with him and approved of the appointment. Jackson, tired of "Bible stories," was attracted by the idea of action rather than contemplation and left the seminary several months short of graduation.

"What I feared then, and what I still fear," he says, "is that black power would remain at the level of psychological self-esteem. That we would stop with new hair styles instead of striving onward for new life styles." With Jackson as its director, Breadbasket began functioning in Chicago and was taken under the organizational umbrella of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Jackson brought his tactical skill to bear by relying heavily on the black church, still the most vital institution in the black community, as the basis of Breadbasket's structure—and Breadbasket soon got results. Dairies were boycotted that spring because, Jackson explains, "milk can't sit too long," and soft drink companies were hit in the summer, the peak season.

In August 1967, King tapped Jackson to be national director of Operation Breadbasket, an organization with branches similar to Chicago's in 15 cities. By then, Breadbasket's reputation had become so firmly established in Chicago that many ghetto businesses capitulated merely at the threat of boycott. Today, after three years in Chi-

icago, Breadbasket has obtained more than 4,000 jobs directly and an estimated 10,000 by indirect influence, and has brought black businessmen good markets for their products. "We dare any cat in the ghetto to take us on," Jackson will say. "We'll destroy him."

Nevertheless, Breadbasket has had and continues to have many internal troubles. From the beginning, the more militant black members were resentful of Jackson's key use of white people, many of whom Jackson brought with him from the seminary. Jackson sympathized with their objections but fought vigorously to keep Breadbasket integrated, and at a showdown threatened to resign if the "all-black" faction prevailed. He won.

There has been some friction between Breadbasket's black businessmen and ministers. As one businessman put it, "The ministers just don't seem to consult us much and seem to forget at times that we're supplying a lot of the money to keep them going." But, though there are now more than 300 businessmen in Breadbasket, they accept the fact that the ministers are running the show.

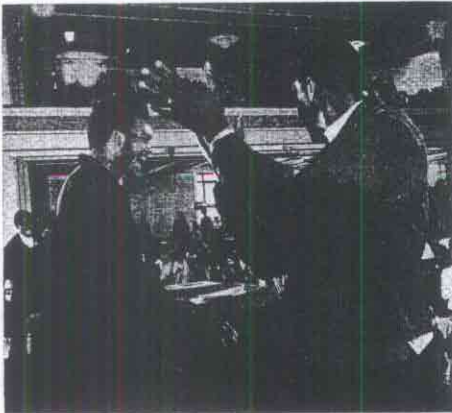
There is also resentment of Jackson himself, largely from older staff members who see him usurping all the glory while they do much of the scut work. One particularly embittered staff member grumbles: "Why do you think he's able to jet around the country giving speeches and going on television? It's because of us. I've worked and sweated 12 and 14 hours a day for years for my people, and he gets all the credit." But Breadbasket's assistant director, Rev. Calvin Morris, who gave up pursuit of a doctorate to join Breadbasket, says, "The genius of Jesse's leadership is that he is big enough to get people to work for him who are sharp themselves."

Jackson shrugs off this criticism, but there is one longstanding criticism of Breadbasket that truly bothers him. It is the charge that Breadbasket helps the black middle class and that the people who truly need help, the hardcore poor, are being ignored; that the jobs Jackson has gained have gone to those who can hold jobs; and that the black products he has helped sell brought profits to men already comfortable. "Jesse tries to shrug off the middle-class label they stuck on Breadbasket," says one friendly critic. "But even though it isn't completely true, it bothers him. He'll say that the middle class provides the leaders, so you have to begin there. I think it was a big reason for his hunger drive this spring."

The hunger drive, in May, was part of the second phase of the Poor People's Campaign begun in Resurrection City in 1968. While the drive failed to rouse the national conscience as Jackson hoped it would, it did succeed in influencing the Illinois legislature in Springfield to accept

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Jackson presides at weekly Saturday meeting of Operation Breadbasket



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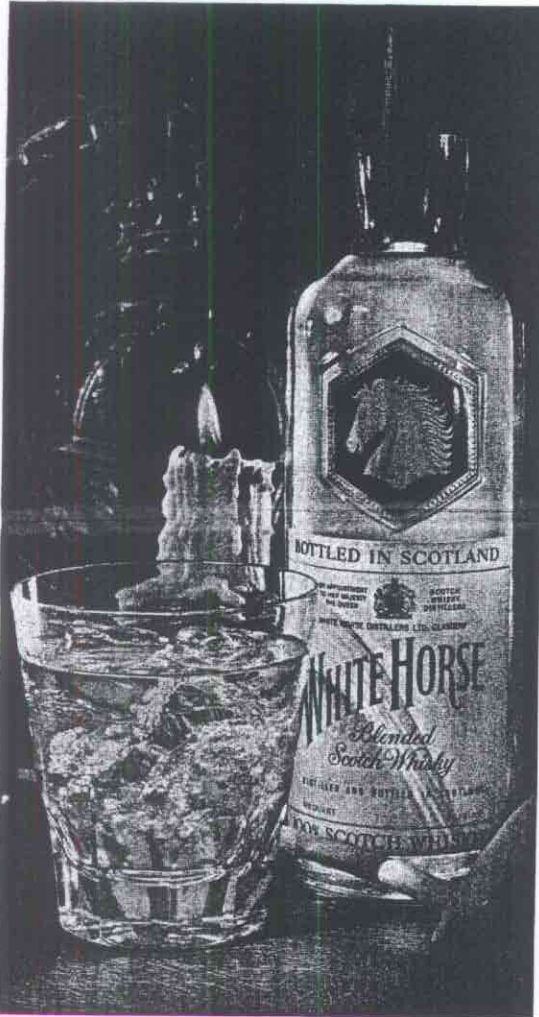
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Jackson got one Republican legislator so incensed he muttered obscenities and kicked the wall

CONTINUED) two of its four major demands. The first was a free-lunch program for poor schoolchildren. The second, on which Jackson had only slight effect, was to place a higher tax levy on corporations than on individuals under a new state tax law passed by the legislature.

Jackson's maneuvering during the hunger campaign left no doubt that he is far and away the most astute black political leader in the state, perhaps in the nation. Dealing with the entrenched political leadership in Springfield, he was able to shift effortlessly from the area of economics and civil rights protest to politics and self-promotion. Early in the hunger drive, the conservative speaker of the Illinois House, Representative Ralph Smith (now U.S. senator), introduced a bill to cut the state welfare budget by \$1.25 million, or about \$15 per person per month. Declaring the bill "open warfare against poor people," Jackson quickly arranged for 3,000 people to protest at the capitol in Springfield. The day they arrived from Chicago, Jackson met privately with Governor Richard Ogilvie, who admitted Smith's bill was bad and indicated to Jackson he would see to it that it was killed. Aware of the value of a public victory for himself and the hunger drive, Jackson answered that if the bill were to be killed, he would help kill it, and the execution would not be in the quiet confines of the governor's office. The next day Jackson appeared to testify before the entire House on Speaker Smith's bill. Rather than testimony, he delivered a sermon that attacked the bill and decried the plight of the poor. It was a masterful show, with Jackson exerting total control over the gallery, which was packed with his followers. Many legislators resented his take-over of their chamber. One of them, a Republican known for his back-lash sentiments, was so incensed he muttered obscenities and repeatedly kicked the wall until two fellow legislators quieted him.

Jackson had given his speech and captured the headlines. But almost ignored in the drama was the fact that Smith's bill, now dead, had been killed before Jackson ever entered the House that day. Earlier that morning, Smith publicly read a letter from Governor Ogilvie, a close personal friend, which said that the state could meet its welfare budget without the proposed cut. In a move unprecedented for a speaker, Smith withdrew the bill. Not surprisingly, however, Jackson was publicly hailed as the man who forced Smith to back down. The response from black people around the state was enormous; Jackson could no longer be fairly labeled as a man who fought only for the black middle class. A welfare mother marching in a Jackson-led hunger march in Peoria spoke for many: "If they cut the welfare it would have killed me and my kids. But Reverend Jackson wouldn't let them do it."

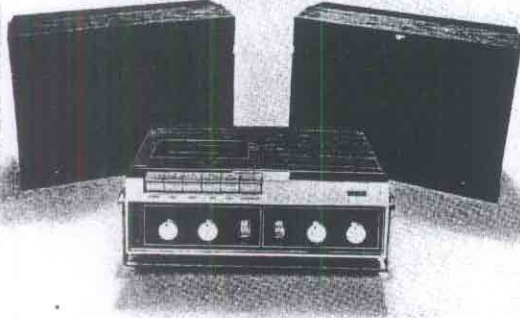
Through his politicking (he calls it "wheelin' and dealin'") during the hunger drive, Jackson's influence spread into other areas. None is more obvious than his new stature with many of the 18 black state legislators, 17 of whom are from Chicago. He has helped prod them toward greater militancy and increasing separation from the Democratic machine that gives them their political life. Many of them consult Jackson about strategy. In early June several held a secret midnight meeting with Jackson in which they unveiled a plan to stage a filibuster. The next day it was held, dramatizing the need for jobs and also drawing atten-

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'Jesse is the man right now. He's creating for himself the kind of power base in the black community that Daley has in the white community'

CONTINUED tion to the hunger drive, something Jackson needed then.

Jackson's personal impact on the black politicians is considerable. For example, one state representative, an old-line machine Democrat, has converted from taking party orders to "fighting for my people." He says it is due to Jackson's influence.

Jackson says of his relationship with the legislators: "The prophet creates new alternatives under which men can act. I am in the tradition of the prophet, giving these men new alternatives not open to them before." He also says, "The legislators cooperated with me because if they didn't, they know we can mention it on the radio in *Saturday at Breadbasket*."

After Martin Luther King was shot, nationally syndicated columnists called for Jackson to assume the presidency of SCLC. This was impossible, for, as one high-ranking SCLC board member later explained: "If anybody but Ralph Abernathy had taken over, the organization would have been in a shambles, because no one would have followed Jesse or any of the younger ones. We always fought like hell over things, and Dr. King and Ralph were the only two with enough stature to arbitrate them." Fulfilling King's wish, Reverend Ralph Abernathy became the new leader of SCLC, but there were soon rumors of internecine intrigues, with Jackson always in the picture.

There were reasons for the rumors, the strongest being that Jackson, despite all the disclaimers and denials, really doesn't respect Abernathy's leadership. (Jackson gave Abernathy this backhanded compliment: "Ralph says all the right things. So what if he doesn't say them well.") There was also a bitter fight between Jackson and the volatile Hosea Williams over the mayoralty of Resurrection City last summer. Jackson was appointed by Abernathy to the job, but Williams took it over, and the resultant clash exasperated Abernathy and strained his relations with Jackson, who was reassigned and left the camp before the summer ended.

The fact is that, since the 1965 Selma march, SCLC has not scored a major success other than Breadbasket, and this raises the question of who needs whom more. Should the two organizations go their separate ways, Jackson would be hurt little. The chances are, however, that he will stay with SCLC—his loyalty to Martin Luther King is stronger than his lack of enthusiasm for Abernathy.

With Chicago's black middle class already largely committed to him and a solid footing now in the long-ignored, hunger-driven black underclass, Jackson has created a Chicago constituency that is cohesive, responsive and self-reliant. He has broadened his scope considerably. He is virtually on a national speaking tour all the time. He is also a major catalyst in the black protest against the construction unions in Chicago. A Chicago reporter who has watched him for several years observes: "Jesse is the man right now. He's moving in many directions, creating for himself the kind of power base in the black community that Daley has in the white community: a broad appeal to all factions and recognition that he's the one to come to when you want something done."

Jackson has offset Mayor Richard Daley's power, not merely by welding his own constituency but by working

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Jackson is vain to the point of narcissism, unable to resist peeking at himself in every mirror he passes

CONTINUED to erode Daley's. In the 1968 gubernatorial election, Jackson, to everyone's great surprise, endorsed the Republican, Ogilvie, rather than Daley's candidate, the incumbent Governor Samuel Shapiro, who was considered a liberal. Ogilvie won. "Ogilvie is a pharaoh," Jackson explains, "but Daley is a pharaoh's pharaoh. I wanted to split Daley's power—sort of divide and conquer. Before, to get to the governor, you had to work down from Daley. Now we go directly to the governor."

"Daley isn't afraid of Jesse because Daley isn't afraid of anybody," says one Illinois politician. "But he would do his damndest to avoid a head-on clash." It is a fact that Daley pays Jackson grudging respect by meeting promptly with him when Jackson demands a meeting, a tacit recognition that Jackson at least must be tolerated despite Daley's dislike for him.

Jackson has stature and he knows it, but there are times when he seems insensitive to its implications. He can weep openly at the sight of a malnourished child, as he did recently during a hurried tour of Rockford, and then arrive for the next tour in Peoria in a rented Cadillac limousine, courtesy of SCLC, and appear oblivious when eyebrows are raised. He is vain almost to the point of narcissism, unable to resist peeking at himself in every mirror he passes. He once ordered his car stopped in traffic and told an aide to fetch him a copy of TIME magazine when he was told there was a story about him appearing. He has demonstrated little capacity for self-criticism, he calls criticism from others "unfair," and he labels praise as "the truth." These are troublesome but not fatal flaws, and Jackson will acknowledge that he might have shortcomings. "It ain't nothing new," he'll tell you, "for God to speak through imperfect people." ■

Jackson talks with black legislators at Springfield statehouse

