

TRIBUTE

A TRIBUTE TO BARBARA JORDAN

The Legislative Bureau is dedicated to involvement in the legislative process. Accordingly, the Executive Board of the Legislative Bureau wishes to pay tribute to the late Barbara Jordan, a woman who helped to shape American politics for the past thirty years. Although she died at the early age of 59,¹ Barbara Jordan achieved the pinnacle of success on both local and national levels.

After graduating from Boston University School of Law in 1959, Barbara Jordan entered private practice in Houston, Texas. In 1966, she began a distinguished political career by becoming the first African-American woman elected to the Texas State Legislature and the first African-American elected to the Texas Senate since 1883. Ms. Jordan served as a state senator from 1966 until 1972. During her last year as a state senator, she was President Pro Tempore.

In 1972, she became the first African-American woman from a southern state to serve in the United States Congress. As a congresswoman, Ms. Jordan was a member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, the House Committee on Government Operations, and the Steering and Policy Committee of the Democratic Caucus. During her three terms, Ms. Jordan's legislative achievements were many. She was instrumental in the passage of the Amendments to the Voting Rights Act, which expanded the Act's coverage and provided for the printing of bilingual ballots. She was also responsible for the repeal of federal authorization for state "Fair Trade" laws - laws which authorized vertical price fixing schemes. Ms. Jordan also drafted an amendment to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration Act that prohibited the use of federal funds in a discriminatory fashion.

Barbara Jordan is also remembered for her distinguished role in the House Judiciary Committee's 1974 impeachment proceeding against former President Richard M. Nixon. Her stirring defense of the Constitution helped persuade her colleagues on the House Judiciary Committee to ask for Richard Nixon's impeach-

¹ Barbara Jordan died on January 17, 1996 in Austin, Texas.

ment hearings for his involvement in Watergate. She spoke movingly during the impeachment inquiry beginning with the words, "We the People" and eloquently proclaimed "My faith in the Constitution is whole. It is complete. It is total."² These powerful words exemplified her faith in the Constitution. Her pivotal role in the impeachment inquiry restored the Presidency and rebuilt public trust in our system of government.³ In recognition of her sincerity and conviction, the constituency posted placards throughout the city of Houston thanking Barbara Jordan for protecting the Constitution.

In 1975, Ms. Jordan was a key player in affecting the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. She stated that "[w]e must see to it that the Act continues to be honored and that people who want to vote are able to vote."⁴ In the following year, she became the first African-American and the first woman to be the Keynote speaker at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. In her Keynote Address, shortly after the Watergate scandal, she reminded us that:

[w]e are one people bound together by common spirit, sharing in a common endeavor . . . , as a first step, we must restore our belief in ourselves . . . [W]e must define the common good, and begin again to shape a common future. Let each person do his or her part. If one citizen is unwilling to participate, all of us are going to suffer. *For the American idea, though it is shared by all of us, is realized in each one of us.*⁵

Her remarkable accomplishments as a legislator paved the way for her distinguished career as an educator. From 1979-1982, she was the recipient of the Lyndon B. Johnson Public Service Professorship at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. As a professor of ethics, Ms. Jordan had a tremendous impact upon the lives of students. From 1982 until her death, she held the Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair at the University of Texas at Austin. She had also been awarded twenty-nine honorary

² Editorial/Opinion, PHOENIX GAZETTE, Jan. 19, 1996, at B4 (quoting Barbara Jordan's address to the American people).

³ Evan Thomas ET AL., *Remembering Watergate*, NEWSWEEK, June 22, 1992, at 27.

⁴ Barbara Jordan, *Still Two Nations — One Black, One White?*, Speech made to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund's 1985 Annual Civil Rights Institute.

⁵ Lloyd Bentsen, *Barbara Jordan, The "Gentlelady from Texas" Speaking the Truth with Eloquent Thunder*, ANNUAL SURVEY OF AMERICAN LAW, at xii (1989) (quoting Ms. Jordan's Keynote Address at the 1976 National Democratic Convention).

doctorate degrees including schools such as Harvard University, Princeton University, Notre Dame University, and Brandeis University.

Although she devoted the last fourteen years of her life to teaching, Barbara Jordan continued to make contributions to American politics. At the 1992 Democratic National Convention, she spoke of the philosophy that guided her throughout her political career. "We seek to unite people, not divide them Our strength in this country is rooted in our diversity."⁶

Most recently, in 1994 Jordan performed her final act of public service when President Clinton appointed the former Texas Congresswoman to chair the nine-member U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform. The Commission recommended cutting off welfare and non-emergency health-care benefits, tightening control on employment, and the furnishing of public education to children, as required by the Constitution.⁷ Although these recommendations surprised many immigration advocates, her colleague, Representative John Bryant, D-Texas, described Ms. Jordan's role in the presidential commission as the influential voice capable of balancing interests.⁸

Barbara Jordan was and remains one of the most admired women in America. Her remarkable intellect, determination to excel, and integrity carried her through a distinguished political and professional career. She evidenced an unwavering commitment to the safeguard of human rights and to the causes of minorities and women. She was truly a dedicated and gifted public servant. Her remarkable legislative accomplishments demonstrate that her service in the United States Congress has made government a better place. Her fourteen years as the Centennial Chair in National Policy exemplify her gift and passion for teaching. At her January 28th memorial service, she was remembered by hundreds of admirers, including her colleagues in Congress, her graduate students at the University of Texas, and those who, although they did not have the honor of meeting her personally, have benefitted from her years of public service. Reflecting upon her vast contributions to our legislative process and our educational system, we recognize that her ideals and words will remain a powerful reminder of what can be accomplished by any one of us.

⁶ Susan Estrich, *POLITICS; The Great Congressional Exodus: When the Center Does Not Hold*, L.A. TIMES, Jan. 21, 1996, at Opinion, PART-M.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ David LaGesse (Dallas Morning News), *Immigrant Advocates Worried House To Consider Major Revisions*, ARIZONA REPUBLIC, Mar. 18, 1996, at A1.