

# *“Farewell to ‘The Reverend’”*

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The Jackson Children: Jonathan (left), Jesse, Jr. (middle), Yusef (right)  
Santita (left rear); and Ashley (right rear)

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**March 1, 2026**

“Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

-- John 11: 17-26

I rise this morning to join with all of my fellow citizens across this great nation and, indeed, across the entire world, in expressing heartfelt condolences to the family of the late **Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. (1941 – 2026)**.

In memoriam of this great man's life and contributions to humanity, there is nothing that I can say that you have not already heard or that has not already been said.

And yet I feel as though I owe an obligation to my own friends and family members to share something of my own personal feelings and thoughts upon the passing of Rev. Jackson. Most of them know, albeit quite vaguely, that I attended law school alongside Rev. Jackson's oldest son, Jesse, Jr.; and, through that acquittance, we became lifelong colleagues, friends, and co-workers in the struggle for freedom.

And so, perhaps, what I have to say here this morning may have some grain of value, particularly as there may be some youths, or an aspiring public servant, after reading this, might draw inspiration, confidence, and strength from my words.

And then, too, what I have to say here might also very well be an important marker, or an important milestone, in my own family's history.

As fate would have it, my choice of career (law); my selection of graduate schools (the University of Illinois); and the time period of my graduate studies (early 1990s), all contributed to multiple encounters between the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. or his children and myself during the period 1991 through 1998.

For it was then, during this period, when I first learned about Rev. Jackson's football scholarship to the University of Illinois during the year 1959.

During the early 1990s, Rev. Jackson's stature and national influence was so great that he was simply known as "**THE REVEREND.**"

Whenever I spoke to his son, Jesse, Jr., I simply and affectionately called him "**THE REVEREND.**" Indeed, Rev. Jackson's stature during that time was *on par* with the great Frederick Douglass (1818 – 1895).

Rev. Jackson's oldest son, Jesse, Jr., was one year ahead of me in law school. Jesse, Jr. graduated in '93, and I graduated in '94.

And because we were both enrolled in two law school courses that had perhaps less than 15 enrolled students— namely, a) "*Legal Theory*," which was taught by Professor Anthony Taibi; and b) "*Jurisprudence*," which was taught by Professor Francis Boyle— Jesse, Jr. and I got to know each other very well.

During the Summer of 1994, while I had returned to Jacksonville in order to study for the Florida Bar exam, I heard one morning on the *Tom Joyner Morning Show* that Rev. Jackson would be in Jacksonville to attend a political rally involving what I cannot now recall. But I distinctly remember Congresswoman Corrine Brown being there, and several other important local officials.



Rev. Jesse Jackson, standing next to Congresswoman Corrine Brown, during one of many Visits to Jacksonville, Florida

Unexpectedly, I again met my law school classmate, Jesse, Jr. — he had not yet gotten elected to Congress.

When Jesse, Jr. saw me, he yelled, "*Attorney Ford!*" I imagined that he did that so that Security team and others would not be alarmed, and so that the Security team would permit me to get past the gate to where he was sitting.

We gave each other a sort of a "fraternity handshake!"

After about five minutes of shooting the breeze, I could not resist; and so, I said, "*Jesse, introduce me to 'THE REVEREND.'*"

He said, *“Ok... follow me.”*

We walked briskly through the crowds, and as I can recall, that was quit an ordeal.

When we finally walked up to Rev. Jackson, Jesse, Jr. said, *“Reverend, this is Rod Ford, one of my law school classmates.”*

Reverend Jackson and I shook hands; but he did not let my hand go! As Rev. Jackson gripped my hand, he then asked me, in a joking manner, *“DID HE REALLY GO TO LAW SCHOOL?”*

Jesse, Jr. then butted in and said, *“Rod, tell him that I went to Class!”*

At that point, several onlookers, who were standing nearby, started to laugh!

And I said, *“Yes, Reverend, he actually went to class!”*

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This was the last time I saw the Rev. Jackson and his son, Jesse, Jr., in person.

But, as fate would have it, Jesse, Jr. and I would remain connected through various proxies – i.e., third parties or mutual colleagues and friends who knew both of us and who could relay messages.

When I was in the Army, stationed in Charlottesville, Virginia, I also met Rev. Jackson’s youngest son, Yusef Jackson, who was then attending law school at UVA.

Yusef and I met; we spoke briefly; and, we conveyed pleasantries back-and-forth between Jesse, Jr. and myself, at least once or twice.

It is amazing how small the world really is!

Needless to say, my words here do not adequately convey my heartfelt condolences to my friend, Jesse, Jr., and to entire Jackson family.

Like each of you, I can go on with a long list of Rev. Jackson's very impressive deeds – such as marching with Dr. King; bringing hostages home from overseas; two great runs for President in '84 and '88; and so much more – all of which inspired me as a high school and college student.

But, obviously, *through* Rev. Jackson's wonderful children and their friendship, he became to me more like family!

And so, like family, I extend forth my deepest, sincerest sympathies.

May the Good Lord keep and comfort the Jackson family during this difficult period of their loss.

And may the good Reverend rest in Eternal Peace!

Rev. Roderick Andrew Lee Ford  
Gainesville, Florida

