



# From Student to Stateswoman: The Life and Legacy of Barbara Jordan

# From Student to Statesman: The Life and Legacy of Barbara Jordan

## Lesson Overview

- Upbringing and Childhood
- Education
- Speech and Debate
- Early Career
- Political Path to Congress
- The Statesman... The Congresswoman
- Fight for Civil & Women's Rights
- Legacy





# Essential Questions

1. What are the attributes of a good leader?
2. What leadership qualities did Barbara Jordan possess?
3. How did Barbara Jordan make an impact as a leader?





# Upbringing and Childhood



On February 21, **1936**, Barbara Charline Jordan was born in Houston, Texas.

Barbara's father was Benjamin Jordan and her mother was Arlyne Patten Jordan. Her father was an educated man with a degree from Tuskegee Institute. He worked hard as a local warehouse employee and later became the pastor of Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church. Her mother Arlyne Jordan was a homemaker and public speaker.

Barbara was youngest of three sisters.







Barbara Jordan grew up in Houston's Fifth Ward during the period of U.S. History known as "Jim Crow."

Although her environment was racially segregated, she grew up in a close-knit community with many opportunities for African Americans. Jordan's family spent lots of time at church, where her mother was a teacher and her father was the preacher.

*\*Jim Crow was an era between the years following Reconstruction (1877) and mid 1960's*



# Education

As a child, Jordan was educated in Houston public schools where she attended “all black schools.”

She attended and graduated from Phyllis Wheatley High School in **1952** as a top student and champion orator.

After high school she chose to attend Texas Southern University -- an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) -- as segregation still prevented African Americans from attending other universities.







# Speech and Debate

During her time at Texas Southern University, she majored in political science and history.

Under the leadership of debate coach, Dr. Thomas Freeman, she perfected her skills in public speaking.

She was well known for her speech and debate skills as member of the Texas Southern Speech and Debate Team.

She earned her bachelor's degree from Texas Southern University in **1956**.



<https://education.texashistory.unt.edu>



## Think like a Historian:

### **Source:**

Jordan, Barbara C. Then Now  
Future, text, Date Unknown

## Think - Pair - Share

Using the guided questions, analyze the  
handwritten notes for a speech being prepared by  
Barbara C. Jordan about Houston's Fifth Ward.

*Support your claims using text evidence.*

### Document Analysis Questions:

1. What generalizations can you make about the subject of the speech based on the title?
2. Who is the intended audience of this speech?
3. What was the overall message of this speech?
4. How would you describe Fifth Ward and Barbara Jordan's feelings about it, based on the text of the speech?
5. What predictions can you make about the significance that Fifth Ward will play in Barbara Jordan's leadership?



# Early Career

Following her graduation from Texas Southern University, she went to Boston University to obtain a law degree. After she passed her law exam, Jordan moved back to Houston to practice law.

As a young professional, she was very active in her community and was a member of many social and civic organizations, including Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Kappa Beta Pi Legal Sorority (international); Harris County Democrats (vice chairman); Day Care Association (board of directors); Houston Council on Human Relations (board of directors).



# Early Career: Campaign Staffer

Barbara Jordan's first job was to serve as the administrative assistant for a Harris county judge.

The turning point in her political involvement occurred during the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy in **1960**.

As a young leader, Jordan organized and managed a highly successful get-out-the-vote program in Houston that served 40 predominantly African-American precincts in the city.





# Political Path to Congress: the Texas House of Representatives

Barbara Jordan began her political career in 1962 when she ran for the Texas House of Representatives, although she did not win the election. She ran again in 1964 but was again unsuccessful.

Demonstrating perseverance, she ran in **1966** for a third time for a seat in the Texas Senate. She won!

Due to this victory, Barbara Jordan became the first African American woman ever elected to the office of Texas Senate.

Consequently, she was the first African American state senator elected in the United States since 1883.







# Political Path to Congress: the Texas Senate

Barbara Jordan was elected president of the Texas Senate on **March 28, 1972**, making her the first African American woman in America to oversee a legislative body.

During her time as senator, Jordan earned a reputation as an effective legislator. She advanced bills to establish the state's first minimum-wage law, anti-discrimination clauses in business contracts, and the Texas Fair Employment Practices Commission.





# Political Path to Congress: “Governor for the Day”

As president of the Texas Senate, Barbara Jordan had the duty to serve as acting governor when the governor and lieutenant governor were out of the state.

On **June 10, 1972**, Jordan was able to fulfil that ceremonial role of “Governor for the Day.”

At that moment, she became the first Black chief executive in the nation.



# Political Path to Congress

In **1971** Jordan entered the race for the U.S. Texas congressional seat encompassing downtown Houston, including Fifth Ward.

“I’m not going to Washington and turn things upside down in a day,” she told supporters at a rally. “I’ll only be one of 435. But the 434 will know I’m there.”<sup>4</sup>

Jordan took the primary with 80 percent of the vote. During the general election she won 81 percent of the vote.

As a result of this election, Jordan became the first black woman from the Deep South and the first African American Texan ever to take a seat in the U.S. Congress.

She would later win two additional campaign cycles with overwhelming support, allowing her to serve a total of 6 years.





# The Statesman... The Congresswoman

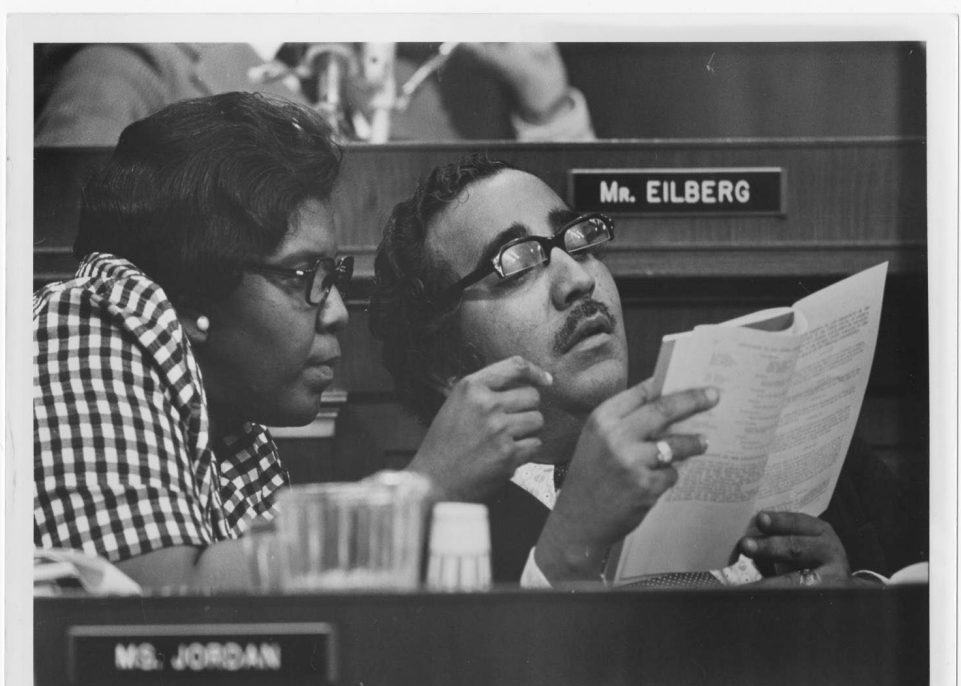


While serving as a congresswoman in Washington, D.C. Jordan served on various committees.

She is best known as a trailblazer on the House Judiciary Committee.

She served three terms on the Judiciary Committee, where she received national recognition as a powerful and prominent voice in Washington, D.C.

# The Power of Her Words



In the summer of **1974**, Barbara Jordan delivered opening remarks as the Judiciary Committee began considering articles of impeachment against President Richard M. Nixon for crimes associated with the Watergate Scandal.

Televised on national television, Jordan's words shook the committee chambers as she exclaimed reasons to support impeachment.

She also went on to express her unwavering faith in the Constitution. President Nixon resigned from office on August 9, 1974.



## Think like a Historian:

Source:

Text of arguably the most famous and important speech of Barbara Jordan's career.

Barbara Jordan Scrapbook, July - September, 1974. The Portal to Texas History

## Think - Pair - Share

**Using the guided questions on the handout, analyze excerpts from the speech to summarize why Barbara Jordan supported impeachment of President Nixon.**

***Support your claim with text evidence.***

- What was the purpose of this speech?
- What was Barbara Jordan's overall tone in this speech?
- Based on Excerpt 1, what can you infer about why the words of the Constitution are so important to Barbara Jordan?
- Based on Excerpt 2, why does Jordan believe the Constitution permits impeachment?
- Based on Excerpt 3, summarize the main argument being made by Barbara Jordan in support of impeachment.



# The Fight for Civil Rights

Barbara Jordan spent much of her political career as a statesman advocating for civil rights and federal protections for many Americans.

In **1975**, she sponsored legislation to expand the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to include Latinx, Native, and Asian Americans.

In **1976**, she became the first woman and first African American to keynote the Democratic National Convention.





# The Fight for Women's Rights

One of Barbara Jordan's most famous speeches was delivered in **1977** at the National Women's Conference, in Houston, TX.

The goal of the conference was to express the need for equal rights for women in America. Barbara expressed clear goals and objectives to pave the road for women in America.

Suggested Clip - [https://texasarchive.org/2014\\_00417](https://texasarchive.org/2014_00417)



# Legacy of Barbara Jordan

In **1979**, Jordan ended her political career and became a professor at the University of Texas in Austin. She taught courses in ethics and political values in the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University until the early 1990s.

Despite being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and later used a wheelchair, Barbara Jordan continued to serve her state and nation as the leader of various commissions.







# Legacy of Barbara Jordan: A Nation Mourns

Barbara Jordan, one of the most influential women in U.S. History, passed away January 17, **1996**.

President Bill Clinton declared a national time of mourning following her death and across the country newspapers published extensive obituaries that celebrated her life and legacy.



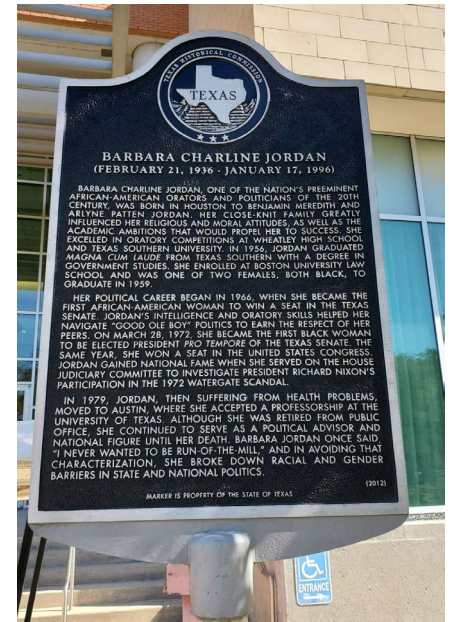
*"She left Congress after only three terms, a mere six years. No landmark legislation bears her name. Yet few lawmakers in this century have left a more profound and positive impression on the nation than Barbara Jordan." - New York Times, 1996*

# The Lasting Legacy of Barbara Jordan



Today, Barbara Jordan is revered and remembered. Across the nation and state of Texas, numerous schools, monuments and even a freeway in Houston are named in honor of the legendary Barbara Jordan.

Having previously advocated for African Americans to be buried in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin, Barbara Jordan was the first African American to receive this honor, with her grave being located near Stephen F. Austin's.





## Apply your knowledge

*Use notes and activities from this lesson to support your thinking process.*

# Think - Pair - Share

Using the lesson essential questions discussed at the beginning of the lesson and your newly gained perspective about the life and legacy of Barbara Jordan, answer the following questions using text evidence.

## Essential Questions - Exit Ticket

1. What leadership qualities did Barbara Jordan possess?
2. How did Barbara Jordan make an impact as a leader?
3. Why do you think Barbara Jordan is remembered as such an important leader in history?