

Former Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. sentenced to federal prison for corruption

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Former US Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. was sentenced to 30 months in prison by a circuit court in Washington, DC on Thursday. Jackson's wife, Sandi Jackson, was sentenced to 12 months to be served at a different time. The judge ruled that the couple must also pay back \$750,000 to the government and perform hundreds of hours of community service.

On February 20, the Jacksons pleaded guilty to criminal charges stemming from more than 3,000 instances of using campaign funds for the personal purchase of luxury goods. "For years I lived off my campaign," Jesse Jackson Jr. admitted in February. The plea was in part aimed at ending any further probing of their finances, which could have implicated other politicians.

Jackson, the son of Democratic Party operative Jesse Jackson, was once considered a rising star in the Democratic Party. He was selected to be among the first speakers at the 2008 Democratic National Convention, which named Barack Obama its candidate for president. Jackson Jr. was also a leader of his father's Rainbow/PUSH coalition and a fixture on Democratic Party campaigns. He was the congressman for Illinois's 2nd district since 1995, before resigning after his reelection in 2012, citing mental health problems.

The felony conviction does not necessarily spell the end for Jackson's prospects in business or politics. "I still believe in the power of forgiveness," Jackson said. "I believe in the power of redemption. Today I manned up and tried to accept responsibility for the errors of my ways, and I still believe in the resurrection."

Jackson has expressed interest in being incarcerated at a facility in Birmingham, Alabama, where Wall Street investor Bernie Madoff is currently held. Federal prosecutors pressed for a four-year prison sentence,

while Jackson's attorney argued for a shorter sentence, claiming he "was not Bernie Madoff."

The investigation into Jackson's use of campaign funds came on the heels of an investigation of the sale of Barack Obama's former US Senate seat by Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. Jesse Jackson Jr. was considered by the governor as a potential buyer. Blagojevich, who was impeached and jailed on corruption charges, tried to convert his power to appoint a replacement for Obama into a cash payment or sinecure.

Jackson Jr. represents a certain social and political type. His crimes, in comparison to those carried out on a daily basis by the corporate and financial elite, were in fact relatively minor. They are part of a process, steeped in corruption, in which the ruling class has implemented historic attacks on the working class, while carrying out a historic transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich.

In Chicago, the Democratic Party is struggling to contain the social opposition to its destruction of the social position of the working class in the city and beyond, through dismantling public housing, privatizing of city services, closing public schools, and slashing public transit.

The unprecedented polarization of Chicago, and cities across the US, along class lines that has taken place over the last three decades has revealed the reactionary character of identity politics, a crucial element of the bourgeois political order in the United States.

The Jacksons' corruption is part of a broader process of degeneration that has seen former "civil rights" figures (like Jackson's father) transformed into wealthy businessmen assigned the role by the political establishment and the media as leaders of the African-American "community." In fact, they have absolutely

nothing in common with the workers and poor people they claim to represent.

The median income in Jackson's district is just under \$45,000. The 2nd District also includes some of the poorest areas in the United States, like Ford Heights, where the median household income is just under \$22,000 and more than 20 percent of households make less than \$10,000 per year.

Sandi Jackson was alderman for Chicago's 7th Ward, representing some of the same communities as her husband. In her ward is South Shore, a neighborhood of about 50,000 residents, where the median household income is just under \$28,000. The neighborhood of South Chicago, the former location of US Steel South Works, has a median income of \$31,164. Both neighborhoods have been devastated by deindustrialization and population flight, having lost about 20 percent of their residents over the last 10 years, who left in search of work and affordable housing.



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