

Barbara Jordan

Barbara Charline Jordan (February 21, 1936 – January 17, 1996) was an American lawyer, educator^[1] and politician who was a leader of the Civil Rights Movement. A Democrat, she was the first African American elected to the Texas Senate after Reconstruction and the first Southern African-American woman elected to the United States House of Representatives.^[2] She was best known for her eloquent opening statement^[3] at the House Judiciary Committee hearings during the impeachment process against Richard Nixon, and as the first African-American as well as the first woman to deliver a keynote address at a Democratic National Convention. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among numerous other honors. She was a member of the Peabody Awards Board of Jurors from 1978 to 1980.^[4] She was the first African-American woman to be buried in the Texas State Cemetery.^{[5][6]}

Jordan's work as chair of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, which recommended reducing legal immigration by about one-third, is frequently cited by American immigration restrictionists.^{[7][8]}

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Early life

Barbara Jordan
 <div>Barbara Jordan</div>
Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas's 18th district
<div>In office</div>
January 3, 1973 – January 3, 1979
Preceded by Bob Price
Succeeded by Mickey Leland
Member of the Texas Senate from the 11th district
<div>In office</div>
January 10, 1967 – January 3, 1973
Preceded by Bill Moore
Succeeded by Chet Brooks
Personal details
Born
<div> <div><div>Barbara Charline Jordan</div></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none">February 21, 1936 Houston, Texas, U.S. </div>
Died
<div> <div><div>January 17, 1996 (aged 59)</div></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Austin, Texas, U.S. </div>
Political party Democratic
Domestic partner
Nancy Earl (late 1960s–1996)
Education
Texas Southern University (BA) <p>Boston University (LLB)</p>

Barbara Charline Jordan was born in Houston, Texas's Fifth Ward.^[2] Jordan's childhood was centered on church life. Her mother was Arlyne Patten Jordan, a teacher in the church,^{[1][9]} and her father was Benjamin Jordan, a Baptist preacher. Barbara Jordan was the youngest of three children,^[1] with siblings Rose Mary Jordan McGowan and Bennie Jordan Creswell (1933–2000). Jordan attended Roberson Elementary School.^[9] She graduated from Phillis Wheatley High School in 1952 with honors.^{[1][9][10]}

Jordan credited a speech she heard in her high school years by Edith S. Sampson with inspiring her to become an attorney.^[11] Because of segregation, she could not attend The University of Texas at Austin and instead chose Texas Southern University, an historically-black institution, majoring in political science and history. At Texas Southern University, Jordan was a national champion debater, defeating opponents from Yale and Brown and tying Harvard University.^[9] She graduated magna cum laude in 1956.^{[9][10]} At Texas Southern University, she pledged Delta Gamma chapter of Delta Sigma Theta sorority.^[9] She attended Boston University School of Law, graduating in 1959.^{[9][10]}

Career

Jordan taught political science at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for a year.^[9] In 1960, she returned to Houston, and started a private law practice.^[9]

Jordan campaigned unsuccessfully in 1962 and 1964 for the Texas House of Representatives.^[12] She won a seat in the Texas Senate in 1966, becoming the first African-American state senator since 1883 and the first black woman to serve in that body.^[12] Re-elected to a full term in the Texas Senate in 1968, she served until 1972. She was the first African-American female to serve as president *pro tem* of the state senate and served one day, June 10, 1972, as acting governor of Texas. To date Jordan is the only African-American woman to serve as governor of a state (excluding lieutenant governors).^[13] During her time in the Texas Legislature, Jordan sponsored or cosponsored some 70 bills.^[13]



Barbara Jordan delivering the keynote address before the 1976 Democratic National Convention

In 1972, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first woman elected in her own right to represent Texas in the House. She received extensive support from former President Lyndon B. Johnson, who helped her secure a position on the House Judiciary Committee. In 1974, she made an influential televised speech before the House Judiciary Committee supporting the impeachment of President Richard Nixon, Johnson's successor as President.^[14] In 1975, she was appointed by Carl Albert, then Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.

In 1976, Jordan, mentioned as a possible running mate to Jimmy Carter of Georgia,^[12] became instead the first African-American woman to deliver a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention.^[12] Despite not being a candidate, Jordan received one delegate vote (0.03%) for President at the Convention.^[15]

Jordan retired from politics in 1979 and became an adjunct professor teaching ethics at the University of Texas at Austin Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. She was again a keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention in 1992.

In 1994, Clinton awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom and The NAACP presented her with the Spingarn Medal.^[1] She was honored many times and was given over 20 honorary degrees from institutions across the country, including Harvard and Princeton, and was elected to the Texas and National Women's Halls of Fame.^[1]

Statement on the Articles of Impeachment

On July 25, 1974, Jordan delivered a 15-minute televised speech in front of the members of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee.^[16] She presented an opening speech during the hearings that were part of the impeachment process against Richard Nixon.^[16] This speech is thought to be one of the best speeches of the 20th century.^[17] Throughout her speech, Jordan strongly stood by the Constitution of the United States. She defended the checks and balances system, which was set in place to inhibit any politician from abusing their power.^[16] Jordan never flat out said that she wanted Nixon impeached, but rather subtly and cleverly implied her thoughts.^[18] She simply stated facts that proved Nixon to be untrustworthy and heavily involved in illegal situations,^[18] and quoted the drafters of the Constitution to argue that actions like Nixon's during the scandal corresponded with their understanding of impeachable offenses.^[19] She protested that the Watergate scandal will forever ruin the trust American citizens have for their government.^[18] This powerful and influential statement earned Jordan national praise for her rhetoric, morals, and wisdom.^[16]



Jordan and President Carter, ca. 1977. Photo by Dev O'Neill.

Legislation

Jordan supported the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, legislation that required banks to lend and make services available to underserved poor and minority communities. She supported the renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and expansion of that act to cover language minorities; this extended protection to Hispanics in Texas and was opposed by Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe and Secretary of State Mark White. She also authored an act that ended federal authorization of price fixing by manufacturers. During Jordan's tenure as a Congresswoman she sponsored or cosponsored over 300 bills or resolutions, several of which are still in effect today as law.^[13]

U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform

From 1994 until her death, Jordan chaired the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform. The commission recommended that total immigration be cut by one-third to approximately 550,000 per year. The commission supported increasing enforcement against undocumented migrants and their employers, eliminating visa preferences for siblings and adult children of U.S. citizens, and ending unskilled immigration except for refugees and nuclear families. The commission's report to Congress said that it was "a right and responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest", concluded that "legal immigration has strengthened and can continue to strengthen this country" and "decree[d] hostility and discrimination against immigrants as antithetical to the traditions and interests of the country." The commission recommended that the United States reduce the number of refugees admitted annually to a floor of 50,000 (this level would be lifted during emergencies).^{[20][21][22][23]}

Personal life

Jordan's companion of approximately twenty years^[24] was Nancy Earl,^[25] an educational psychologist, whom she met on a camping trip in the late 1960s.^{[10][12]} Earl was an occasional speech writer for Jordan, and later was a caregiver when Jordan began to suffer from multiple sclerosis in 1973. Considerable speculation exists as to Jordan's sexuality and the nature of her and Earl's relationship, something that neither Jordan nor Earl are known to have addressed, recorded or shared with others to date. In the KUT-FM radio documentary *Rediscovering Barbara Jordan*, President Bill Clinton said that he had wanted to nominate Jordan for the United States Supreme Court, but by the time he could do so, Jordan's health problems prevented him from nominating her.^[26] Jordan later also suffered from leukemia.^{[10][27]}

On July 31, 1988, Jordan nearly drowned in her backyard swimming pool while doing physical therapy, but she was saved by Earl who found her floating in the pool and revived her.^[28]

Jordan died at the age of 59 due to complications from pneumonia on January 17, 1996, in Austin, Texas.^[29]

Recognition and legacy

- 1984: Inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame
- 1990: Inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame
- 1992: The Spingarn Medal from the NAACP ^[30]
- 1993: The Elizabeth Blackwell Award from Hobart and William Smith Colleges
- 1994: The Presidential Medal of Freedom
- 1995: The second ever female awardee of the United States Military Academy's Sylvanus Thayer Award ^[31]

Her 1974 statement on the articles of impeachment (regarding President Richard Nixon) was listed as #13 in American Rhetoric's Top 100 Speeches of the 20th Century (listed by rank).^{[32][33]}

Her 1976 Democratic National Convention keynote address, the first major convention keynote speech ever by a woman and the first by an African American, was listed as #5 in American Rhetoric's Top 100 Speeches of the 20th Century (listed by rank).^[32]

Namesakes in Texas

The main terminal at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport is named after Jordan. The airport also features a statue of Jordan by artist Bruce Wolfe.

A boulevard in central Austin is named after Jordan. Several schools bear her name, including an elementary schools in Dallas, Texas, Odessa, Texas, and Austin, Texas, Barbara Jordan Early College Prep School, an elementary school in Richmond, Texas, Barbara C. Jordan Intermediate School, a middle school in Cibolo, Texas, and Barbara Jordan High School in Houston and The Barbara Jordan Institute for Policy Research at her undergraduate alma mater Texas Southern University. The Kaiser Family Foundation currently operates the Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholars, a fellowship designed for people of color who are college juniors, seniors, and recent graduates as a summer experience working in a congressional office.

Namesake in Missouri

Elementary school in University City School District is named after her, Barbara C Jordan Elementary in University City, Missouri.

Other honors

In 2000, the Jordan/Rustin Coalition (<https://web.archive.org/web/20101021173249/http://jrcla.org/>) (JRC) was created in Jordan's honor. The organization mobilized gay and lesbian African Americans to aid in the passage of marriage equality in the state of California. Along with Bayard Rustin, a civil rights leader and close confidante of Martin Luther King, Jr., Barbara Jordan is remembered for her advocacy of progressive politics. According to its website, "the mission [of the JRC] is to empower Black same-gender loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and families in Greater Los Angeles, to promote equal marriage rights and to advocate for fair treatment of everyone without regard to race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression."

On March 27, 2000, a play based on Jordan's life premiered at the Victory Garden Theater in Chicago, Illinois.^[34] Titled (https://books.google.com/books?id=-TweB6n_Q0wC&pg=PA4&lpg=PP1&output=html), "Voice of Good Hope", Kristine Thatcher's biographical evocation of Jordan's life played in theaters from San Francisco to New York.^[35]

On April 24, 2009, a statue of Barbara Jordan was unveiled at the University of Texas at Austin, where Jordan taught at the time of her death. The Barbara Jordan statue campaign was paid for by a student fee increase approved by the University of Texas Board of Regents. The effort was originally spearheaded by the 2002–2003 Tappee class of the Texas Orange Jackets, the "oldest women's organization at the University" (of Texas at Austin).^[36]

In 2011, actor/playwright Jade Esteban Estrada portrayed Jordan in the solo musical comedy *ICONS: The Lesbian and Gay History of the World, Vol. 5* which includes the song "Nancy's Eyes" sung by the character of Jordan with music and lyrics by Estrada.

In 2011, the Barbara Jordan Forever Stamp was issued. It is the 34th stamp in the Black Heritage series of U.S. stamps.^[37]

In 2012, Jordan was inducted into the Legacy Walk, an outdoor public display which celebrates LGBT history and people.^[38]

The Barbara Jordan Media Awards are given annually to media professionals and students who "have produced material for the public which accurately and positively reports on individuals with disabilities, using People First language and respectful depictions".^[39]

The Barbara Jordan Public-Private Leadership Award is presented by Texas Southern University's School of Public Affairs and School of Law. Its first recipient was former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on June 4, 2015.^[40]

Gallery



Barbara Jordan standing at a podium in doctoral regalia



Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, April 7, 1976

See also

- History of the African-Americans in Houston
- List of African-American United States Representatives
- *Texas African American History Memorial*, Texas State Capitol
- Women in the United States House of Representatives

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- Barbara Jordan (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/6456>) at Find a Grave

<u>Texas Senate</u>		
Preceded by <u>Bill Moore</u>	Member of the Texas Senate from the <u>11th</u> district 1967–1973	Succeeded by <u>Chet Brooks</u>
<u>U.S. House of Representatives</u>		
Preceded by <u>Bob Price</u>	Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas's <u>18th</u> congressional district 1973–1979	Succeeded by <u>Mickey Leland</u>
Party political offices		
Preceded by <u>Reubin Askew</u>	Keynote Speaker of the <u>Democratic National Convention</u> 1976 Served alongside: <u>John Glenn</u>	Succeeded by <u>Mo Udall</u>
Preceded by <u>Ann Richards</u>	Keynote Speaker of the <u>Democratic National Convention</u> 1992 Served alongside: <u>Bill Bradley</u>, <u>Zell Miller</u>	Succeeded by <u>Evan Bayh</u>

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