

Who was ... Barbara Jordan?

Barbara Charline Jordan: attorney, educator, politician

Born: 1936 in Houston, TX

Died: 1996 in Austin, TX

Why is she important?

Ms. Jordan rose to national prominence as a member of the US House Judiciary Committee during the 1974 Watergate hearings considering whether then-President Nixon should be impeached. Her opening statement to the committee, broadcast live, argued forcefully and eloquently in favor of impeachment. She began by saying that “[M]y 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.”



The following link provides a video (and the text) of Ms. Jordan’s speech, available from the University of Virginia Miller Center: [My faith in the Constitution](#)

Highlights and Honors

As you read about Ms. Jordan, consider that she was a Black, lesbian woman at a time when all 3 groups were subject to systematic discrimination, an example of what is now referred to as “intersectionality,” the influence of multiple forms of discrimination acting together.

- 1966: First African-American to be elected for the Texas state senate since 1883.
- 1972: Elected as president of the Texas Senate, the first black woman in America to oversee a legislative body.
- 1972: First woman to be elected in her own right to represent Texas in the US Congress; re-elected in 1974 and 1976.
- 1974: As a member of the House Judiciary Committee, gave an opening statement during the hearings on the impeachment of Richard Nixon, considered to be one of the greatest speeches in 20th century US history.
- 1976: First African-American woman to deliver a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. The following link provides a video of this speech, available from the Texas Archive of the Moving Image. The video includes an introductory video about Ms. Jordan and the ovation from the convention delegates. [Barbara Jordan 1976 keynote address](#)
- 1992: Selected again as a keynote speaker at the 1992 Democratic National Convention. The following provides a video of this speech, available from C-Span.org. The video includes the ovation from the convention delegates. [Barbara Jordan 1992 keynote address](#)
- 1994: Awarded the US Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton and the NAACP Spingarn Medal. The Spingarn Medal was created in 1914 by Josiah Spingarn,

Chairman of the NAACP Board at the time. It is the NAACP's highest honor and is awarded annually for the highest achievement by a living African American with the goals of calling attention to distinguished achievement among African Americans and stimulating the ambition of African American youth.

- 1996: First African-American to be buried in the Texas State Cemetery.
- 1999: At its opening, the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport included the Barbara Jordan passenger (main) terminal.

To learn more about Barbara Jordan

Here are links to biographies from 3 different organizations, all with slightly different perspectives on her life and work.

- The History, Art & Archives of the United States House of Representatives. [Jordan, Barbara Charline](#)
- The National Women's History Museum. [Barbara Jordan](#)
- The Barbara Jordan Career Center. [The Biography of Barbara Jordan](#)