



T O U G H

SUSANNA DICKINSON MUSEUM PRESENTS:

T E X A S

CHAPTER ONE: BARBARA JORDAN

W O M E N

EARLY LIFE

About two miles northeast of downtown is Houston's Fifth Ward; first settled by Irish and Jewish immigrants and, after the American Civil War, newly freed slaves began moving into the area. It was in this neighborhood on February 21, 1936, Barbara Charline Jordan was born, the youngest of three girls. Her parents were Reverend Benjamin Meredith Jordan, a Baptist minister and warehouse clerk, and Arlyne Patten Jordan, a domestic worker and gifted church speaker.

According to Jordan, "My mother, father, and sisters said, 'You're never going to amount to anything unless you go to school. You've got to get something in your head.'" She heeded their words closely as she grew up, but it was her grandfather, John Ed Patten, who was arguably her most influential mentor. A junk merchant, he inspired Jordan to believe that despite poverty, racial prejudice, and being female in a male-dominated society, she could do anything.

Lessons from John Ed Patton:

Just remember the world is not a playground, but a schoolroom.

Life is not a holiday but an education.

One eternal lesson for us all - to teach us how better we should love.



Both: Jordan (circled above) with her sisters,
Texas Southern University

"The world is a severe schoolmaster, for its frowns are less dangerous than its smiles and flatteries, and it is a difficult task to keep in the path of wisdom."

The above words of famed African-American Revolutionary poet Phyllis Wheatley echoed in the halls of the high school that Barbara Jordan attended. She excelled at school, Girl of the Year, and President of the Honor Society. However, it was when Edith Spurlock Sampson, an African-American lawyer, addressed her 10th grade class that Jordan decided to become a lawyer. Sampson was the first woman to receive a Master of Law from Loyola University; she worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the League of Women Voters, and the National Council of Negro Women. Inspired by Sampson, Jordan became a skilled debater and entered the Texas Oratorical Usher's Contest and won the National Competition's \$200 college scholarship to any school in the US. It was clear to see that Jordan never intended to be a run of the mill person: "I can stay comfortable or go out in the world."

I GET FROM THE SOIL AND SPIRIT OF TEXAS THE FEELING THAT I, AS AN INDIVIDUAL, CAN ACCOMPLISH WHATEVER I WANT TO, AND THERE ARE NO LIMITS, THAT YOU CAN JUST KEEP GOING, JUST KEEP SOARING.

Barbara Jordan, National Geographic, August 1989



15 year old Jordan,
Texas Southern University



National Ushers Convention
Oratorical Contestants (Jordan circled above),
Texas Southern University

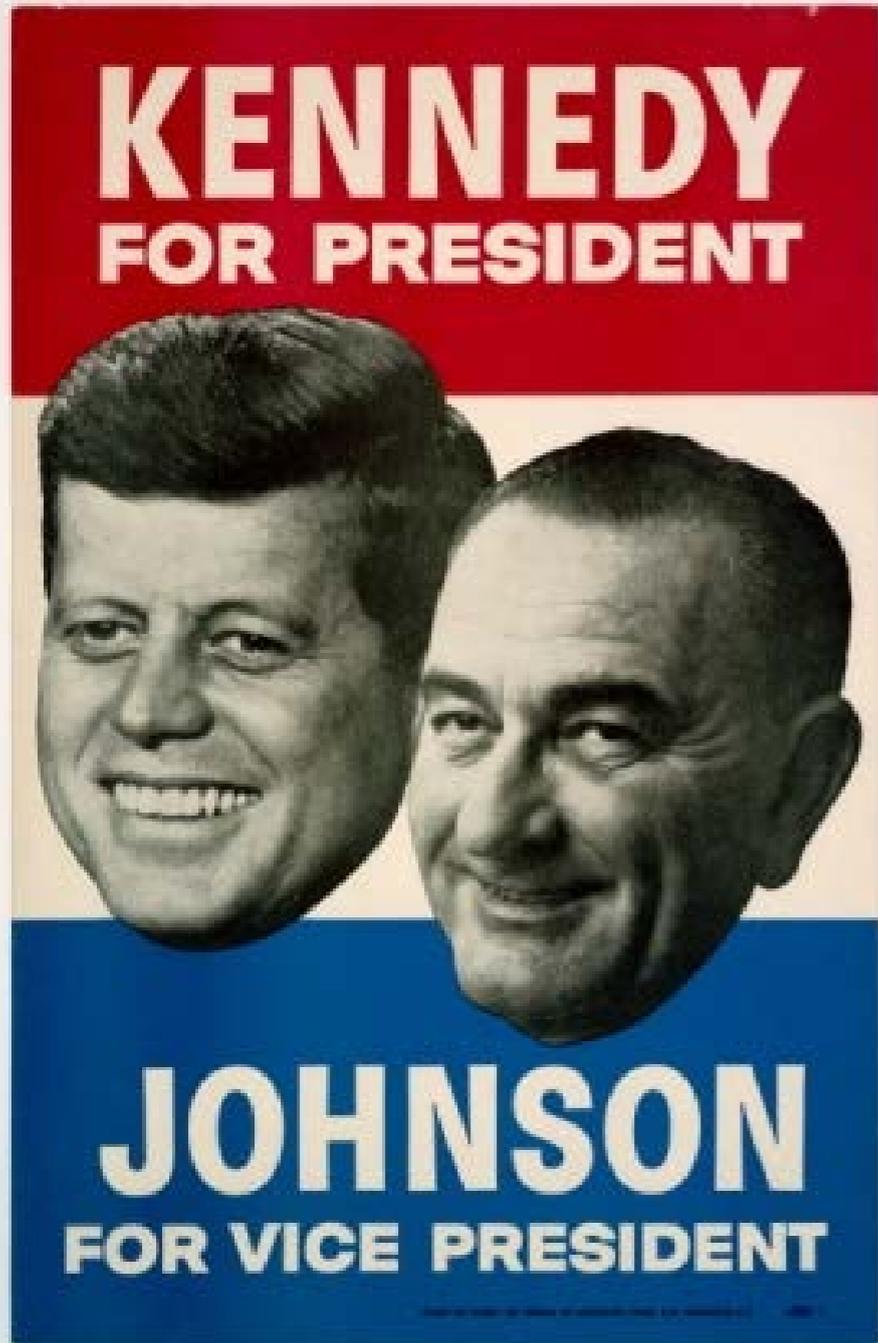
Texas segregation policies prevented her from attending the University of Texas at Austin, therefore she attended Texas Southern University, a traditional African-American University. There she continued to sharpen her skills as a national champion debater and became a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. After graduating, she attend Boston University School of Law. "I didn't get much sleep those years. I was lucky if I got three - four hours a night ... I had to stay up. I had to." Jordan passed the Massachusetts State Bar and moved from Boston to Alabama, where she taught for a year at the Tuskegee Institute before returning to Houston. Shortly after, she passed the Texas State Bar and began her own law practice from her parents' kitchen.

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS

In 1960, Jordan took her first real step into the political realm as a volunteer for the Kennedy / Johnson Democratic Presidential campaign. She began by knocking on doors and organizing Houston's first black precinct drive. When a speaker for the campaign did not show up to make a statement at a local black church, Jordan volunteered to speak. She was so effective and popular that she became a regular speaker at rallies.

After the election, friend Chris Dixie was so adamant about Jordan continuing in politics that he floated her the \$500 filing fee to run for the Texas State Senate in 1962. Jordan lost, but did not give up. She ran again in 1964, but lost again. Her perseverance kept Jordan going and in 1966 she won a seat on the Texas State Senate. Why was Jordan's third time so successful? She became the representative of the newly created "11th District." Following various cases that clarified equal representation and attempting to reduce gerrymandering, the new district was created and Jordan's chances were all but guaranteed. In 1967, Barbara Jordan became the African-American woman to preside ever in the Texas State Senate. It took 75 years, but she would continue the family legacy: [Edward A Patton](#), Jordan's great-grandfather, won a seat in the Texas House of Representatives in 1890.

It was also during this time that Jordan met Nancy Earl through mutual friends on a camping trip to Inks Lake. Jordan and Earl quickly took to one another and moved in together while Jordan served her time as State Senator in Austin. Her relationship was an open secret and Jordan never felt the need to comment on her private life.

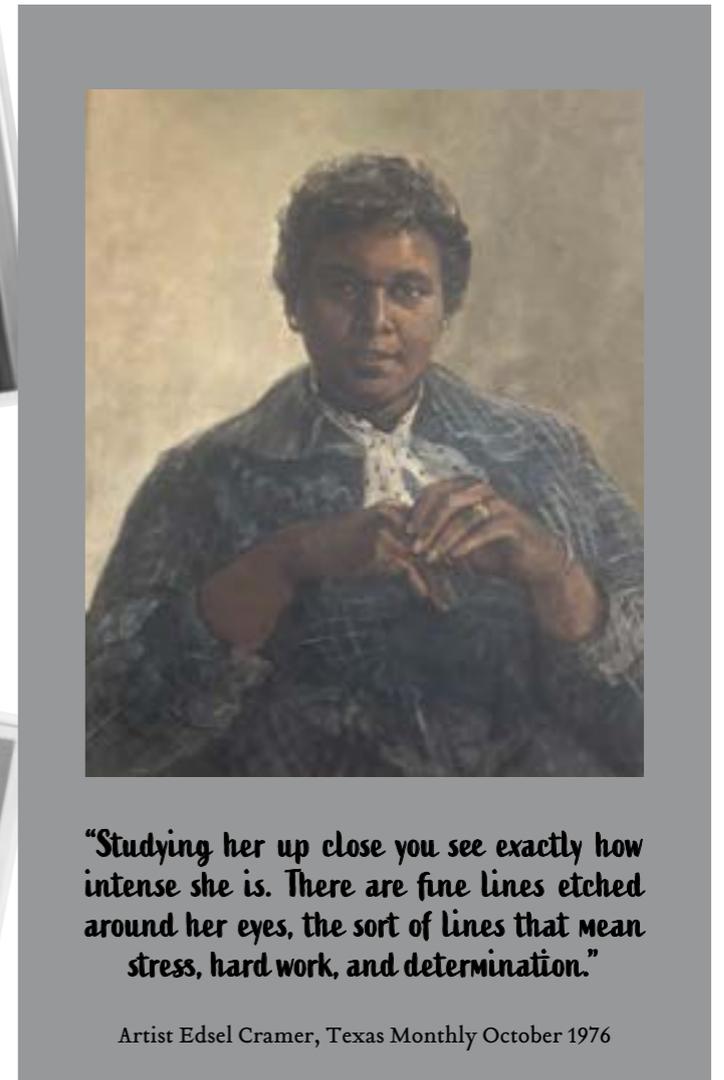


Kennedy / Johnson 1960 campaign poster, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library

TEXAS STATE SENATE

When Jordan joined the legislature, she was both the only woman and African-American serving Texas, which did not bother her as much as it did others. She wrote further legislation against discrimination based on gender and race and safeguarded help for the disenfranchised and poor. And though she may have seemed somewhat of an outsider at first, she charmed people on both sides of the aisle in the Capitol.

In an interview with Ron Marcello from the University of North Texas in 1970, Jordan explained that “ ‘the man’ as many of our people call him, writes his books and knows the rules and makes the decisions. And so I decided in order to cope with the world as it is and not as we would like for it to be, it was necessary to find the door for getting inside just a little bit to find out what ‘the man’ is doing and how he acts and how he thinks.” And Jordan succeeded; she sponsored and co-sponsored around 70 bills while serving as a State Senator. Mayor Louis Welch of Houston even proclaimed October 1, 1971 Barbara Jordan Day.



“Studying her up close you see exactly how intense she is. There are fine lines etched around her eyes, the sort of lines that mean stress, hard work, and determination.”

Artist Edsel Cramer, Texas Monthly October 1976



All: Senator Barbara Jordan 1967-72,
Texas Southern University

GOVERNOR OF TEXAS FOR A DAY



I WANT YOU TO CELEBRATE THIS DAY AS A NEW DAY OF NEW COMMITMENT WHEN A NEW IDEA AND A NEW SENSE OF FUTURE IS TO BE BORN IN TEXAS, A NEW COMMITMENT THAT TEXAS WILL NOT TOLERATE DIFFERENCE BASED ON RACE, A DAY WHEN TEXAS WILL FIGHT INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY WHENEVER IT FINDS IT.

Barbara Jordan, Governor For A Day, TSU Special Archives



Governor Barbara Jordan (clockwise): at her desk on June 10, 1972, swearing in as governor, and with her parents, Texas Southern University



When the State Legislature convened in the spring of 1972, it was evident that State Senator Barbara Jordan was probably going to be moving onwards and upwards soon. The Senate decided to give Jordan an appropriate send off; she was elected as the First African American woman to serve as elected president pro tempore of the Senate. And, as it happened, on June 10, 1972, both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor “took the day off”, and Jordan was made “Governor for a Day.” Jordan was the first African American woman to preside over a legislative body in the United States and the first African American ever to preside over the Texas Legislature.

Jordan’s day was marred by tragedy. Unbeknownst to Jordan, directly after her swearing in ceremony, the Rev. Benjamin Jordan suffered a stroke; a state trooper saw him collapse and called for an ambulance, and the Reverend Jordan was rushed to a nearby hospital. In the midst of celebration and fanfare, Jordan did not hear the news that her father had taken ill until she was back in the governor’s chambers. Jordan met her family at the hospital to check his condition before returning to the capitol to change clothes for that evening’s reception. Jordan was ever the professional and private person, and after talking it over with her family, Jordan made the decision to return to her duties. She felt that if she did not, it would be “all anybody will remember about the afternoon event... so there will be no mention of my father.”

WASHINGTON CALLING



The first words that President Lyndon Baines Johnson said to Barbara Jordan were: “Barbara, what do you think?” She had received a telegram from the President while at home, and thought it a joke. To her surprise, President Johnson had invited her to the White House to discuss a civil rights addition to the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

When the President’s Assistant for Domestic Affairs questioned why Jordan’s presence was so important, he responded: “...this is the brightest person in the State of Texas. ...She’s got more common sense, more brains in her pinky than all these guys have from Harvard Business School and from all their corporations and Wall Street.”

With an impressed President in her corner, Jordan’s aspirations continued to grow. The next step was the newly created 18th Congressional District for the U.S. House of Representatives. “Don’t go for it, unless it’s already in your pocket,” Johnson told her. She agreed and ran for the Congressional seat.

“I’ll only be one of 435. But the 434 will know I’m there,” Jordan declared while campaigning. She won the election in 1972 as the first female Representative of Texas.

With the former President’s support, she was given a seat on the House Judiciary Committee, a fitting place for Jordan. She worked on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, and also sponsored and cosponsored over 300 pieces of legislation.



Clockwise:

Barbara Jordan and President Lyndon B. Johnson, University of North Texas
Jordan at her campaign headquarters, The Houston Chronicle
The Washington Post, October 22, 1972

THE IMPEACHMENT OF RICHARD NIXON

It took the US Supreme Court three weeks to decide the verdict of 418 U.S. 683 (1974), *United States vs. Richard Nixon*. The decision was handed down on July 25th, 1974 — the following evening, on July 25, 1974, just before 9pm EST, it was freshman congresswoman and 38th of 38 committee members on the U.S. House Judiciary Barbara Jordan's turn to speak. She was given 15 minutes to address the nation, and her "Statement on the Articles of Impeachment" is considered to be among the greatest speeches of the 20th Century.

Jordan's speech, imbued with outstanding rhetoric, morals, and wisdom - not to mention her legendary voice - earned her national praise; one journalist even noted: "If God is a woman, He must sound like Barbara Jordan." In the end though, the Articles progressed steadily on their way to ratification and at 11:35 AM EST on August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned.

Earlier today, we heard the beginning of the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States: 'We, the people.' It's a very eloquent beginning. But when that document was completed on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that 'We, the people.' I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decision, I have finally been included in 'We, the people.'

Today I am an inquisitor. An hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution. ... Who can so properly be the inquisitors for the nation as the representatives of the nation themselves? The subjects of its jurisdiction are those offenses which proceed from the misconduct of public men. And that's what we're talking about. In other words, [the jurisdiction comes] from the abuse or violation of some public trust.

Excerpt from Jordan's Impeachment Speech, American Rhetoric



Jordan (top left) with Rep. Charles Rangel D-NY in 1974 during the hearings, AP

Houston businessman purchased 25 billboard to thank Jordan in 1974, Google Images

Jordan in 1974 during the televised event, Getty Images

THE 1976 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION



The Democratic National Convention was held from July 12 - 15 at Madison Square Garden. In 1976, Jordan's name had been floated for a number of positions including Supreme Court Justice, Vice President, and Solicitor General. Jordan preferred Attorney General, as she believed she did not have enough trial experience for Solicitor. Sadly, negative press with derogatory gossip ruined her chances at Attorney General. To add to her illustrious list of accomplishments, she became instead the first African-American woman to deliver a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Her mastery of rhetoric was incredible and effective - she was able to make an entire hall of delegates stand silently and listen - something not even the previous speaker astronaut (and later Senator) John Glenn was able to do. And though she was not a candidate, Jordan received one delegate vote for President that year.



Jordan (top down) at the 1976 DNC signing an autograph, and with Democratic Presidential Nominee Jimmy Carter, University of Texas Press

We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community. We are a people trying not only to solve the problems of the present, unemployment, inflation, but we are attempting on a larger scale to fulfill the promise of America. We are attempting to fulfill our national purpose, to create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal.

This is the question which must be answered in 1976: Are we to be one people bound together by common spirit, sharing in a common endeavor; or will we become a divided nation? For all of its uncertainty, we cannot flee the future. We must not become the "New Puritans" and reject our society. We must address and master the future together. It can be done if we restore the belief that we share a sense of national community, that we share a common national endeavor. It can be done.

Excerpt from Jordan's 1976 DNC Speech, American Rhetoric

PROFESSOR JORDAN

In 1976, Jordan sponsored legislation to enhance the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to cover Hispanics and Latinx in Texas and other southern states involved in voter suppression. In 1977, she sponsored the Community Reinvestment Act, but in 1979, she chose not to seek re-election. Jordan would retire from the U.S. House of Representatives and return to Texas.

That same year she was appointed professor at the University of Texas at Austin Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, the same university that would not accept her because she was African-American. Jordan became nearly synonymous with the university once she accepted the LBJ Centennial Chair of National Policy at UT. Her classes were so popular that the university needed to run a lottery for them. Elspeth Rostow, the Dean of LBJ School at the time said that “the entire school would have enrolled in her class if they had the chance.”

During her tenure, Jordan became concerned about the direction of the Texas educational system, especially at UT. “I think we are indeed in danger of losing our love of beauty. The aesthetic sensibilities which ought to be a part of every individual. I think we are in danger of losing that as we whisk headlong into technological innovation and the scientific state.” Jordan believed that history, literature, art, and poetry were important and that people tend to forget to learn from the past. Jordan was also an avid Longhorns fan, and thought sports were vital. “I see sports as an antidote to some of the balkanization that we see occurring in our society; everybody wanting their own private little piece of turf; an absolute abandonment of any sense of common purpose, of common good.”



Jordan (top down) in her office with students, at a Longhorns game, and with her Ethics class, University of Texas Archives



BUILDING A LEGACY

Jordan's accolades began in 1960 and continued through the 1990s. In 1984, Jordan was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame and named Best Living Orator by the National Oral Platform Association. In 1985, she was the only American chosen by the United Nations to serve on a new panel examining the activities of transnational corporations in South Africa and Namibia. In 1987, Jordan received the Charles Evans Hughes Gold Medal of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1990 and was given the Spingarn Medal from the NAACP in 1992. In 1993, Jordan received the Elizabeth Blackwell Award from Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

During Jordan's life, she was awarded over 30 Honorary Degrees from universities across the country. While her educational work was the focus of her later years, Jordan never fully stepped away from public life. Jordan believed that "...each woman has the right to her own body and making decisions what her body undergoes. That is a matter that should not be a subject of dispute. It should be understood for each individual. [...] I think that is just basic and fundamental and unarguable."

She believed the Equal Right Amendment should be part of the U.S. Constitution, "[it] is a mandate for change. It is a standard by which to measure our future legal and social constructs ... [as it] amends the equal protection values of the 14th Amendment beyond race, color, and national origin to include gender. It is about equality and freedom and the pursuit of happiness."

Jordan served as a special counsel on ethics for Texas Governor Ann Richards in 1991: "Ethical behavior means being honest, telling the truth, and doing what you said you would do."

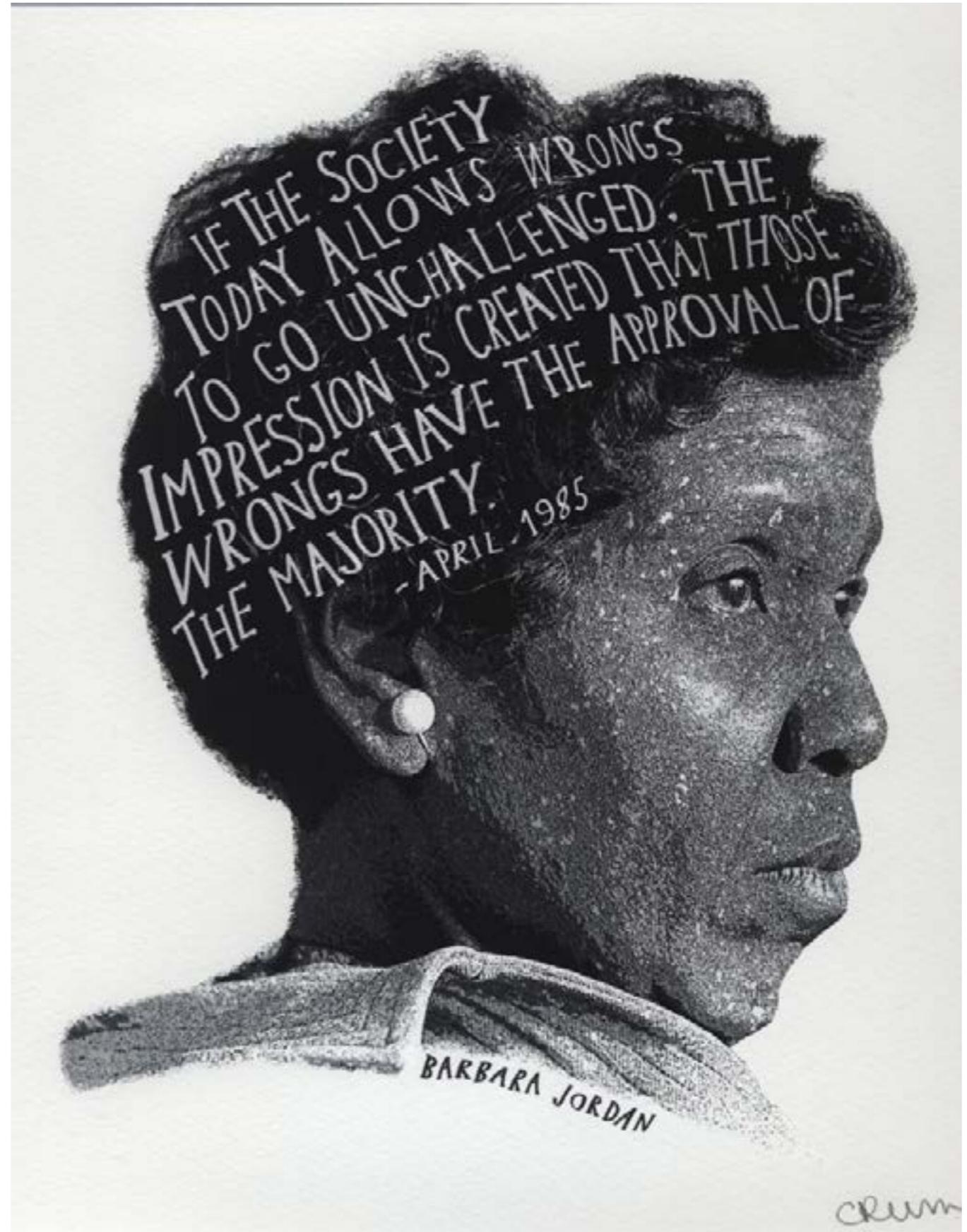


Barbara Jordan, University of North Texas

President Bill Clinton once said Jordan’s “eloquent voice, which articulated the views and concerns of millions of American, was always a source of inspiration to us.” He should know—Barbara Jordan gave a speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1992 during his nomination. Her health declining, Jordan gave her address from a wheelchair. Still, Jordan rallied her party with the same powerful and thoughtful style she had displayed 16 years earlier. President Clinton wanted to nominate her to the United States Supreme Court, but her health issues made that offer impossible: Jordan had been diagnosed years earlier with Multiple Sclerosis.

In 1994, she was named by President Bill Clinton to head a commission on immigration reform. The Jordan commission recommended breaking up INS, rewriting the citizenship oath, and giving aid where needed. “There are nations in the world that have tried this, and we are not like them, we are not a nation that is permanently divided into ‘us’ and ‘them’. I believe that treating us all alike is the appropriate way to attack illegal immigration.”

Once described as a “spectacle of greatness,” Jordan passed on January 17, 1996, in Austin, Texas at the age of 59 due to complications from leukemia-related pneumonia. When Jordan passed, President Bill Clinton declared a national time of mourning in her honor. On the occasion of her death, there was a march at UT in her honor led by students and staff.



Barbara Jordan by Carl Crum, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library



Barbara Jordan, Texas Southern University

Her impact continues into the 21st Century with various funds and honors in her name supporting, women, minorities, and LGBTQ causes, “One thing is clear to me: We, as human beings, must be willing to accept people who are different from ourselves.”

She was a beloved sister, daughter, partner, friend, and stateswoman. She was the first African-American woman elected to the Texas Senate after Reconstruction, the first southern black female elected to the United States House of Representatives, appointed by the Secretary-General of the UN to serve on a select global panel, taught as a professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, and twice she delivered the keynote address at a Democratic National Convention. She received over 30 Honorary Degrees, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal, the National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award, Juanita Kreps Award Honoring the Spirit of the American Woman, and numerous other recognitions.

She was seen by some as a symbol, yet despite her many accomplishments and accolades, Barbara remained humble:

SOMETIMES I JUST STARE IN TO THE MIRROR AND LOOK AT MYSELF AND SAY ‘BARBARA, BY GOLLY, YOU’VE DONE OKAY. IT WASN’T EASY, BUT YOU’VE DONE OKAY.’

Barbara Jordan, Oral Interview 1974

JORDAN HAS BEEN A TRAILBLAZER FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR AND FOR WOMEN. SHE RECOGNIZES NO BARRICADES TO WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED BY A DETERMINED, COMMITTED PERSON AND HER EXEMPLARY CAREER IS LIVING PROOF THAT SHE IS RIGHT.

STATE SENATOR RODNEY ELLIS
(D - HOUSTON)

BARBARA JORDAN, THROUGHOUT HER CAREER, HAS SPOKEN OUT TO A STATE, TO A NATION, AND TO THE STUDENTS IN HER CLASSROOM, ADMONISHING US NEVER TO BE SATISFIED WITH LESS THAN THE BEST THAT HUMANKIND HAS TO OFFER. HER PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND THE FORCE OF HER BEING CHALLENGE US TO REACH FOR THE STARS.

MAX SHERMAN
DEAN OF LBJ SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SOMETHING ABOUT HER MADE YOU PROUD TO BE PART OF THE NATION THAT PRODUCED HER.

TEXAS GOVERNOR ANN RICHARDS



BARBARA JORDAN SERVED HER STATE AND HER COUNTRY WITH A RARE COMMITMENT TO FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY. SHE OVERCAME ALL ODDS TO BECOME ONE OF OUR NATION'S MOST ELOQUENT AND PASSIONATE VOICES FOR JUSTICE.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BOB BULLOCK

HER IMPASSIONED DEFENSE OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION DURING WATERGATE WILL RING IN AMERICA'S COLLECTIVE MEMORY FOREVER. BARBARA JORDAN TOUCHED THE NATION'S SOUL AND LEFT AMERICA A BETTER PLACE.

VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE

I AM SO PLEASED TO HONOR BARBARA JORDAN: WHO PROVED TO US THAT 'BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL' BEFORE WE KNEW WHAT IT MEANT; WHO PROVED THE POWER OF WOMEN IN POLITICS BEFORE ANY OF US HAD EVER HEARD OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION; WHO PROVED 'WE CAN OVERCOME' ... SHE IS KNOWN NATIONALLY AS A LEADER WHO IS CONCERNED FOR THE RIGHTS, THE HOPES, THE DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS OF ALL PEOPLE.

PRESIDENT LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

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