



Name in English: Harry Lee
Name in Chinese: 朱家祥
Name in Pinyin: Zhū Jiāxiáng
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1932-2007
Birth Place: New Orleans, Louisiana
Philanthropy: Yes

Profession: Sheriff, Federal Judge, Attorney, Air Force Officer

Education: B.S., Geology, 1956, Louisiana State University; J.D., 1967, Loyola University Law School

Awards: 1983, AMVETS Silver Helmet Americanism Award; 1998, National Conference of Community and Justice's first annual Founder's Award; 1998, Award from the Foundation for Improvement of Justice; 2000, Honorary Doctor of Law, University of New Haven; 2001, Louisiana Political Hall of Fame (one of only four sheriffs ever inducted)

Contributions: Harry Lee was born on August 27, 1932, in the back of his family's laundry business in New Orleans, Louisiana. Like many children of working-class Chinese immigrants born during the Great Depression, he and his eight siblings worked in the family-owned laundry and restaurant while attending school. One of his younger sisters, Margaret, in 1964, became Playboy's first Asian-American Playmate and centerfold (under the name China Lee).

Hailing from a state where Asians comprise only 1.4% of the population, Harry Lee would become one of Louisiana's most beloved politicians and its most outspoken and controversial law-enforcement official. Lee's love of politics began at age 12, when, despite his minority status, he would be elected to one student office after another by defeating white classmates. After graduating from Louisiana State University and serving in the U.S. Air Force, Lee returned to Louisiana in 1959 to pursue a career in politics. His first break was being hired as the driver for then-House Majority Leader Hale Boggs, who would become his mentor and confidant.

After earning his law degree from Loyola University and being admitted to the Louisiana State Bar, Lee formed a law practice with Marion Edwards, a future chief judge of the Louisiana Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal. Their legal practice was in Gretna, the seat of Jefferson Parish, the state's second-largest parish. In 1971, President Richard Nixon appointed Harry Lee as a federal magistrate judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. Lee would serve as a federal judge until 1975, when he was elected chief attorney for Jefferson Parish.

With a reputation of being anti-corruption and a tough crime fighter, Lee was elected sheriff in 1979, the first of his seven terms and 28½ years as Jefferson Parish's top cop. As sheriff, Harry Lee modernized his department with computers and crime analysis, but it was his charismatic, no-nonsense, and often blunt style of leadership style that won the adoration of voters and supporters, while, at times, making his advisors cringe. Sheriff Lee staunchly backed his deputies who were accused of brutality when he believed that they were performing their duties in accordance with the law.

Some of the law-enforcement policies and tactics that Sheriff Lee advocated drew the ire and legal action from the African American community, NAACP, and ACLU, which accused him of profiling African-Americans. An example of his controversial policing practices occurred in 1986 during a rash of robberies involving African American suspects who followed their white victims home to rob them. Sheriff Lee issued an order to his deputies to stop and question any African Americans seen driving in white neighborhoods, regardless of whether there was probable cause or reasonable suspicion for such detentions. That resulted in calls for the sheriff's resignation until he rescinded the order.

In 2005, during the first week after Hurricane Katrina left its devastation, looting occurred in parts of Jefferson Parish. To prevent further looting, Sheriff Lee and the Gretna police chief deployed personnel to barricade a major bridge to prevent New Orleans evacuees from crossing into Jefferson Parish. Evacuees were ordered at gunpoint to turn back and return to New Orleans. The move drew praise from Gretna residents, but criticism from Orleans Parish officials.

Despite the allegations and lawsuits against Sheriff Lee and his department during his nearly three decades in office, he would survive politically and won each of his six re-elections by wide margins. His approval rating among white voters was as high as 91%. The flamboyant Harry Lee described serving as sheriff as "the closest thing there is to being a king in the U.S. I have no unions. I don't have civil service. I hire and fire at will. I don't have to go to council and propose a budget. I approve the budget. I'm the head of the law-enforcement district; and the law-enforcement district only has one vote, which is me."

Sheriff Lee never campaigned for re-election. Instead, he would host an annual birthday party and fundraiser for himself, which he called the Chinese Cowboy's *Fais Do-Do* (Cajun for "celebration"). The monetary gifts from the estimated 5,000 who attended the annual event would pay for his re-election campaigns.

At nearly 6'3" and 375 pounds, and wearing his familiar wide-brimmed Stetson hat, Sheriff Harry Lee was bigger than life to many who knew and supported him. In the middle of his seventh term as sheriff, poor health would take its toll. He suffered from diabetes, prostate cancer, and died of leukemia on October 1, 2007. Harry Lee was survived by his wife Lai Lee; daughter Cynthia Lee Sheng, a member of the Jefferson Parish Council; and two grandchildren.

Philanthropy: After his passing, more than \$250,000 from Sheriff Harry Lee's campaign war chest went to the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Metairie in accordance with his will. Sheriff Lee also specified that money from his charitable foundation, The Harry Lee Community Service Fund, would go to Loyola University Law School and specifically toward a scholarship he established for Asian students.

References/External Links:

Wild About Harry: A Biography of Harry Lee. By Deno Seder (1985). Edition Dedeaux. ISBN-13: 978-0930987015
http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/10/jefferson_parish_sheriff_harry_1.html

(Revised by Gary Gee on December 21, 2014)