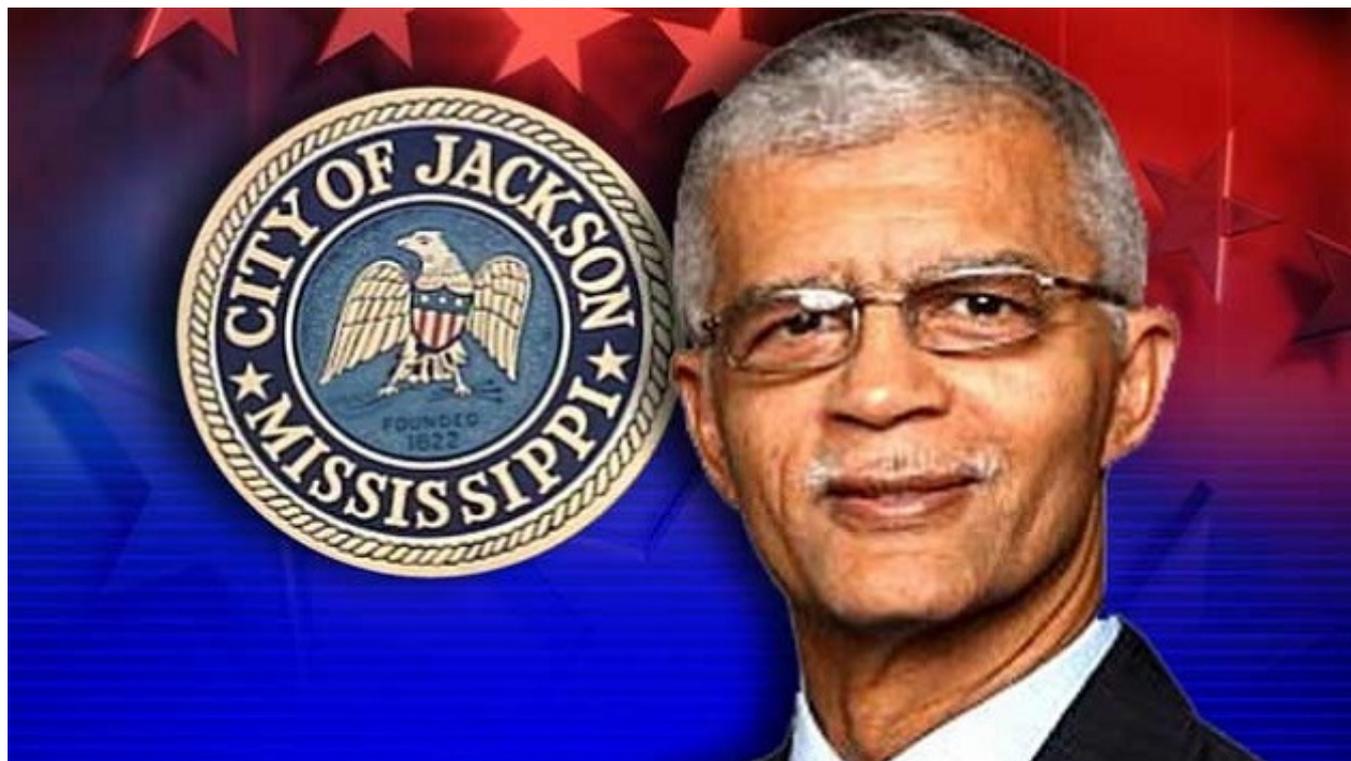


Remembering Chokwe Lumumba

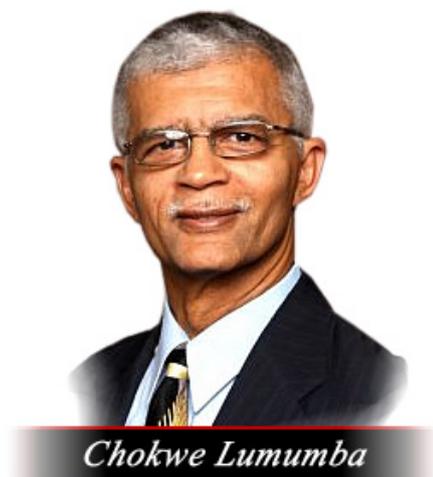
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Chokwe Lumumba



The Honorable Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, [Chokwe Lumumba](#), an unapologetic revolutionary "New Afrikan" (Black) nationalist, fighting for the human rights and dignity of Black

folks in a place that has the reputation of being antithetical to that notion, is dead at age 66.

Born, Edwin Findley Taliaferro on August 4, 1947, in Detroit, Michigan, Lumumba, the second of eight children, was a smart, athletic and competitive young man, qualities that would serve him well throughout his life. He was president of his student council at St. Theresa High School and captain of their basketball and football teams, respectively. He played college basketball (forward) and football (tight end) at Kalamazoo College where he graduated with a degree in Political Science in 1969.

His initial exposure to the issues of human rights and dignity came from his mother, Priscilla. A native of Alabama, Priscilla showed her children the infamous of a deceased 14-year-old's bashed in face. It was young Emmett Till, murdered for sassing a White woman. She followed this up with a conversation about racism—Lumumba, an impressible eight years old. He saw his mother organize in their community and raise funds for various causes. Her strength, discipline and determination gave Lumumba a foundation for organizing and a sense of Black community pride and commitment. But Priscilla wasn't the only strong person in his life, her first cousin, the legendary boxer Joe Louis, gave Lumumba a sense of confidence and dignity. Lumumba saw how many White men his cousin literally destroyed in the boxing ring and thus never had the fear of White people many Black people had at a time.

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Lumumba's political watershed moment came as a reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King, someone he followed closely throughout high school and college. Already a student leader, Lumumba and other students took over a building demanding more scholarships for Black students and an increase in Black faculty. Not long after this, Lumumba met Imari Obadele, President of the [Republic of New Afrika](#) (RNA), and his organizing and activism mushroomed as he developed a more revolutionary nationalist political outlook.

Lumumba became involved in the RNA in 1969, where he was elected Second Vice President of the Provisional Government. The RNA called for the development of a Black nation in the "Black belt south," in counties where Black people made up the majority of the population, extending from Louisiana to South Carolina.

After a protest at Wayne State Law School about racially discriminatory grading, Lumumba left in 1970 after his first year to organize in Jackson with the RNA. Lumumba became an FBI target and local law enforcement agencies routinely raided the RNA's meetings and arrested members. In 1971, the FBI and the Jackson Police Department attacked the RNA office; one police officer and an FBI agent was wounded—and a police officer was killed. It was during the ensuing legal battle that Lumumba decided to return to law school because the "movement needed skilled lawyers."

Lumumba returned to law school and graduated top of his class. He stayed in Detroit for over a decade, practicing criminal defense and human rights law. His law practice grew, representing political activists such as Bilal Sunni Ali, Mutulu Shakur (Tupac Shakur's stepfather) and former Black Panther Assata Shakur.

But in 1988, even though he loved Detroit, Michigan, he moved back to Jackson, Mississippi with his wife and small children. "I don't want anybody to think for a moment that I didn't love Detroit," Chokwe said after moving. "The South has always suggested to me some prospects because of our large numbers. It was a place where we could be the majority in the government. The idea was to try to get black majority districts where we could get human rights into government."

After moving to Jackson, he opened the People's Law Center, where he zealously represented many causes and people that needed skilled, politically sophisticated, community dedicated counsel including Geronimo Pratt, Tupac Shakur, and most recently, the Scott Sisters. He co-founded the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, an organization dedicated to self-determination, freeing political prisoners, stopping sexist oppression, reparations for "New Afrikans" (Black people), advocating for human rights and ending genocide. He also returned to one of his first loves, sports, where he coached a successful AAU basketball team for over 20 years, which included NBA players, Monte Ellis and Mo Williams.

Lumumba's legal practice was successful, but he often found himself at odds with judges and the bar for his outspoken criticism. He once spent three days in jail; was ordered to pay a fine and was disbarred for questioning the "cost" of democracy. It was not long after his reinstatement in 2007 that Chokwe turned his attention toward electoral politics.

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In 2009, he was elected Jackson City Councilman and was sitting in the Mayor's chair by June 2013. As Mayor, Chokwe was just getting started. Within four months he passed a one percent sales tax increase that is estimated to raise \$700 million dollars over the next ten years for infrastructure improvements. He had plans to make Jackson the greenest city in the South, by retrofitting and using renewable energy on all of the municipal buildings. He also wanted to develop Farish Street into a black entertainment district.

There is the old saying that the good die young. Lumumba was young in heart and spirit. On the verge of something incredibly youthful and exciting in Jackson, Mississippi, the city, and all who knew Lumumba and his dedication to Black people are in deep mourning. He will be missed!

[Source](#)