

BARBARA JORDAN

2/21/1936 – 1/17/1996

Barbara Jordan came to national prominence during the Watergate scandal in 1974 when, as a freshman member of the House Judiciary Committee, she made an eloquent speech on the Constitution that was nationally televised in prime time. Her speech set the stage for President Richard Nixon's resignation.

Journalist Molly Ivins said of Jordan, "It seemed to me that the words 'first and only' came before Barbara Jordan[']s name] so often that they seemed like a permanent title: the first and only black woman to serve in the Texas State Senate, the first black woman elected to Congress, the first black elected to Congress [since] Reconstruction, the first black woman to serve on corporate boards. She broke so many barriers."

The daughter of a Baptist minister, Barbara Jordan grew up during the days of segregation in Houston's Fifth Ward. She earned degrees from Texas Southern University and Boston University Law School and was admitted to both the Massachusetts and Texas bars before becoming active in politics during the 1960 presidential campaign.



In 1976, Jordan delivered the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention, a speech many historians consider the best political keynote speech in modern history.

Jordan began to suffer the physical effects of multiple sclerosis in the 1970s. In 1979, she retired from politics to become a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. She addressed the Democratic National Convention in 1992.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton awarded Jordan the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

At Jordan's funeral in 1996, President Clinton eulogized her: "Whenever she stood to speak, she jolted the nation's attention with her artful and articulate defense of the Constitution, the American Dream, and the common heritage and destiny we share, whether we like it or not."

**Representative Barbara Jordan (D-Texas)
was the first African-American woman
elected to Congress from a southern state.
She was known as an outstanding orator
and Constitutional scholar.**

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