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LOCAL News



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(ISSN: 3070-8761)

WHEN EMPOWERMENT JOINS FORCES



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VOLUME 1



LOCAL NEWS: Free Xandria Harris!:

Is Ms. Harris a Killer or a Woman Caught in a Tragedy She Didn't Create?

By Aaron Robinson

She did not fire the gun.

Yet today, Xandria Harris, a mother of several children faces the same first-degree murder charges as the man who pulled the trigger.

On December 29, 2021, officers responded to a call at the Comfort Inn in Bradley, Illinois. What began as a complaint about barking dogs ended in tragedy: Sgt. Marlene Rittmanic was killed, and Sgt. Tyler Bailey was seriously wounded. Darius Sullivan has since been convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

But why is Harris standing trial as if she committed the same act?

Prosecutors argue she was present and involved. They point to her actions before and after the shooting. During Sullivan's trial, she refused to testify, even after being granted use of immunity and was sentenced to 10 years for contempt of court. Judge Kathy Bradshaw-Elliott stated that refusal to testify must be deterred.

Her defense tells a different story.

Attorney Cierra Norris argues Harris was a victim of domestic abuse and suffered from battered woman syndrome. A psychologist was hired to evaluate whether she acted under



Kankakee County State's Attorney Jim Rowe, left, and Xandria Harris, right

duress. Supporters insist she never carried a weapon, never harmed an officer, and instead focused on getting her children to safety.

So the question remains: Is she being prosecuted for participation or for proximity?

In a justice system that has long drawn scrutiny from communities of color, some are asking harder questions. Would this case look the same if Harris were not a Black woman? Is silence being treated as guilt? Is loyalty being criminalized?

This trial is about more than one night in 2021. It is about how far

accountability extends and whether justice can distinguish between the hand that pulls a trigger and the person standing beside it.

For many watching, the demand is simple: If the law is blind, it must also be fair.

The trial for Xandria Harris has been pushed back once again. The court recently granted a joint motion to delay the trial due to issues involving discovery and witness lists. The new trial date is now scheduled to begin on August 17 in Kankakee County.

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COVER PHOTO: Tocarra Eldridge-Robinson and Teresa Jones

INSIGHT NEWS READER

InSight News Reader is more than a newspaper publication, it is a trusted voice for the community, created to inform, uplift, and amplify stories that deserve to be heard while addressing the concerns and needs of the community at large. It also engages with its audience and serves as a dynamic platform for businesses to expand their visibility and connect meaningfully with the communities they serve.

Operating under the umbrella of Robinson Publishing LLC, InSight News Reader is connected to the nationwide magazine, Consciousness Magazine, a respected publication with over 20 years of impact, along with a portfolio of published works that have achieved Amazon bestseller recognition. Together, these platforms reflect a lasting commitment to truth, empowerment, culture, and community advancement.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

What's Your Point?



your Voice - your concern & thoughts

Meet Travis Miller: A Voice for the People

Activism Inspiration

What inspired my activism was watching injustice become normal. In Kankakee, I saw how systems quietly decide who gets opportunity and who gets obstacles. I saw young Black students labeled before they were nurtured. I saw potential people criminalized instead of cultivated. I saw families navigating a system that seemed designed to exhaust them rather than empower them.

And I refused to accept that as that's "just the way it is."

My activism didn't start from theory, it started from proximity. From conversations with mothers trying to keep their sons out of the system. From watching returning citizens come home with hope, only to be prevented from having the opportunity to receive jobs and housing. From seeing how over-policing and under-investment can shape an entire community's future.

I became an activist because silence felt like complicity. For nearly 20 years, my work has centered on disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, fighting for scholarship access, pushing for criminal justice reform, reducing recidivism, and demanding police accountability, because all of those issues are connected. They're not isolated problems; they are patterns.

And at the core of it all is this: Black people deserve equity, dignity, and fairness, not as a favor, not as a trend, but as a right. I'm not motivated by titles or recognition. I'm motivated by impact. I want the next generation in Kankakee to inherit systems that work for them, not against them. That's what keeps me in this line of work. And I'm not done yet.



Travis Miller is always prepared to fight for injustice around the country.

Concerns of the Black and Brown people when it comes to the judicial system in Kankakee County

I want to be clear; my position isn't about attacking individuals. It's about examining systems. I don't have specific sentencing data in front of me that proves disparities in every case, so I won't make claims I can't substantiate. But what I can speak to is lived experience, community testimony, and patterns we see across the country, where data has consistently shown racial disparities in arrests, charging decisions, and sentencing outcomes.

In Kankakee, many Black and Brown residents feel over-policed and under-protected. We have seen instances of unjust arrests and

unnecessary harassment. Whether those cases are isolated or indicative of broader issues, they deserve transparency and accountability.

This isn't about blaming one State's Attorney, one judge, or one officer. Systems operate over time, across administrations. If there are disparities, they are systemic, not personal.

What I advocate for is transparency. If sentencing is equitable, then the data should reflect that. If arrest patterns are fair, the numbers should confirm it. Accountability shouldn't be feared, it should be welcomed.

Justice should be consistent, impartial, and humane. And if members of the community feel that isn't happening, it's not enough to dismiss those concerns, we have to examine them. My commitment is not to tear down institutions. It's to strengthen them by ensuring they serve everyone equally.

Conclusion

I don't do this work for headlines. I do it for history. For nearly two decades in Kankakee, I've fought for opportunity, fairness, and dignity because I believe our community deserves systems that lift people up, not lock them out. My focus has never been temporary change. It has always been generational impact.

I want a Kankakee where a child's ZIP code doesn't determine their destiny. Where returning citizens have real second chances. Where justice is truly impartial. Where Black and Brown families don't have to question whether fairness applies to them. This work is bigger than protests. It's about policy. It's about leadership. It's about building institutions strong enough to serve everyone equally.

I believe accountability and collaboration can coexist. I believe progress requires courage. And I believe our city can become a model for what equitable reform looks like, if we are willing to do the hard work.

At the end of the day, legacy isn't about what you say. It's about what you build that lasts.

And I'm committed to building something that outlives me.

Be a voice in the community. Do you have any concerns about your community? Here is your chance to Express Yourself. We want to hear from you. Email contact@insightnewsreader.com or write to P.O. Box 2496, Kankakee, IL 60901

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Talk it out with your youth



5

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Hot Topics - What's Trending

Young Leader in the Making: Aiyana Lafi Shines at Just Seven Years Old



88th Annual Illinois State Conference NAACP Convention

By Staff Member

At just seven years old, Aiyana Lafi is already making a remarkable impact in her school and throughout the community. A second grader at Steuben Elementary School in Kankakee School District 111, Aiyana is balancing academics, creativity, leadership, and service, all while enjoying the fun of being a kid.

Aiyana recently transitioned to Steuben Elementary following the closing of Edison Primary School. She says the adjustment has been smooth. "It's kind of like Edison technically," Aiyana shared. "They have Tie Tuesday. The principal is nice. The library is far to walk to. The art teacher makes good projects for us to do."

Her love for art continues to flourish. Last year, Aiyana drew and colored a vibrant banner for the Still I Rise Organization, showcasing both her creativity and her commitment to uplifting others. She also appeared in

Tocarra's "Come & Get Your Kids" music video, adding performer to her growing list of accomplishments.

Aiyana holds a special distinction in Kankakee County, she is the youngest member of the NAACP. Last year, as she recited the pledge at the 88th Annual Illinois State Conference NAACP Convention, an experience she remembers fondly. "I felt good. I got to say the pledge!" she said proudly. "It was great because there were people I did not know, but I was ready," she explained. "And also seeing the people with the flags and the army, I was glad because my grandpa was a marine."

In addition to her civic involvement, Aiyana is also a member of the Girl Scouts of America. She enjoys the friendships and lessons that come with being a part of the organization. "My friends are in it. We learn the Girl Scout pledge and everyone is very kind. We also learn about other Girl Scouts. The uniforms are cool," she said with a smile.

Entrepreneurship is another one of Aiyana's talents. She operates her own small business, Aiyana's Grab and Go. "It's great because everyone likes it and I get money," she laughed. "It was out of the ordinary and so much fun. I get to save and spend the money. I love spending money."

With confidence, creativity, and a heart for community service, Aiyana Lafi is proving that leadership has no age limit. Whether through art, service organizations, or her own business ventures, she is already setting an inspiring example for her peers, and her future looks exceptionally bright.



By Mozella Malone

In 2026, the biggest conversation among teens isn't just fashion, music, or social media trends, it's mental health. Across schools and communities, young people are openly talking about burnout, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion in ways previous generations rarely did. Many teens describe feeling constantly overwhelmed by academics, social media, family expectations, and the pressure to "have it all together." As 16-year-old Maya shared, "I'm not sad exactly... I'm just tired all the time, even when I sleep." Another high school junior explained, "It feels like if you're not achieving something big, you're behind." For a generation raised online, comparison is constant and silence is rare and that nonstop stimulation is taking a toll.

Unlike past generations, today's youth live in a 24/7 digital environment where social media highlights success but hides struggle. Teens are aware that much of what they see is curated, yet the pressure still lingers. "You scroll for five minutes and suddenly you feel like everyone is doing better than you,"

said 17-year-old Jordan. At the same time, global news, economic uncertainty, and cultural shifts add to a quiet but persistent stress. School counselors report that students are more willing to talk about anxiety and depression, but many still hesitate to ask for help. As one sophomore put it, "We joke about being 'mentally unstable,' but deep down we're actually trying to cope."

The encouraging shift in 2026 is that teens are redefining strength. Protecting their peace, setting boundaries, and prioritizing therapy or rest are becoming normalized rather than stigmatized. Young people are encouraging one another to log off, seek support, and speak honestly about their struggles. "Taking a break doesn't mean you're weak," said 15-year-old Alana. "It just means you're human." As youth culture continues to evolve, one thing is clear: mental health is no longer a hidden issue. It is a defining priority for this generation and one that communities, schools, and families must take seriously if young people are to thrive.

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WHEN EMPOWERMENT JOINS FORCES

Tocarra Eldridge-Robinson and Teresa Jones Building Legacy and Lifting Community



Tocarra Eldridge-Robinson and Teresa Jones pose

By Aaron Robinson

When Tocarra Eldridge-Robinson, founder and Executive Director of Still I Rise, and Teresa Jones, owner of Fierce Financial Planning Services Inc., join forces, their shared vision for community empowerment becomes something far greater than the sum of its parts. Together, the two women have created a collaborative model of leadership that continues to uplift families, empower youth, and inspire

community engagement throughout Kankakee.

Last year, the dynamic duo demonstrated the power of collaboration during their 8th Annual Back-to-School Supply Giveaway, an event that brought excitement, unity, and resources to hundreds of local families. Through their partnership, they were able to distribute nearly 800 backpacks filled with school supplies to children in the community. But the event went far beyond school supplies. Families

were welcomed into a festive environment filled with entertainment, food trucks, face painters, hair braiders, community organizations, and both local and national sponsors.

The event has become a highly anticipated annual tradition, one that represents more than charity. It reflects a commitment to community care, strategic collaboration, and a belief that collective action can create meaningful change.

Their partnership itself began through a simple introduction by a mutual acquaintance. What started as a friendship quickly evolved into a working relationship built on mutual respect and shared values. Interestingly, their collaboration often operates in a modern and unconventional way. Much of their planning and coordination happens through text messages, emails, and occasional phone calls, with the two primarily coming together publicly for media appearances or community events.

Despite their busy schedules and separate businesses, the connection between them remains strong.

“Working together with Teresa has been an amazing venture,” Eldridge-Robinson says. “We both have separate businesses, but when we unite to collaborate on community events, the connection, sisterhood, and the vision is real. Teresa is a very humble being and extremely easy to work with. She’s an avid listener and we bounce ideas off one another to bring incredible concepts to the forefront.”

Jones shares similar sentiments about their partnership.

“It feels amazing to work with someone who shares many of the same

goals about helping the community,” she explains. “When you have someone who thinks the same way you do about a common mission, it helps balance everything.”

For both women, success has never been defined by recognition or public praise. Instead, it is rooted in perseverance, authenticity, and service.

“The keys to my success have been my everlasting perseverance, tireless work ethic, passion for giving back, and always believing in myself,” says Eldridge-Robinson. “This work requires a lot of effort, but the inner reward of joy and accomplishment is indescribable.”

Jones echoes a similar philosophy.

“The key to my success is staying true to myself,” she says. “Standing firm in what I believe in, giving back to the community, and never forgetting where I came from.”

Both women are driven by deep personal motivations. Eldridge-Robinson credits her determination to an internal drive that has guided her throughout life.

“My motivation comes from within,” she says. “When I set my mind to accomplishing something, I begin executing immediately. Obstacles may appear along the way, but my inner drive does not allow them to derail my vision.”

Jones says her motivation is rooted in legacy.

“I want to create something meaningful that I can leave behind for my loved ones,” she explains. “I’m also motivated by helping others succeed. I truly enjoy seeing people win.”

Their professional backgrounds reflect years of dedication and

education. Eldridge-Robinson holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration and a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, credentials she uses to guide the work of Still I Rise, an organization she founded in 2014 that has served thousands of individuals throughout the region.

Jones brings more than two decades of financial expertise to her work. She holds a Master's Degree in Accountancy, a Bachelor's Degree in Business with a concentration in Accounting, and an Associate Degree in Applied Science in Accounting. Since 1998, she has worked in accounting and finance while building her company, Fierce Financial Planning Services, into a trusted resource for individuals and businesses seeking financial guidance.

Both women have celebrated impressive accomplishments along the way. Still I Rise was named Kankakee County Nonprofit of the Year in 2021 and also received the NAACP President's Award that same year. Eldridge-Robinson was honored with the John Fulton Distinguished Alumnus Award in 2023 and has experienced success as a professional recording artist with songs appearing on the iTunes charts.

Jones considers some of her greatest accomplishments closer to home.

"Being a mother and grandmother is my greatest accomplishment," she says. "I'm also proud to be the first person in my family to earn a master's

degree and to operate a successful, legally registered business for more than five years."

Like many entrepreneurs, their journeys have not been without challenges. For Eldridge-Robinson, personal loss tested her resilience during critical moments in her work.

Within a four-year period, she lost several close family members, including her younger brother, grandmother, grandfather, and father. Yet even in grief, she continued to carry forward her mission.

"One of the most difficult moments came just days before our Back-to-School event when my grandmother passed away," she recalls. "I briefly considered canceling, but I knew she believed in the work we were doing. Continuing the event felt like honoring her legacy."

Jones notes that running a business in Kankakee as a Black woman can present its own unique challenges.

"Finding adequate staffing and access to funding can be difficult," she explains. "Sometimes there are stereotypes and expectations placed on you. But I've learned to stay focused on the bigger picture and move wisely."

Despite the obstacles, both women remain committed to breaking stereotypes surrounding collaboration within the Black community. Their partnership stands as proof that unity can lead to greater progress.

"Trust and shared vision are important," Eldridge-Robinson says. "There is no competition between us. We maintain a community-based mindset."

The two also acknowledge that Kankakee, like many communities, faces challenges related to unity.

"There are definitely people working together for the greater good," Jones says. "But there is still division. Sometimes people feel their light will dim if they collaborate with others, when the opposite is actually true."

Regardless of those challenges, both women remain deeply connected to their hometown and committed to its growth.



8th Annual Back to School Event

"I've always believed in giving back," Eldridge-Robinson says. "Helping others has always been a part of my DNA."

Jones agrees.

"If we don't give back to our own community, who will?" she says. "Giving back, even when faced with negativity, says a lot about who you are."

Their dedication to youth remains at the center of their work. As role models, both women encourage young people to remain confident, disciplined, and committed to their goals.

"Stay true to yourself," Eldridge-Robinson advises. "Believe in your uniqueness and build a team that supports your growth."

Jones encourages young women to invest in themselves.

"Have standards, respect yourself, and always believe in your potential," she says.

As they prepare for their 9th Annual Back-to-School Supply Giveaway, the pair hopes to expand the event's impact even further. This year's celebration will once again provide backpacks, school supplies, food, and activities, but will also introduce new opportunities.

Eldridge-Robinson plans to introduce a scholarship opportunity for students, while Jones intends to launch a youth financial literacy program, along with bike giveaways and annual cash donation initiatives.

Together, their vision continues to

grow, one event, one family, and one act of service at a time.

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909 N. 5th Kankakee, IL 60901



WVLI Radio Interview



Tocarra pose for Photoshoot



Teresa Jones pose for business photoshoot

What's Poppin'

Entertainment

Arts & Culture - Music - Events and more...

From Kankakee to the Industry: The Journey of Vudu Spellz

By Aaron Robinson

For years, mentioning Kankakee outside of Illinois often brought puzzled looks. That changed slightly in 2020 when King Von referenced the city in his song "Took Her To The O", briefly placing the small community in a national hip-hop conversation.

But long before that lyrical nod, DJ and producer, DJ Vudu Spellz had already been working to put Kankakee, affectionately known as "K3" on the map.

Small Town, Big Talent

Located about 45 minutes south of Chicago, Kankakee has long lived in the shadow of its larger neighbor. Chicago's music scene, shaped by generations of migration, blues, house music, and hard-edged storytelling born from struggle, has earned global recognition. Kankakee, Vudu Spellz says, carries much of that same creative DNA, just without the infrastructure.

"There's no lack of talent," he explained. "But there's an unfortunate lack of resources, labels, music companies and networking opportunities." That lack of access created significant challenges early in his career. Local buzz alone wasn't enough to sustain growth. Vudu Spellz says he quickly realized that being the most skilled DJ or producer in his immediate area wouldn't open national doors.

To build momentum, he had to travel, collaborating with artists in Chicago, Atlanta and Los Angeles while steadily expanding his network.

Representing Home on a National Platform

Vudu Spellz' determination eventually earned him a moment on BET's Rap City during a live broadcast of The Basement, a milestone many DJs aspire to reach. During the appearance, he made sure to represent his roots, shouting out Chicago and wearing a custom-made Kankakee jersey honoring Trivicio Taylor (RIP).

At the time, he had recently relocated



DJ Vudu Spellz

from Cicero, Illinois, to Las Vegas, beginning his first year as a Dream Team DJ on Power 88. The move marked a pivotal turning point, expanding his reach beyond the Midwest. "Sometimes you have to move around to be successful," he said. "But always represent where you're from."

Faith, Family and the Formula for Longevity

When asked what advice he would offer DJs, producers and artists in the Chicago area, Vudu Spellz doesn't start with streaming numbers or marketing strategies. He starts with foundation.

"You have to put God and family first," he said. "You have to be spiritually grounded."

He also stresses the importance of self-investment and education. According to Vudu Spellz, many artists fail not because of lack of talent, but because they lack business knowledge.

"You have to learn the business, research the business and study the business," he said. "And build relationships with attorneys or mentors who understand contracts and legal documents."

Vudu Spellz also cautions artists about traditional record deals, explaining that advances function like high-interest loans tied to the artist's Social Security number. Labels must recoup expenses before profits are distributed and those expenses often include itemized costs that exceed what companies actually pay through corporate discounts.

"Understanding that side of the business can save your career," he said.

A New Chapter

After 18 years in radio, Vudu Spellz recently retired from broadcasting and now serves as Executive Creative Director for Lottery Pick Entertainment, partnered with BlocStar Evolution and Virgin Music Group, powered by Strange Music, founded by Tech N9ne.

He is currently promoting new releases from artist Daiyon, including "Trust Exercise" featuring LaRussell and "Vicious" featuring Mistah F.A.B. He also has a recent international single that was released Feb. 20, 2026 titled "What I Gotta Do," featuring South African artist Apple Nick and Daiyon.

In addition to industry work, Vudu Spellz remains active in community initiatives through the Las Vegas Hip Hop Entrepreneurship and Donna Street Community Center, collaborating with sponsors including the Golden Knights, Raiders, Athletics, Aces, Cox Cable and Silver Summit.

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Community Highlights:

FROM IDA B. WELLS TO IMPACT

Vondale Eugene Singleton Sr. Builds a Legacy of Mentorship

By Aaron Robinson

Born on the South Side of Chicago in the historic Ida B. Wells Homes housing projects, Vondale Eugene Singleton Sr. understands firsthand what it means to overcome adversity. Raised amid challenging circumstances, he defied the odds to become a first-generation college graduate, earning both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Oral Roberts University. He later received an honorary doctorate from Trinity International University.

Singleton credits much of his success to his mentor, Steven Robertson, who he says "invested sacrificially" in him and helped shape the man he is today. That investment sparked a lifelong commitment to ensuring other young men receive the same guidance and opportunity.

For more than 21 years, Singleton has worked in primary, secondary, and higher education as both a teacher and administrator. His leadership experience includes roles within the KIPP network and the Noble Network of Charter Schools, where he founded CHAMPS Mentoring. He now serves as Backbone Director for My Brother's Keeper Chicago (MBK Chicago), part of the broader Obama Foundation initiative focused on creating pathways of opportunity for boys and young men of color.

Singleton's philosophy is simple



Photo of Vondale Singleton

yet powerful: "Salvation plus education is an unbeatable combination."

Breaking Barriers and Redefining Narratives

Singleton's early life was marked by hardship. He lost his mother at 14 and witnessed his father struggle with addiction and incarceration. Rather than becoming defined by circumstance, he chose faith, discipline, and accountability.

"Mentors poured life into me and helped me see my purpose," he says. "When you believe you are Born 2 Win, you begin to live differently." That belief became the foundation for CHAMPS Mentoring, a Gold-Star Award-winning

program designed to provide structure, leadership development, mental health support, and college and career exposure for boys and young men of color.

Influences and Inspiration

Throughout his journey, Singleton was shaped by influential leaders and thinkers. In addition to Steven Robertson, spiritual guidance came from Pastor Clarence Boyd, Pastor Corey Brooks, and Pastor John Hannah. Motivational speaker Eric Thomas inspired his "one percent mindset," while business leaders Larry Miller and Howard H. White of Jordan Brand modeled leadership rooted in legacy and excellence.

A Legacy of Impact

Singleton considers his greatest achievement to be personal: being a present father and husband. Professionally, he has received numerous honors, including recognition as a Chicago Defender Men of Excellence honoree and a mayoral proclamation recognizing ten years of CHAMPS service.

To date, CHAMPS Mentoring has served more than 12,000 young men across Chicago and cities nationwide. Participants have gone on to graduate from institutions such as Morehouse College and Northern Illinois University with scholarships, becoming entrepreneurs, engineers, and mentors themselves.

The organization now focuses on long-term sustainability, including plans for a permanent CHAMPS headquarters to serve future generations.

Overcoming Barriers

Singleton has faced poverty, grief, limited resources, skepticism, and the ongoing funding challenges of nonprofit leadership. Yet through partnerships, faith, discipline, and documented impact, he has continued to expand opportunities for the young men he serves.

One of the most heartwarming moments for Singleton is when former mentees return to guide the next generation, creating a cycle of leadership and empowerment. "Every young man is Born 2 Win wh

For more information about CHAMPS Mentoring, visit www.champsmentoring.com.

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The Circle

Around the World News



Current - Latest Happenings

Remembering Rev. Jesse Jackson [Oct 8, 1941 - Feb 17, 2026]



Rev. Jesse Jackson, Steven Majors (Photographer), and Aaron Robinson (Publisher of InSight News Reader)

By Aaron Robinson & Mozella Malone

From the moment Reverend Jesse Jackson stepped onto the national stage, he positioned himself as a bridge, connecting eras, ideologies, and generations within the ongoing struggle for racial justice in America.

At a time when the Civil Rights Movement was largely rooted in the South and still burdened with unfinished work, Jackson expanded its reach. He helped carry the fight from the dismantling of Jim Crow laws to confronting systemic inequality in Northern cities. He linked the disciplined, church-centered activism of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s inner circle to the rising voices of Black Power advocates and later to activists shaped by the hip-hop generation.

“From Martin Luther King to

Barack Obama, there’s a bridge called Jesse Jackson,” Rev. Al Sharpton once said, a reflection of Jackson’s unique role in shaping modern political and social movements.

Jackson, a protégé of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., rose to national prominence during the height of the Civil Rights Movement and continued to lead for decades after King’s assassination in 1968.

For more than 50 years, Jackson remained a visible and vocal advocate for racial justice, economic opportunity, voting rights, and human dignity. Even after being diagnosed with a neurological disorder later in life that affected his movement and speech, he refused to retreat from public life.

He weighed in on major political debates, stood beside families of Black Americans killed by police, and worked to combat vaccine hesitan-

cy in Black communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. His activism reflected a lifetime commitment to expanding access and inclusion.

Though age and illness softened his physical presence, his resolve endured. He was arrested outside the U.S. Capitol while urging lawmakers to end the filibuster to protect voting rights, a reminder that the fire within him had not dimmed.

Rev. William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People’s Campaign, recalled Jackson’s words of encouragement to younger activists: “Live life so that it’s not your alarm clock that awakes you in the morning, but a purpose. A purpose will get you up when you want to stay down.”

Even in his later years, Jackson’s voice carried powerful resonance. At George Floyd’s memorial service in Minneapolis, his anguished cry of “I can’t breathe!” echoed through the cathedral, marking the length of time Floyd had been pinned beneath a police officer’s knee. It was both a personal expression of grief and a symbol of a struggle that had defined his life’s work.

He later marched through downtown Minneapolis and stood with Floyd’s family when former officer Derek Chauvin was convicted. Addressing demonstrators, Jackson cautioned, “Even if we win, its relief, not victory. They’re still killing our people. Stop the violence, save the children. Keep hope alive.”

That final phrase “Keep hope alive” became one of his enduring refrains.

Jackson’s career was not without controversy. Critics accused him of seeking attention and courting the spotlight. One of the most debated

moments of his early prominence came after King’s assassination, when Jackson appeared in photographs taken at the Lorraine Motel balcony. He later told the Chicago City Council that his turtleneck bore King’s blood, a claim that drew both sympathy and skepticism.

Two decades later, Jackson reshaped American politics with his presidential campaigns. In 1984 and again in 1988, he sought the Democratic nomination for president. In 1988, he won 13 primaries and caucuses, the most successful run by a Black candidate for president until Barack Obama’s election in 2008.

His influence extended beyond politics. In 1988, he helped popularize the term “African American,” advocating for a name that reflected both heritage and citizenship. Through Operation PUSH, later the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, Jackson pressured corporations and institutions to expand opportunities for Black Americans and other marginalized communities. He also engaged in high-profile diplomatic efforts that led to the release of American hostages abroad.

Born Jesse Louis Jackson Sr. on Oct. 8, 1941, in Greenville, South Carolina, he was the son of Helen Burns, a teenage high school student, and Noah Louis Robinson, a married neighbor. He was later adopted by Charles Henry Jackson, who married his mother and gave him his surname.

From the pulpit to the protest line, from presidential campaigns to international negotiations, Jackson’s life embodied both controversy and courage. To supporters, he was relentless; a man who refused to step away from the battlefield of justice.

As he once said of himself: he would not stop until he dropped.

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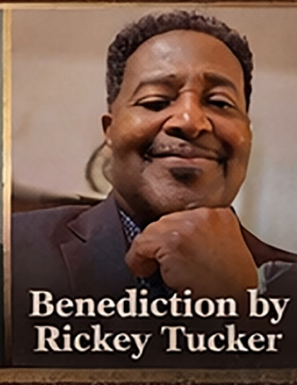
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