

Barbara C. Jordan

A voice for justice and equality was silenced Jan. 17, as Barbara C. Jordan, teacher, lawyer, and pioneer politician, quietly passed away at the age of 59. She leaves behind a nation, not only grateful for a distinguished career, but for her devotion to preserving the United States as a place of refuge for people from all walks of life.

Noted for her eloquent speaking style and unabashed defense of the Constitution, Jordan was born in 1936 in one of Houston's poorest neighborhoods. At her funeral, Houston Mayor Bob Lanier stated, "This girl grew up in the Fifth Ward of Houston. Yet on her death, she may be the most revered person in this city."

Graduating from Texas Southern University in 1956, Jordan began her ground breaking, pioneering journey by becoming the first African American student to enroll at Boston University Law School. Upon graduation in 1959, she was admitted to the Texas Bar and began her legal career by hanging out a shingle in the Houston neighborhood of her youth. Jordan set another milestone by serving in the Texas Senate from 1966 to 1972, the first African American woman to ever do so. During her tenure in Austin, she became a close advisor to President Johnson on federal civil rights legislation.

In 1973, Jordan rose to national prominence as the first African American woman from the South to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. During her six years of service in Washington, D.C., she continued to pursue the passage of better civil rights laws and ardently defended the cause of the poor. Jordan gained widespread acclaim and support in 1974 for her work as a member of the House Judiciary Committee during President Nixon's impeachment proceedings.

In eulogizing Jordan, President Clinton remarked on the 1976 keynote address she gave to the Democratic national convention in which she reminded the audience that the Constitution, when originally written, did not apply to her. "If Barbara Jordan was not in the Constitution when it was first written, she made sure that when she got in, she stayed in," Clinton said. "Her voice always stirred our national conscience." Those that remember her best, credit her for not only bringing herself into the freedoms and protections afforded by that document but by carrying a generation of disenfranchised citizens with her.

After leaving political office in 1978, Jordan wrote her autobiography, *Barbara Jordan: A Self-Portrait*, which was published in 1979, and took a teaching position in Austin with the LBJ School of Public Affairs on The University of Texas campus, a role she continued to fill until her death. As a politics and ethics professor, Jordan's legend continued to



grow among the students and faculty she interacted with on a daily basis. In the years shortly before her death, she was not only a frequent lecturer, speaking at many national political events, but could often be found tirelessly campaigning for those candidates she felt would carry on the political torch she had left behind.

A friend to all people, regardless of race, color, or creed, Jordan will be greatly missed and her profound impact on the nation will forever be remembered. "Our friend, our daughter is gone, but Barbara Jordan is still with us, and she is strong. In the words of that old gospel song, she lifted us to higher ground," said former Texas Governor Ann Richards.

Those who wish to honor the memory of Jordan can make a donation to the Barbara Jordan Scholars Fund at the LBJ School of Public Affairs. For more information about the fund contact Carlton Schwab, director of development, at (512)471-2670 or make your donation payable to the Barbara Jordan Scholars Fund, LBJ School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas, Drawer Y, University Station, Austin 78713-8925. ★