Jesse Jackson and the Globalization of Black Business

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how Jesse Jackson has played a vital role in the globalization of African American business and emerging economic Pan-Africanism. The paper discusses Jackson’s involvement in the globalization of black business and his quest to empower black-owned commercial ventures in emerging markets.1

Keywords: Jesse Jackson – black business – globalization

Jackson and Black Capitalism in Chicago

Jesse Jackson joined the staff of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (S.C.L.C.) in 1965. He was twenty-four years old, the youngest of King’s aides. Coinciding with Martin Luther King’s arrival in Chicago, a year later, Jackson was appointed head of the Chicago office of Operation Breadbasket (Breadbasket). Breadbasket was a program sponsored by the S.C.L.C. and established in 1962 to fight economic discrimination against African Americans in Atlanta. Influenced by the example of Reverend Leonard Sullivan in Philadelphia, the aim of the organization was to utilize the bargaining power of African American church leaders and their congregations to foster “selective buying” (boycotts) as a means to pressure white businesses to open up private sector jobs to blacks. The beginning of the boycott movement is traditionally linked to the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” protest, which was successfully organized in Chicago in 1929, which based black people’s right to work on their status as consumers. The target was a small chain of grocery stores in Chicago’s black ghetto that refused to employ African Americans. Referred to as ‘Spend Your Money Where You Can Work,’ this first campaign sparked a larger boycott against Woolworth stores located in Chicago’s ‘Black Belt’ that also resisted hiring black employees. An aggressive black newspaper, the Chicago Whip, published fiery editorials endorsing the campaign.

In October 1962, King brought Leon Sullivan to Atlanta to meet local ministers and discuss replicating the program. As a result of this meeting, Breadbasket was born. Its mission was to organize black ministers to promote more employment opportunities for local African Americans, and it rapidly became the economic arm of the S.C.L.C. It was operated by Fred C. Bennette, Jr.--who also served as interim pastor (1964-1965) of the Mount Welcome Baptist Church, which was then located in the Pittsburg Community of Atlanta--and its first activities were in Atlanta and other Southern cities. It was in Chicago, under the direction of Jackson, where Breadbasket finally achieved national recognition.2 In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., S.C.L.C. chairman, characterized Breadbasket as the “most spectacularly successful program” in Chicago, a city where King had faced an unexpectedly high degree of resistance from both whites and some African Americans who were deeply invested in the city’s political system.3

Jackson’s stroke of genius was to expand Breadbasket’s activities, moving beyond the more traditional aim of the movement, job desegregation, into addressing more complex issues such as access to finance, development of brands, and the creation of supply chains. In 1966, Jackson carefully targeted
retailers where he had the leverage to win, such as High-Low stores, a white-owned grocery chain that operated primarily in the Windy City’s black neighborhoods. After winning an agreement from High-Low management to provide 184 new jobs for blacks, including positions as store managers, Jackson presented a new demand: that retailer guarantee shelf space for products made by minority-owned businesses. What products did Jackson promote? Those made by a handful of black businessmen who had lent their support to him and were paying for his operation. At his Saturday morning meetings Jackson would exhort the crowd to buy Joe Louis Milk and Grove Fresh orange juice, inventing rhyming jingles as he warmed up and engaged the crowd. Before he was done, High-Low not only stocked those products but also other products produced by black businessmen, such as Archie’s Mumbo Barbecue Sauce, Staff of Life Bread, and King Solomon Deodorant. Later, as Breadbasket expanded its scope, Jackson was able to “induce” big corporations in Chicago to transfer their capital investments from white to black banks. Jackson successfully convinced a number of white managed companies such as High Low Food, Nation Tea, and Del Farms, to co-operate with Breadbasket by depositing money in banks owned by blacks. At the Breadbasket steering committee meeting of December 13, 1966, Jackson pointed out that those companies agreed to transfer the accounts of their ghetto stores to Seaway and Independence banks, both of which were black-owned businesses based in Chicago, with such success that, according to some reports, the two black-owned banks more than quadrupled their combined assets—from $5 million to $22 million. “One of the most significant projects we can do this winter,” he said at the steering committee meeting, “is a bank-in movement, asking concerned whites to put money in Negro banks. The money could extend their lending power. The whole money market could change.” Banks then used this money to grant loans to black consumers as well as black-owned businesses in the ghetto. One by one the big chains, such as High Low Foods, the National Tea Company, Jewel Foods, and A&P submitted to Breadbasket’s demands.

While managing Breadbasket in Chicago, Jackson built an impressive network of ministers who took the original idea of economic integration in the direction of black capitalism. Describing slums as an American Bantustan, in reference to the all-black territories established by the white South African government, Jackson declared that African American ghettos formed an “underdeveloped nation” with abundant labor and insufficient capital. He summoned the nation to “provide the bootless with boots” in the form of jobs, and to teach “those with boots to pull themselves up” through business development. Breadbasket won support from several Chicago trade unions as it challenged and boycotted Country Delight and High Low Foods, and waged a successful sixteen-week campaign against A&P with their forty stores in black neighborhoods. In turn, Breadbasket aided black hospital workers, teachers, and bus drivers in local strikes. King called Jackson “a great dreamer and the great implementer of dreams” for winning jobs in white firms and for “building the economic base through Negro Business.” Breadbasket increasingly became an economic development agency to support African American entrepreneurship and worked to accelerate the growth of black capitalism in Chicago. Although Breadbasket was associated with labor unions in several campaigns for promoting or protecting employment for black workers, and Jackson seemed interested both in black businesses and black labor, he did not develop, as Breadbasket’s leader, the vision of an organic alliance between labor unions and the civil rights movement, as Bayard Rustin and, less convincingly, Dr. King did. Plus, the labor unions that partnered with the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s were in decline, facing a reduction in the number of members, and political influence, and were suffering the waves of partisan realignment. Richard Nixon, a Republican with a more liberal record on Civil Rights and black support than Adlai Stevenson or John Kennedy in the 1950s, was committed to making liberal-conservative lines simply unsustainable. The enforcement of affirmative
action was instrumental to the ultimate goal of the Nixon administration, generating the split between labor unions and Civil Rights leaders, but translated into little progress for black workers.

In the following decades, the network of Jackson’s friends in business, finance, and media would enlarge, and include John H. Johnson, publisher of Jet and Ebony magazines, Percy E. Sutton, the former Manhattan borough president and owner of Inner City Broadcasting, Maceo K. Sloan, Loida Nicolas Lewis, a Filipina married to the wealthiest African American in the country, Reginald Lewis, Sanford I. Weill, CEO of Travelers Group, Chester Davenport, Percy Sutton, Kevin Ingram, Ron Blaylock, John Rogers, Jim Reynolds, Christopher Williams, and John Utendahl. These individuals were certainly visible and influential black entrepreneurs. Jackson’s business associates and network grew over time and sustained Jackson in his subsequent career as a civil rights activist in support of black entrepreneurship and as a politician emphasizing the commonality in aspirations between blacks and whites for economic enhancement.

Tapping into and encouraging the nascent aspiration among African-Americans to become entrepreneurs is one of the many activities that can be accurately and fairly attributed to Jackson, as well as his commitment to the struggle for equal rights on economic empowerment at a time when the leadership of the struggle was preoccupied with social and political power. Pioneering a number of very successful affirmative action and corporate diversity programs, especially in Chicago, Jackson’s activism was centered on creating broader retail distribution networks for black businesses and promoting African-American economic community empowerment. However, another of Jackson’s contributions to the black cause lies in his involvement in the globalization of black business.

Jackson and the Globalization of Black Business

In the early 1970s, Jackson built a role for himself as ambassador of black business internationally. During the following three decades, he helped black entrepreneurs and black-owned businesses to connect with whomever could help them, whether it was companies, institutions, or governments that could create business opportunities in Central America, the Caribbean, and ultimately Africa and the Middle East. The international business agenda of Jesse Jackson began in 1972 with a trip to Liberia, to discuss the possibility of African American dual citizenship in order to build a bridge between Africa and America. As the African country with the largest proportion of residents claiming descendants in the United States, Liberian citizens were uniquely poised to claim Pan-African connections with Americans. On November 20, in front of a small delegation of Chicago businesspeople and Monrovian dignitaries, Jackson, the founder and leader of the newly formed Operation PUSH proclaimed, “It is high time for the nearly thirty million American blacks, who have a gross national product of some $42 billion, to start moving from lip service to ship service with Africa.” On this occasion, Jackson announced plans to develop U.S.-Liberian trade by allowing African-Americans to acquire dual-citizenship. It would have marked the beginning of a new career for Jackson, bringing trade to Africa, and a new opportunity for PUSH—if only some of Jackson’s black business associates in Chicago were prepared to follow their leader and branch out into foreign trade.

The coalition between Blacks and Jews was a pillar of the Civil Rights Movement. The special relationship between Jews and Blacks, so powerfully portrayed in the march on Montgomery, was forged by the same history of oppressed people in America and the world. The rise of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the 1960s fueled growing skepticism among African Americans towards Israel and Jews more generally. While Jews and Blacks still worked together politically, the special relationship created during the Civil Rights Movement was over and this shift in attitudes moved African Americans
toward the Arab world. Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party enlisted under Nasser’s banner (Nasser's retaliatory move to nationalize the Suez Canal Company in 1956), stating, “We are Africans wherever we are. [Israel] is moving to take over Egypt. Egypt is our motherland—it’s in Africa.” Israel’s reputation among both Africans and African Americans degenerated after the 1973 War, and the Arab oil embargo further precipitated this when Israel decided in 1974 to reinstate diplomatic relations with South Africa and to expand trade relations to include the sale of military equipment. In 1979, Andrew Young, the first African American to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the UN, resigned, due to revelations that he met secretly, against American policy, with a PLO representative and then lied about it. Jackson joined Bayard Rustin, Ralph Abernathy, and 200 other prominent black leaders in signing an angry statement criticizing Israel.

Jackson also expanded his links with Arab nations in the 1970s. Having already visited Libya in 1972, Jackson met with Libyan Embassy officials at PUSH headquarters in 1979. A Libyan diplomat gave PUSH a contribution of $10,000. After Jackson embraced PLO leader Yasser Arafat that year, and famously planted a dramatic kiss on his cheek, he called for the creation of a Palestinian state. The Arab League donated substantial funds to PUSH and PUSH-Excel (the educational arm of PUSH). Jackson went to the Middle East in response to an invitation from Yasser Arafat and visited Israel, as well as Arafat in Lebanon, and other Arab countries. Thanks to this “citizen diplomacy” in Beirut, he then arranged to meet 150 Arab businesspeople at PUSH headquarters in Chicago. Once again, PUSH played the role of business broker. A year later, Jackson admitted he had written to the Libyan embassy in Washington on behalf of the Wallace Company, a black-owned oil company in Tuskegee, Alabama, and several other black businesses in support of “opening trade routes” between black America and that country.

In the 1980s, Jackson ran not one, but two campaigns, for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination, in 1984 and 1988, respectively. In his second presidential bid, he framed himself as a populist rather than a traditional liberal, and increasingly embraced American progressive populism as a political stance. Despite the common opinion that populism has no political agenda per se, as it is more a disposition of the heart and an emotional distaste for existing patterns of power and privilege, Jackson articulated a convincing populist agenda. He and his message projected a clear vision of a pre-existing moral community under attack by an aggressive, emerging, liberal, individualistic agenda. He placed himself in a sort of “moral center” and from there he started to preach the “gospel of the people.” In a period when American society was divided between “the have’s” and “the have-nots,” the political conversation was affected by mutual hostility and disrespect. Jackson identified politics as “a moral arena where people come together to find common ground.”

We find common ground at the plant gate that closes on workers without notice. We find common ground at the farm auction, where a good farmer loses his or her land to bad loans or diminishing markets. Common ground at the school yard where teachers cannot get adequate pay and students cannot get a scholarship, and can’t make a loan. Common ground at the hospital admitting room, where somebody tonight is dying because they cannot afford to go upstairs to a bed that’s empty waiting for someone with insurance to get sick. We are a better nation than that. We must do better.

According to Jackson, the common people’s traditional concerns, interests, and values are the “common ground” that can bring the nation back to unity. Jackson ran for president as a leader of the Rainbow Coalition, and on “a political vision that, while based on the African-American experience, did not solely represent a ‘black candidacy’ or ‘black politics.’” This populist turn clearly affected his
international platform. Gradually, the militant rhetoric of Pan-Africanism was replaced with the more inclusive vision of human rights. Human rights became the new lens through which to look at foreign affairs.

Blacks identify with people who are oppressed all around the world. Russia’s invasion of Afghanistan was wrong. Russia’s stand on Soviet Jews is obviously a violation of human rights. Israel’s occupying of the Palestinians is wrong. South Africa’s occupying South Africa or Namibia is wrong. In the same way U.S. attempts to overthrow the government of Angola or Nicaragua are wrong.

Jackson sincerely believed that the African American experience could epitomize the post-colonial reality of the 1970s, and function as a blueprint for developing countries. Consequently, he supposed that African Americans’ quest for human rights provided them a special sensitivity to that issue around the world. African Americans had developed a specific understanding of “life under occupation because we’ve been occupied.” That, in the context of an occupier-occupied dialectic, make them unique in their belief that their destiny could not be separated from that of oppressed people the world over. Not surprisingly, Jackson took the side of ethnic and political minorities, civil rights, and “the have-nots” internationally. He asked for a fundamental shift in American foreign affairs, centered on the support of human rights and focused on economic growth and justice.

The intersection of citizen diplomacy, human rights activism, and international business brokerage has been for Jackson a source of constant criticism and skepticism. Critics have seen his behavior in international affairs as merely symbolic; skeptics have seen it as brazen opportunism. Most of them were already angry, in part, because he had so dramatically inflated his own part in the story of Dr. King’s final moments. The book, Shakedown, Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, reported on Jackson’s adventures as an American diplomat to Africa. These activities have previously been unreported. Jackson’s diplomatic stint earned him praise from blacks at home, but many Africans thought differently. Africans interviewed by the author saw Jackson as an opportunist who embraced dictators like Charles Taylor of Liberia, Sani Abacha of Nigeria and Foday Sankoh of Sierra Leone for personal profit. The stories in the book about Jackson’s actions in Africa were actually disturbing to his critics. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Jackson shifted his attention to Nigeria, closing business deals - especially oil contracts - with black enterprises. In 1997, no longer as a private citizen, but as the “Special Envoy for the President and Secretary of State for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa,” Jackson was the representative in Africa of the United States with a direct line to the president. While he did not enjoy diplomatic status, he could legitimately bypass the Department of State and speak directly with the White House. The Clinton administration had demonstrated continued neglect towards Africa, and Jackson’s appointment was Clinton’s way of signaling a renewed interest in Africa’s affairs. Apparently, Jackson decided to take advantage of the prestigious appointment, and blur the lines between promoting government business and brokering deals for private companies. For example, while on a plane with Liberian president Charles Taylor, he made a pitch on behalf of an Atlanta telecommunications company that belonged to an African-American group of entrepreneurs. While in Ghana, Jackson gave a speech at the stock exchange, promoting the venture capital firms of black investors.

A more positive -- and probably accurate -- assessment of Jackson’s involvement in politics and international business is to portray him as a global advisor who preferred to link U.S. black-owned businesses and black entrepreneurs with non-U.S. economies and governments, and vice versa. As a global advisor, Jackson provided personal intelligence on macroeconomic and political events by cultivating relationships with senior policymakers around the globe. In thirty years of international activism in Africa, the Middle East, and Central America (Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Cuba) at
the highest level, his network includes central governments, heads of state, regulatory and development agencies, and international aid and trade organizations. In four decades Jackson’s travels have taken him to all the countries of the Middle East more than once, as well as Central America, Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, and of course, most countries of Africa. He also met Mikhail Gorbachev, and visited the Soviet Union. While all of these visits did not focus on business, the international contacts at the highest level in politics, finance, and economics are all valuable in lobbying, as they are an indispensable vehicle for collecting confidential information, framing scenarios, influencing decisions, and creating opportunities.

In addition, PUSH has a long tradition in international business consulting, the organization providing a range of advisory services to promote and support successful business transactions with governments, as well as with private and public sector organizations throughout the world. PUSH hired Hunter Pitts “Jack” O’Dell – a valued organizer and fundraiser, as well as a director of S.C.L.C. - as a director of international affairs in 1971. He provided Jackson with his impressive and well established networks and connections. Years later, Yuri Tadesse became Senior Advisor to Jackson and Director for International Affairs of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition (a merger of two organizations, Operation PUSH and the National Rainbow Coalition, founded by Rev. Jackson between 1991 and 1996). Previously, Tadesse worked with the Clinton White House and the Department of State, serving as the Senior Adviser to the President’s Special Envoy for Africa, Rev. Jackson. After leaving the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, Tadesse became Vice President for International Business Development, and also the Coordinator of the GoodWorks International Business Development Unit. GoodWorks is an advisory firm formed in 1996 by Ambassadors Andrew Young and Carlton Masters to fill a particular set of needs faced by enterprising U.S. multinational companies seeking to enter the emerging markets of Africa and the Caribbean.

Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and GoodWorks navigate among states, private corporations, power struggles, as a hybrid organization that blurs the lines between the private sector and public policy. Jackson and Young, two close aids of Dr. King, are basically in competition in the same market space. Both offer their extensive experience in international business, finance and politics, and their substantial contacts and relationships throughout the world, directly linking the potential of emerging markets to the promise of black-owned commercial ventures. Their organizations-- Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and GoodWorks--provided expert advisory services, international contacts, and insight into the political and financial environments of international markets for corporations interested in exploring the economic opportunities for development and growth in these regions. These groups focus on negotiating and securing bilateral and multilateral diplomatic and international business negotiations and international trade missions, encouraging U.S. businesses to explore investment opportunities in new and emerging markets. Their knowledge of the business landscape and political realities in emerging markets was a key asset. Inevitably, these organizations’ competencies and connections were the results of the professional experiences, strategic business alliances, and government relationships established by their leaders. Their ability to attract clients was also the result of the prestige of their leaders and the political stances their leaders took. That may explain why both Jackson’s and Young’s organizations focused their attention on markets and governments where Pan-Africanism and the Third World were rooted, and the experience of black civil rights leaders resonated more deeply.

Jackson’s approach to facilitating foreign trade between U.S. black ventures and Third World economies has changed since the 1980s. It was politically motivated and ideological in character in the 1970s, at the height of Pan-Africanism in the United States, but then Jackson embraced a more
traditionally business-oriented approach. Consequently, the role of Rainbow/PUSH had also changed. It was a natural evolution that involved other foreign trade agencies. In the 1970s, underdeveloped economies needed infrastructure, and agencies focused on creating successful business transactions for their clients. Agencies were leveraging their close contacts with decision-makers in mostly autocratic governments in Africa and elsewhere, supporting governments, as well as private and public sector organizations in the name of self-determination, resistance, and freedom. Finally, they opened doors for U.S. companies and ensured expansion and market access into fast-growing economies. In most cases, their activities included creating international government networks, and establishing and maintaining contacts with high-level officials, along with key ministries and ministers in various emerging markets. Rainbow/PUSH and GoodWorks worked to provide access to foreign governments in order to ensure successful business dealings, to provide access critical businesses, and to market and political information. They were a private, parallel circuit of the International Trade Administration for purposes of mutual aid and reciprocal assistance among Pan African and Third World advocates.

It would be misleading to suppose that Jackson’s engagement with global issues has been simply an extension of his domestic philosophy of self-help and reciprocity. During all these years, Jackson has evolved his thinking about black business, economic justice, and global capitalism. Yet there are some basic concepts such as economic autonomy, black unity, and inclusion that are constant in Jackson’s lifelong struggle for black advancement. While promoting Pan-Africanism and human rights, Jackson never stopped promoting the idea that black people must apply a global strategy to deal with economic autonomy, especially with global banks, and leverage their strengths, stating, “Black groups need to buy shares in large multinational corporations so that they can attend global banking group shareholder meetings to raise issues.” He said that African American shareholders need to inquire with the management of these companies who they used for their professional and other services. During a keynote address to the annual investment conference of the Association of Black Securities and Investment Professionals (ABSIP) in Johannesburg in 2010, Jackson pointed out that there was still apartheid in finance, healthcare, education, trade and shipping, among other sectors. “We are free, but we aren’t equal. Who manages the pension funds? This is another dimension of our struggle,” said Jackson. ABSIP was established in 1995 to address the apparent lack of representation of black professionals in the securities and investment industry in South Africa. Jackson told ABSIP members that everyone had to understand that by saying, “Every bank and shopping center is for sale, if you have the money”. In other words, participating in the capital system provides economic power.

Jackson has dedicated himself to cultivating unity among black people throughout the world, more than establishing independence for African nations. This is probably because of Jackson’s experience with a fractured black movement in Chicago during the late 1960s, combined with his commitment to work with coalitions. In particular, the relationship with Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, a mainly African American Muslim movement, resonated in Chicago as well as in the global arena. It has been observed that “the joining of Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan represents a new dimension of unity in the Black community. Those two symbolize the coming together of different thoughts, ideology and religions around one common cause: Black empowerment.” In an intentional effort to heal the wound created by the deep, public division between Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Southern Christian crusade and Malcolm X’s Northern Muslim urban militancy, Jackson and Farrakhan traveled together in the Middle East, took advantage of each other’s connections and reputations, and sometimes jointly accepted contributions from the same foreign institutions in the name of their organizations.
Finally, during his career Jackson has never hesitated to promote Africa, the U.S. black businesses number one trading partner, and had the audacity to act as if his race qualified him to promote Africa as a natural trading partner of the United States. Jackson never stopped calling for an African version of the Marshall Plan—a reconstruction policy of aid given to Europe at the end of Second World War—as a bolster to accelerate the inclusion of Africa in the capitalistic system. According to Jackson, Africa deserved massive assistance as a result of the damage done by colonialism, and the continuing naked aggression that has left the continent poor and downtrodden. In his words,

*In order for countries to overcome disparities, they need to get fair trade and favored-nation trade status to cover the ravages of war and occupation and colonization. The formula was good for European reconstruction - it should apply to Africa.*

As implied earlier, Jackson was not a stranger to issues affecting Africa, and he has been a vocal supporter of Africa for decades. During the era of his presidential candidacy, he did call for debt cancellation and lower interest rates on the loans given to African nations. As a “special envoy,” in the 1990s, Jackson made sure that Africa would never be on the margin of the president’s mind. As a global adviser, he continues to play a role in Africa. At present, he is still committed to encouraging people to build mutually respectful relationships, forging political coalitions, sustaining economic growth, and merging capitalism and democracy.

**CONCLUSION**

Without overstating Jackson’s role and influence on the emergence of black entrepreneurship, domestically and internationally, promoting capitalistic development within the black community is one of his most enduring and important legacies as a black leader. Banking, finance, construction, education, and consumer goods are only a few of the industrial sectors that benefited from his activism. Along with this, he was also engaged in economic Pan-Africanism by participating in foreign trade and the global expansion of black business, although there is no evidence that a global business strategy and entrepreneurial sector emerged within the black community as a result of the numerous trips Jackson made a broad to discuss mutual interests in business opportunities.

However, Jackson did not confine his activism simply to black capitalism. While he embraced the consumers’ rights tactics of Operation Breadbasket, and aided several black businesses to grow, his tangential involvement in foreign affairs helped the black cause internationally. While his stature as a leader was raised from local and national to global status, the size of deals he promoted also escalated, from selling products made in Michigan, to acquiring stakes in the African state telecommunications monopolies that were being privatized.

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4 Tom Landess and Richard M. Quinn, Jesse Jackson & the Politics of Race (Ottawa, IL: Jameson Books, 1985), 42-44.

5 Landess and Quinn, Jesse Jackson & the Politics of Race, 46.


7 David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 565.


10 Kenneth R Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 2002), 291-3. It is well known that Shakedown is not only not a scholarly account, but a book by a writer with a very pointed political agenda. It’s published by Regnery Publishers, which is widely known as a strongly conservative and politically-motivated publisher. However, there are seven very good books written on Jackson, none of them written by scholars. Besides, some of “the best works” in the civil rights movement “are ... published by professional journalists and freelance writers, law school professors, divinity school and ‘religious studies’ professor, political scientists, sociologists, musicologists, and English professor.” Source: David L. Chappell, “Waking from the Dream,” Presented at the Historical Society Annual Meeting, June 5-8, 2008, Baltimore, Maryland. It is difficult to assess the objectivity of an author. A case in point is Jesse Jackson: America’s David. Scholars love Reynolds’ book on Jackson, although it has been discredited by Jackson. This said, while including Shakedown in the list of “the best works” on Jackson is objectively difficult, it is probably fair to accept it as a legitimate source.

11 This activity came with a price: the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted surveillance of Jackson during most of his trips outside the United States. Documents have been censored and many pages include blacked-out sections. The files of the FBI on Jackson span the years 1967 to 1984 and include the original investigative file on Jackson detailing his trips and the FBI allegations that he may be acting as a foreign power’s agent. Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI File on the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 1988. Book and Microfilm.

13 Operation PUSH is a spin-off of Operation Breadbasket. In 1971, Jackson broke with S.C.L.C., and Operation Breadbasket became Operation PUSH.

14 This gulf between leadership and the rest of the organization has been constant in Operation PUSH (in its subsequent incarnations). As a charismatic organization, the leader is energetic, knowledgeable, and connected, yet he does not successfully run the operations.


16 Harold Brackman. Jews, African Americans, and Israel: The Ties That Bind. Working paper for Simon Wiesenthal Center/Museum of Tolerance, January-February, 2010. Brackman also points out that “It’s important to note, however, that moderate mainstream civil rights leaders like Whitney Young, Bayard Rustin, and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., continued to subscribe to the pro-Israel gospel. Just before the Six Day War began in June, 1967, Rev. King signed on to an open letter in the New York Times by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and others urging President Johnson to honor the American commitment to Israel. Yet King was sharply criticized from within as well as without his inner circle for too closely identifying with “the Zionist Jew” and compromising his pacifist principles. Though shaken and forced to abort a planned Mideast trip, King did not retreat. Responding to a hostile question during a 1968 speech, he declared: “When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You are talking anti-Semitism.”

17 Another way to put it is that Jackson moved from a sub-Saharan form of Pan-Americanism to Pan-Arabism.

18 The Arabs’ contribution caused a federal investigation and a media storm for Jackson. The FBI conducted surveillance of Jackson for potential violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA); basically, the FBI considered Jackson an agent working with foreign powers. The Atlanta Constitution framed Jackson as “a Libyan oil agent,” and quoted sources from the CIA. Jackson defended his controversial decision to seek and accept the contribution and specified that he received $8,000 from Arabs and $2,000 from black businesspeople attending a meeting in Chicago. He also defended his strategy of dialogue with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The investigation was called off when Jackson phoned the White House, and, in turn, the White House staff called the Department of Justice. For material on the investigation, see: Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI: File on the Reverend Jesse Jackson. For material on the media coverage, see for example: Tendayi S. Kumbula, Jackson Defends Group’s Bid for Aids from Arabs, Times, in Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI File on the Reverend Jesse Jackson.


20 Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 118.

21 Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 120.


Another way to put it is that Jackson moved away from a Pan-Arab form of Pan-Americanism and adopted a global view of Pan-Africanism.


One of Jackson’s sons, Jonathan, has publicly declared that he discussed and negotiated oil prices and deals with a Nigerian businessman. Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 237.

In Africa Jackson was a superstar. When Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa, met the members of the U.S. delegation, he greeted Jackson with “Jesse! Good to see you again, my friend!” And when Clinton made history by addressing the South African parliament, it was Jackson who was singled out by one of the speakers as being responsible for overturning apartheid. Source: Roger Simon, “A New, Toned-Down Jesse Jackson -- 'Special Envoy' Plays Restrained Role During Clinton's Africa Tour,” Chicago Tribune, March 30, 1988.

Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 287.

Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 288. Critics of Jackson were also inside the White House and the Department of State. Sandy Berger, then-national security advisor, minimized Jackson’s status: “He is not a special envoy,” Berger said. “He is a government employee.” Jackson was a part-time, non-compensated representative, whose work is limited to 60 days per calendar year. An envoy refers only to a paid position. Source: Roger Simon, “A New, Toned-Down Jesse Jackson -- 'Special Envoy' Plays Restrained Role During Clinton's Africa Tour,” Chicago Tribune, March 30, 1988.

Hatch, Beyond Opportunity: Jesse Jackson’s Vision for America, 60. Jackson also met twice with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, and with the archbishop of Canterbury.

During the 1950s, Jack O’Dell was a member of the Communist Party in America. In the late 1950s O’Dell withdrew his membership from the Communist Party to work with S.C.L.C. as a volunteer in March 1960, and was hired by King in 1961 to manage a mass-mail funding office for S.C.L.C. in New York. In 1963, O’Dell went on to work as an associate editor of the journal Freedomways magazine and then for Jackson as a director of international affairs.


In the last decade, there has been a proliferation of “hybrid organizations.” Traditionally, hybrid organizations mixed elements from both the public and private sectors, or combined the aims of for-profit and not-for-profit operations. New examples of hybrid organizations are Russian firms like Gazprom, Chinese state-owned corporations, and sovereign wealth funds like Dubai World. For an introduction to hybrid organizations, see: J. Koppell. The Politics of Quasi-Government: Hybrid Organizations and the Control of Public Policy (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Source: Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and Good Works public documentation.

Rather than bringing foreign businesses into contact with U.S. representatives, Jackson has often promoted the opposite, that is, creating contacts in Africa and other continents for U.S. businesspeople.


Among the black businessmen who have taken advantage of the global agenda of Jackson is Maceo Sloan, a financial brokerage company with investment activities in South Africa. He received $120m in guaranteed loans from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation for his New Africa Opportunities Fund. Timmerman, Shakedown: Exposing the Real Jesse Jackson, 314-5.

45 Salim Muwakkil, “Why Jackson Won’t Dump Farrakhan.” In These Times, May 2, 1984, 2. It is not the object of this article to address how the Nation of Islam did business with some of the very same countries that Jackson did. A great source for more on this topic is Dawn-Marie Gibson, A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012).

46 The story of the contributions received by Operation PUSH and the Nation of Islam is not the object of this paper. However, it is fair to say that both organizations received funds from Libyan institutions, although in different years.


49 Mitch Dudek, “Jesse Jackson’s Unity Pitch Led Kenyan President to Name Ex-rival Special Envoy,” Chicago Sun-Times, April 16, 2013.

50 The state in object is Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. Of course, it is difficult to evaluate how much money has been flowing through the hands of Jackson and his colleagues, the businesspeople and the state officers, who have been involved in such transactions. However, based on the financial details available on the type of transactions in object, i.e., telecommunications, an estimation of millions of dollars seems quite conservative.