



Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr.

June 26, 1938 - November 20, 2024

Long-time attorney and civil rights leader Donald R. Jackson Sr., 86, passed away November 20, 2024, in Peoria. He practiced law more than 50 years, served as president of the NAACP's Peoria branch two decades and president of the Illinois State Conference of the NAACP from 2004 to 2011. With his wife, the late Ernestine Jackson, he forged a legacy of advocacy and activism.

Born June 26, 1938, in Peoria, IL, to Edward Jackson and Kathlyn Williams, he was a descendant of one of Peoria's earliest families. His great-great-grandfather, Thomas Lindsay, came to Peoria as a boy in the 1830s. Lindsay, Peoria's first Black market master, was part of a small group that successfully pushed to integrate public schools in 1871. His great-grandfather Henry Gibson, a constable and Peoria's first known Black elected official, won Peoria's first civil rights lawsuit. His great-grandmother, Julia Lindsay Gibson, was a businesswoman and founding member of several long-standing local organizations, including the Colored Women's Aid Club, which organized what eventually became Carver Community Center.

Don married Ernestine Humes January 21, 1961, at the former St. Patrick's Catholic Church. She preceded him in death September 6, 2023. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Whether in the courtroom or on the golf course, he loved to argue. It was a trait, along with his oratorical skills, that served him well in his life-long drive for social and political change.

“Don was a kind of crusader in that he cared more about justice than making money,” says friend and colleague G. Douglas Stephens.

He was equally focused on fighting racial discrimination and building opportunities in education, employment, housing, healthcare and politics. Both publicly and behind the scenes, he was influential in mentoring or kick-starting the careers of a generation of Black lawyers, judges and some of the city’s most prominent elected officials. He formed the city’s first Black law firm, which operated in the 1980s, with Clifton Mitchell and now-retired Judge Glenn Collier. Illinois’ two U.S Senators regularly appointed him to serve on screening committees assigned to review and vet candidates for federal judgeships or attorneys in the Central District of Illinois.

In his later years, he was probably best known for his volunteer work with the NAACP, but he had already built a significant private practice specializing in many of the same issues he targeted with the NAACP, particularly labor law, civil rights and all forms of job discrimination. He was one of the few area attorneys who consistently represented workers and unions in workers’ rights cases. He has also worked on cases of wrongful convictions and wrongful arrests.

He was a 1956 graduate of Manual High School and, later, a graduate of Bradley University. In his early 30s, with three young sons and his wife’s support, he decided to go to law school. At the time he was a recruiter for the Tri-County Urban League’s pioneering Labor, Education, and Apprenticeship Program (LEAP), which helped more than 200 women and minorities gain union jobs in the construction and building trades.

He graduated from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1974 and returned to Peoria to work for the National Labor Relations Board. He was also admitted to the bar in 1974. A year later, he entered private practice and joined the staff of the Peoria County Public Defender.

He taught part-time at Bradley University, served as guest lecturer for seminars at agencies such as the Illinois Department of Human Rights, and as a hearing officer for the Illinois Supreme Court's Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission.

Civil rights and the law were not his only passions. He was an avid golfer who played with the Peoria Progressive Golf Club for many years. He and his wife were founding members, as well as board members, of the Heritage Ensemble and he was a former co-owner of Big John's North with Stephens and Paul Mroz. He was a member of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church.

He received numerous awards and honors through the years. They include the Peoria County Bar Association's (PCBA) Distinguished Service Award in 2006, the PCBA Diversity Committee's Legend Award in 2022, and the PCBA 50-year Service Award in 2024. In June 2024, he was among the first group inducted into the Manual High School Athletic and Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame. He has also received the Heritage Ensemble's Bridge Builder Award, the Martin Luther King Holiday Committee Commemorative Service Award, and the ELITE Youth Outreach Lifetime Achievement Award.

A member of the Peoria County Bar Association and the Illinois Bar Association, he served on many boards and committees, including the City of Peoria's Advisory Committee on Police-Community Relations and the Peoria Citizens' Committee for Economic Opportunity Board of Directors.

Survivors include three sons, Donald Jackson Jr. and Dale (Diane Linda) Jackson, both of Peoria, and Deric (Hannah Puffer) Jackson of Plymouth, MN; two brothers, Edward Jackson Jr. and James (Mary) Jackson, both of Peoria; six grandchildren, Desirae (Duane Simmons) Jackson, Mario Jackson, Sofia Puffer Jackson, Lewyn Puffer Jackson, Tiffany (Dominique) Hobbs, and Randy Jackson Jr.; 12 great-grandchildren, Trinity, Leiana, Le’Naya, D’Ahira, Analya, T’Ayla, Delano, Randy III, Jathaniel, Kaidyn, Marie, and Serenity; three great-great-grandchildren, Aubriella, Akai, and Angel; and many nieces, nephews, family and friends who loved him.

Besides his wife, Ernestine, he was preceded in death by his parents, his stepfather, Francis Williams, stepmother, Alice Jackson, and one sister, Patricia Perry.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the NAACP Peoria branch or the Heritage Ensemble. Contact details for the organizations are NAACP Peoria Branch, 101 N. MacArthur Hwy., Peoria, IL, 61605, <https://www.peorianaacp.com>, or through the QR code in the Photos/Videos tab on this website; Heritage Ensemble, <https://heritageensemble.com>.

Funeral Mass will be held at 11:30 am on Friday, December 6, 2024 at St. Vincent DePaul Catholic Church with a visitation one-hour prior beginning at 10:30 am. Father Achilleus Tegamaisho will preside. Donald will be laid to rest at Swan Lake Memory Gardens where full US Navy Military Honors will be rendered.

Simons Mortuary has been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences may be made at SimonsMortuary.com.

Cemetery Details

Swan Lake Memory Gardens

4601 W War Memorial Dr.
Peoria, IL 61615

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 6. 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM (cst)

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Church
6001 N University St,
Peoria, IL 61614

Funeral Mass

DEC 6. 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM (CT)

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Church
6001 N University St,
Peoria, IL 61614

Tribute Wall



“ *Simons Mortuary created a Tribute Video in memory of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr.*



Simons Mortuary - December 09, 2024 at 12:38 PM



“ *Simons Mortuary created a Tribute Video in memory of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr.*



Simons Mortuary - December 05, 2024 at 05:14 PM



“ *1 file added to the album Burial at Swan Lake Memory Gardens*



Simons Mortuary - December 09, 2024 at 12:38 PM

KC

“ *Kathy Collins lit a candle in memory of Donald Jackson*



Kathy Collins - December 08, 2024 at 07:52 AM

CM

“ *As a representative of the Heart of Illinois Area Local of the American Postal Workers, I often worked with Don when we had an issue that involved a member being accused of a crime. I have always considered him a good friend. The world is a better place because of him. R.I.P., Don. ~Carole Martin~*



Carole Martin - December 05, 2024 at 08:45 PM

MG

“ *Mark and Shelley Gibson purchased the Crystal Cross Bouquet for the family of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..*



Mark and Shelley Gibson - December 05, 2024 at 03:19 PM



“ *Pretty Please was purchased for the family of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..*



December 05, 2024 at 01:35 PM

AM

“ *Andy Hale / Hale & Monico purchased the Laven der Reflections Spray for the family of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..*



Andy Hale / Hale & Monico - December 05, 2024 at 12:41 PM

SC

“ *I met Don when I was an officer of GCU, Local 523 and he was our union attorney. We worked closely together for a number of years in the 1980s. Don was a man of the highest integrity from whom I learned much. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.*

Steve Capiteiil - December 03, 2024 at 03:15 PM



“ *Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..*



December 02, 2024 at 01:50 PM

TB

“ *Don was one of the giants of this generation of lawyers. We will miss him but his example shines on.*

Tim Bertschy - December 01, 2024 at 10:32 AM

VK

“ To the Family of Donald R. Jackson, Sr. I would like to extend my deepest & sincerest sympathy to you. I had the privilege of knowing him when he served the community as president of the N.A.A.C.P., as an esteemed attorney, and when he was a member the Heritage Ensemble. He will be greatly missed and fondly remembered. May God grant you peace. Farewell my fellow Ensemblian!



Vickie King - November 30, 2024 at 09:03 AM

B(

As a native and former Peoria resident, My parents, Larry and Helen Leatherwood and Don's family were close friends. Our families spent unforgettable, wonderful times together over the years. May he Rest In Peace and his family cherish their wonderful memories. Donald, you will be missed and fondly remembered. 🙏❤️

Beverly R. Travis (Leatherwood) - December 08, 2024 at 08:04 AM

MH

“ Marcia Hinton lit a candle in memory of Donald Jackson



Marcia Hinton - November 29, 2024 at 08:07 AM



“ Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..



November 25, 2024 at 10:58 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Attorney Donald R. Jackson Sr..

November 25, 2024 at 10:58 AM



“ John H Lee lit a candle in memory of Donald Jackson



John H Lee - November 23, 2024 at 05:15 PM



“ 1Peter 5: 2-3 “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them-not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be ; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve . True leadership involves serving and caring for those under our responsibility with a genuine heart . Thank-you Thank-you Attorney Donald R. Jackson service well done !! Richard and Theresa Walker



Richard and Theresa Walker - November 23, 2024 at 01:57 PM



“ Uncle Donald. Rest in the Arms of the Master. I’m so grateful I was able to see you before God called you home. Always in my heart

Your niece
Kim



Kimberly Moore - November 23, 2024 at 12:03 PM

TD

“ *I will never forget the great man he was. He is forever in my heart!*

Tammy Drennen - November 23, 2024 at 11:51 AM

MB

“ *Our condolences to the family, God bless you.
- Mr. & Mrs. Agbara Bryson*



Margaret Bryson - November 23, 2024 at 08:33 AM

AP

“ *Amy parrott lit a candle in memory of Donald Jackson*



Amy parrott - November 22, 2024 at 11:29 PM

AP

“ *I used to clean his office n he was our lawyer very sweet gentleman!*

Amy parrott - November 22, 2024 at 11:27 PM

RB

“ *Sincerest condolences to the Jackson Family.
May you find comfort in knowing we care.
The Vinson & Burns Family*



Rita B - November 22, 2024 at 07:22 PM

CS

““Condolences to the family of “Don Jackson”
childhood friend Rest In Peace Charlie and
Loretta Simpson 🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️
🙏🙏🙏”



Charlie Simpson - November 22, 2024 at 05:09 PM

KV

“Kirsten Vivian lit a candle in memory of
Donald Jackson”



Kirsten Vivian - November 22, 2024 at 10:45 AM

RH

“Rachel Hearn lit a candle in memory of
Donald Jackson”



Rachel Hearn - November 22, 2024 at 10:13 AM

DB

“Dorothea Banks-Burse lit a candle in memory
of Donald Jackson”



Dorothea Banks-Burse - November 22, 2024 at 08:35 AM

DC

“ I will miss the contribution of a man who stood taller than life. A champion for willing to sacrifice his life that we might find peace in ours. May his reward meet him in Heaven.

Donald Cummings - November 21, 2024 at 11:41 PM

GB

I will miss you dearly, a man of great standings and a great friend for many years. Never to be forgotten.

Georgia Butler - November 23, 2024 at 08:06 AM

GM

We live across the court from Don & Ernestine. It was lovely to chat with them after dinner when they were on chairs in front of the house. We will miss them.

Gary & Vivette Miller - December 05, 2024 at 10:27 PM