
maynard jackson dies Maynard H. Jackson Jr; NY Times obit

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Maynard H. Jackson Jr., First Black Mayor of Atlanta, Dies at 65 By DAVID M. HALBFINGER ATLANTA, June 23 - Maynard H. Jackson Jr., who as this city's first black mayor embodied the seismic shift in political power from Atlanta's white establishment to its growing black middle class, died this morning after collapsing at an airport in Washington. He was 65. He was resuscitated at Reagan National Airport but suffered a heart attack en route to Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, where he died about 9 a.m., his physician, Dr. Winston Gandy, said at a news conference here. Mr. Jackson, the great-grandson of slaves who won the first of his three terms as mayor in 1973, oversaw the construction of what would become the nation's busiest international airport, endured a horrifying two-year spree by a serial killer and rising homelessness, and helped win the designation of Atlanta as the host city for the 1996 Olympic Games. But it was his fiery advocacy for the new black majority that had elected him - in particular, by setting up affirmative-action programs for hiring city workers and contractors, and by giving neighborhoods a voice in city planning - that constituted a political revolution in the heart of the South. Seemingly overnight, it transformed Atlanta into a mecca for talented, aspiring blacks from across the country. After leaving office for the last time in 1994, he remained influential in Atlanta, where he is said to have handpicked each of his successors, and in the national Democratic Party, where he challenged Terry McAuliffe for the chairman's post in 2001. Mr. Jackson was a 30-year-old lawyer representing indigent defendants when his first child was born on April 8, 1968, the day that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was buried. He said the coincidence moved him to think about the life-death cycle and enter politics. Two months later he filed to challenge the legendary senator and Georgia kingmaker, Herman Talmadge, in the Democratic Party. He said later that he had had little hope of winning but thought Mr. Talmadge, a diehard segregationist, ought not to run unopposed. Mr. Jackson ran a grass-roots campaign across the state, attracting support from poor white farmers, and won more than 200,000 votes, carrying the city of Atlanta. The next year, he ran for vice mayor, a largely ceremonial post, and won in a landslide with a third of the white vote and 99 percent of the black vote. Four years later, he challenged the incumbent mayor, Sam Massell, a progressive who was the city's first Jewish mayor, and won a 47 percent plurality in a field of 11 candidates. Their two-week runoff campaign degenerated into bitter racial acrimony when Mr. Massell adopted as his campaign slogan, Atlanta's Too Young to Die, playing to white voters' fears. On Oct. 16, 1973, Mr. Jackson handily won the runoff with 59 percent of the vote, becoming the first black mayor of a major city in the South, the same year that Tom Bradley and Coleman Young won the mayoralties of Los Angeles and Detroit respectively. Mr. Jackson had campaigned against police brutality and for equity in hiring practices, and his first two terms revolved around themes of crime and racial preferences. He fired the police chief, John Inman, who was seen as racist and ineffective at reducing crime, but the chief fought his dismissal all the way to the state's highest court before settling for a demotion. Despite statistics showing a falling crime rate, though, the city was terrorized from 1979 to 1981 by the murders of 24 children and 6 adults. Wayne Williams, implicated in 24 of the slayings, was tried and convicted of two of them in 1982. Mr. Jackson's greatest legacy was in affirmative action programs that set the standard for American cities, especially those with black majorities, though his advocacy for those programs also helped set a tone of confrontationalism with the white business establishment that left scars on both sides. Maynard Jackson was not a gradualist, said Gary Pomerantz, author of *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn* (Scribner, 1996), a history of white and black Atlanta told largely through the story of Mr. Jackson's family. He believed in change coming right now, if not sooner. As he took office, the old railroad town was becoming the air-travel crossroads of the South, Atlanta's airport was expanding to meet the needs of a major hub, and Mr. Jackson demanded that black workers and contractors receive their fair share of the business building and operating its new terminals at Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. That was just the red flag for so many of the business leaders who were barely able to come to terms with fact of African-Americans having political power, and now having the prospect of intruding on the economic area was enough to drive them ballistic, said Michael L. Lomax, who was a speechwriter for Mr. Jackson in the 1970's and is now president of Dillard University in New Orleans. Mr. Lomax said white Atlanta fought tooth-and-nail before ceding power to the upstart new mayor. The reality was, Maynard made it more confrontational because of his own approach: he was not a diplomat, not a mediator, he was a lawyer, and he was either the advocate for something or the adversary. Mr. Jackson often boasted that the airport was built ahead of time and under budget, even as the city contracts granted to minorities duly soared from less than 1 percent in 1973 to nearly 39 percent within five years. He also boasted that Atlanta gained dozens of new black millionaires, many thanks to joint ventures of minority-owned and white-owned companies at the airport. In many ways, Maynard's the architect of modern Atlanta, Mr. Lomax said. The city just opened up in ways that were unimaginable. When Maynard got elected, Mr. Lomax added, and started a revolution at City Hall, that's what gave black people a piece of the pie and put that city on the map for every young black person in America who had ambitions of doing something spectacular with his or her life. Mr. Jackson's required exit from office after his second term underscored his contentious relationship with Atlanta's business community: no local law firm offered him a job. Instead, he set up a local office as a bond lawyer for a Chicago firm, gaining experience in municipal finance that would later help make him a millionaire. In 1989, after Andrew Young's second term as mayor, Mr. Jackson reclaimed City Hall with 79 percent of the vote. Invariably described as larger-than-life, Mr. Jackson stood nearly six feet three inches and weighed as much as 300 pounds. He easily filled a room, even before he let loose his booming, deep voice and soaring oratory. But he was plagued by health problems related to his obesity, including diabetes. He was a fixture eating fried chicken at Paschal's, the landmark soul-food restaurant here and was known to devour a half-gallon of ice cream in a single sitting, said Bob Holmes, a friend and director of the Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy at Clark Atlanta University. In 1992 he underwent bypass surgery to clear six arterial blockages. The following year, after an administration marred by

contracting and bribery scandals at the airport, he said he would not seek a fourth term. Maynard Holbrook Jackson Jr. was born March 23, 1938, in Dallas, the third of six children of Maynard Sr., a prominent local minister, and Irene Dobbs Jackson. The family moved seven years later to Atlanta, where his paternal great-great-grandfather had bought his own freedom and founded the Wheat Street Baptist Church, and where his maternal grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, himself the son of slaves, became Atlanta's leading black power broker and earned the unofficial title of mayor of Sweet Auburn, the street at the center of black business and cultural life. Mr. Jackson graduated from Morehouse College in 1956, but flunked out of Boston University's law school before graduating from that of North Carolina Central University in Durham in 1964. He returned to Atlanta, worked for the National Labor Relations Board and later headed the Emory Community Legal Services Center. Mr. Jackson divorced his first wife, Bunnie Jackson-Ransom, in 1976, and a year later married Valerie Jackson, who is the host of Between the Lines, a local public radio show, and with whom he lived in the Buckhead section of Atlanta. Besides them, he is survived by a daughter with Ms. Jackson-Ransom, Brooke Edmond, 35, and Ms. Jackson's daughter from a previous marriage, Beth Hodges, 43, whom he adopted, both of Washington; their son Maynard Holbrook Jackson III, 31, of Atlanta; two children with Valerie Jackson, Valerie-Amanda, 23, and Alexandra, 18; and three grandchildren. After leaving office in 1994, Mr. Jackson formed a municipal underwriting firm, which has earned millions of dollars in fees from Atlanta and Georgia state government entities and has participated in bond issues in Chicago, Los Angeles, Memphis, New York, Oakland and Philadelphia. He stayed active in the Democratic party as an endorser and advocate for grass-roots politicking. After losing the chairmanship to Mr. McAuliffe in 2001, he was named the party's national development chairman. Mr. Pomerantz, the author, said Mr. Jackson had a keen sense of his own history, and recalled taking Mr. Jackson to see the slave graveyard where his great-great-grandparents were buried. When he saw those two graves, and he'd never seen them before, he just sort of gasped, held his hand over his mouth, then he reached over to touch the tombstone, Mr. Pomerantz said. But he pulled his hand back before he touched it as if it were aflame. Then he reached out and touched it with one hand. And then he held it firmly with both hands, almost merging with it - standing there, in the shade of these dogwood trees that had literally grown from his slave ancestors.

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