

Short Essay: Barbara Jordan: Advocate of Justice for All

Representative Barbara Jordan's congressional career began in 1972 with her election as a representative of Houston's 18th Ward in the United States House of Representatives. Rep. Jordan served as a representative from January 3, 1973 to January 3, 1979 (93rd-95th Congresses). She was the first African-American person to represent Texas and the first African-American woman to represent a southern state in the United States House of Representatives. Her committee assignments included the Judiciary and Government Operations Committees.

Rep. Jordan was born on February 21, 1936 in Houston, Texas. Following her graduation from Texas Southern University in 1956, she went on to Boston University Law School where she graduated in 1959. Jordan's political involvement began in 1960 when she became active in the Kennedy/Johnson presidential campaign. Six years later in 1966, Jordan became the first African-American woman to be elected to the Texas State Senate where she served from 1966-1972.

In the House of Representatives, Jordan advocated for legislation to improve the lives of minorities, the poor, and the disenfranchised. In addition, she sponsored bills that expanded workers' compensation and strengthened the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to cover Mexican-Americans in the Southwest.

Barbara C. Jordan is best remembered for her speech defending the Constitution during the impeachment hearings of President Richard Nixon in 1974. Jordan's reputation as a national leader was heightened by her active involvement in the House Judiciary Committee as a freshman member and the hearings that resulted in the impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

In 1976, Barbara Jordan became the first woman and first African-American to give the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. She was also considered as a vice-president nominee for Jimmy Carter. In 1979, she retired from her career as a public servant and returned to Texas as a full professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. Although retired, she remained heavily involved in politics. Rep. Jordan died January 17, 1996.