

The Truth About Jesse Owens

Jackson, left, and sons Jonathan, center, and Yusef following a speech in Los Angeles. A newspaper report Sunday, April 8, 2001, says a friend of Jackson encouraged a Budweiser executive to choose one of Jackson's sons as majority owner of a lucrative Chicago beer distributorship. Jesse Jackson isn't letting anything like a secret out-of-wedlock daughter and growing questions about his personal and organization funding get him down.

On the contrary: He's pressing forward with his Wall Street Project, in which some of America's largest corporations have donated millions to his network of charities and organizations.

Ostensibly, Jackson's projects are designed to increase minority participation on Wall Street. But many corporations have learned that a hefty donation to Jackson's causes is simply the best way to change the reverend's political course and bring him around to their side.

And the best way to ensure Jackson's support is to make sure that his family and close friends get a large slice of the pie. No wonder Jackson's most recent book is entitled, "It's About the Money: How to Build Wealth, Get Access to Capital and Achieve Your Financial Dreams."

It all began in the early '80s, when Jackson's demands moved Coca-Cola to award more distributorships to minorities. Among those who got the lucrative contracts: Jackson's half-brother, Noah Robinson (now serving a life prison sentence for hiring gang members to kill three business associates).

In 1996, Jackson successfully pressured Texaco to pony up hundreds of millions to settle a discrimination lawsuit - even though no racial discrimination was ever proven. (A "smoking-gun" tape of company execs was later determined to contain no racial slurs.)

But Jackson had learned that companies will pay up in order to avoid bad publicity and accusations of racism - even if totally unfounded. So in 1997 he formed the Wall Street Project - which now rakes in some \$10 million a year.

And as investigations by The Post, the Chicago Sun-Times and the Los Angeles Times demonstrate, Jackson's support was easily bought. Indeed, noted the L.A. Times, "Corporations have paid handsomely to get Jackson off their backs."

For example:

* In February 1997, Jackson filed a petition with the FCC to block Viacom's bid to sell 10 radio stations, saying the company had reneged on a promise to sell some of them to minorities.

Viacom agreed to create a \$2 million fund to promote minority ownership of broadcast properties. Jackson then ended his opposition, and the sale was approved. The fund is administered by Washington lobbyist Warner Session - who later awarded the Jackson's Citizenship Education Fund (CEF) \$680,000.

* In May 1998, Jackson called President Clinton to block a proposed merger of SBC and Ameritech, calling it "antithetical to basic democratic values."

In early 1999, the two firms pledged \$1 million to CEF; Ameritech agreed to sell its cellular business to a new partnership that included longtime Jackson pal Chester Davenport, who had no previous telecommunications experience.

Davenport later hired Jackson's son Jonathan - who also happens to be president of CEF - as a consultant. (Jackson's wife Jacqueline is a member of the CEF board, and their son Yusef is the board attorney.)

In March 1999, Jackson declared the merger to be "in the public interest."

* In 1998, Jackson's sons Yusef and Jonathan were awarded the largest Anheuser-Busch beer

distributorship in Chicago by company head August Busch IV. He'd been introduced to the Jacksons by Beverly Hills billionaire Ron Burkle - who later hired Karin Stanford, mother of Jesse's child, as a "consultant."

Back in the '80s, Jesse Jackson had organized a boycott of Anheuser-Busch, complaining about the company's hiring and promotion practices. The two Jackson sons today refuse to disclose their own minority-hiring practices.

* In Dec. 1998, Jackson threatened to block the GTE-Bell Atlantic merger unless he got guarantees regarding the minority community. Over the next four months, the companies pledged \$1.5 million to CEF and gave Chester Davenport a 7 percent stake - and the chairmanship - of its new cellular business.

In May 1999, Jackson endorsed the merger, now known as Verizon. And five Verizon executives just addressed Jackson's latest Wall Street Project conference.

* In Dec. 1998, Jackson opposed AT&T's merger with TCI, charging the latter has "a questionable record and a poor level of public service."

The next month, AT&T pledged \$425,000 to the CEF and sent its chairman to one of Jackson's conferences, where he pledged to hire a minority-owned firm to handle its bond offering. The firm that was eventually chosen for the \$750,000 contract, Blaylock & Partners, has close ties to Jackson.

* In Feb. 1999, Jackson negotiated a settlement in a racial discrimination lawsuit filed against Boeing by 13,000 employees.

Days later, Boeing donated \$50,000 to the CEF and made several subsequent donations. Later, the company arranged for hundreds of millions in company pension funds to be administered by minority-owned investment banks, at least two of which are Jackson financial backers.

* In May 1999, Jackson pressured PepsiCo - on the eve of its initial public offering - to give part of the lucrative deal to Utendahl Capital Partners, which has since donated tens of thousands to CEF; PepsiCo has given substantially more.

* In Sept. 1999, Jackson opposed the merger of CBS and Viacom. Two days later, Jackson - together with Chester Davenport and longtime partner Percy Sutton, a CEF board member (Jackson and his wife hold \$1.2 million worth of shares in Sutton's Inner City Broadcasting) met with CBS Chairman Mel Karmazin and urged him to sell the UPN network to a minority owner.

Viacom and UPN then pledged \$730,000 to the CEF. The FCC eventually approved the merger - contingent on Viacom selling UPN within one year.

Jackson also took Sutton along to promote Inner City investments (in which, as a shareholder, he and his wife stand to benefit) during a trade mission to Africa in his role as Clinton's special envoy to the continent.

One of the few corporate heads to resist Jackson's shakedown efforts was T. J. Rodgers, CEO of Cypress Semiconductor, who insisted his industry's workforce is appropriately diverse. The response from Team Jackson: "We can now officially describe Cypress Semiconductor as a white-supremacist hate group."

"He declares racism based on dubious statistics," Rodgers told the Los Angeles Times. "Then he gives you a chance to repent - and the basic way to [repent] is to give Jesse money. The threat is you'll be labeled a racist if you don't."

For years, the news media have taken a hands-off attitude to Jackson - particularly when it comes to his finances and his political hustling. Now, his personal scandal has finally forced him to open up the books and records. And it's becoming increasingly clear that Jesse Jackson has a great deal of explaining to do.