

JUNE JORDAN

b. July 9, 1936, Harlem, New York

d. June 14, 2002, Berkeley, California

POET

“To tell the truth is to become beautiful, to begin to love yourself, value yourself. And that’s political, in its most profound way.”

**Toni Morrison described
Jordan’s legacy best:
“forty years of tireless
activism coupled with and
fueled by flawless art.”**

June Jordan was an activist, journalist, essayist, educator and celebrated African-American poet. Her commitment to fighting oppression, particularly of women and blacks, was the defining element of her work.

Jordan discovered her calling as a poet at an early age. Her father loved literature and maintained irrationally high expectations of Jordan. He required his young daughter to memorize poetry from the time she could read. Although these compulsory assignments strained Jordan’s relationship with her father, they also ignited her passion for language. Speaking of this fraught parental relationship, she said, “My father was very intense, passionate and over-the-top. He was my hero and my tyrant.”

Jordan attended Barnard College in New York, but left without graduating because of her opposition to the white patriarchal curriculum. In 1969 she published her first book of poetry, “Who Look at Me.” Jordan composed this work in black English vernacular, which she believed was an essential characteristic of her culture.

Throughout her prolific career, Jordan’s work ranged from poems to political essays to children’s literature. Though it spanned numerous genres, her work was consistent in engaging social issues and speaking out against oppression.

Jordan received many awards including a lifetime achievement award from the National Black Writers’ Conference. She was well respected and taught at prominent universities including Yale and University of California, Berkeley.

After battling breast cancer, Jordan died at age 65. Toni Morrison described Jordan’s legacy best: “forty years of tireless activism coupled with and fueled by flawless art.”



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