

Name:

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Class/Period:

From Student to Stateswoman:
The Life and Legacy of Barbara Jordan:
Accommodated Primary Source Analysis
The Watergate Hearing

Instructions: With a partner, examine the primary source excerpts below and answer the questions that follow.

Source: Barbara Jordan Scrapbook, July - September, 1974. The Portal to Texas History, June 23, 2015.

Excerpts taken from a copy of arguably the most famous and important speech of Barbara Jordan's career. This speech was delivered to the House Judiciary Committee during the Watergate Scandal hearings and came to define the course of the hearings.

Excerpt 1 -

"'We, the people'--It's a very eloquent beginning. But when that document was completed on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that 'We, the people.' I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decision, I have finally been included in 'We, the people.' Today I am an inquisitor. I believe hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution."

Summary Excerpt 1 -

"We the people" - is a well stated opening line of the Constitution. But when the document was first completed on September 17, 1787, black women were not included in that "We, the people." I felt that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton simply made a mistake by excluding me. But over time, through the Constitution amendment process, interpretation of the document, and court decisions, I am finally included in "We, the people." I am here to ask questions about the Constitution and what it says about impeachment. Words cannot express how sad and upset I am right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is

total. I am not going to sit here and do nothing about President Nixon ignoring and going against the Constitution.

Excerpt 2 -

It is wrong, I suggest, it is a misreading of the Constitution for any member here to assert that for a member to vote for an article of impeachment means that that member must be convinced that the President should be removed from office. The Constitution doesn't say that. The powers relating to impeachment are an essential check in the hands of the body of the Legislature against and upon the encroachments of the Executive. The division between the two branches of the Legislature, the House and the Senate, assigning to the one the right to accuse and to the other the right to judge, the Framers of this Constitution were very astute. They did not make the accusers and the judges—and the judges the same person. We know the nature of impeachment. We've been talking about it awhile now. It is chiefly designed for the President and his high ministers to somehow be called into account. It is designed to 'bridle' the Executive if he engages in excesses. 'It is designed as a method of national inquest into the conduct of public men.' The Framers confided in the Congress the power if need be, to remove the President in order to strike a delicate balance between a President swollen with power and grown tyrannical, and preservation of the independence of the Executive.

Summary Excerpt 2 -

It is wrong to believe that a vote for impeachment means that the Congressman believes the president should be removed from office. The Constitution does not say that. Instead, the Constitution gives powers to the legislative branch to check the actions of the Executive branch. The separation of powers between the two branches gives the House and Senate the power to serve as judge and jury based on the Constitution. It does not give the power to make the accusers and the judges the same body. Impeachment was designed for the President and his cabinet to be held accountable for their actions and prevent the Executive from abusing power. The Framers of the Constitution gave Congress the power to remove the President in order to keep a balance of power, prevent an abuse of power, and preserve the independence of the Executive office.

Excerpt 3 -

"A President is impeachable if he attempts to subvert the Constitution.' If the impeachment provision in the Constitution of the United States will not reach the offenses charged here, then perhaps that 18th-century Constitution should be abandoned to a 20th-century paper shredder! Has the President committed offenses, and planned, and directed, and acquiesced in a course of conduct which the Constitution will not tolerate? That's the question. We know that. We know

the question. We should now forthwith proceed to answer the question. It is reason, and not passion, which must guide our deliberations, guide our debate, and guide our decision.”

Summary Excerpt 3 -

A President is impeachable if he attempts to go against the Constitution. If the impeachment provision of the Constitution of the United States will not recognize the offenses charged during the impeachment trial, then perhaps the Constitution should be destroyed. The only questions to be answered by the Congress is whether or not the President committed the offenses presented and engaged in behavior that the Constitution states as intolerable. We must answer those questions. It is reason and not emotions that much guide our deliberations, discussions, and decisions.

Analysis Questions for The Watergate Hearing:

1. What was the purpose of this speech?
2. What was Barbara Jordan’s overall tone in this speech?
3. Based on Excerpt 1, what can you infer about why the words of the Constitution are so important to Barbara Jordan?

4. Based on Excerpt 2, why does Jordan believe the Constitution permits impeachment?

5. Based on Excerpt 3, summarize the main argument being made by Barbara Jordan in support of impeachment.