

7-1-1996

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### Recommended Citation

Eva Jefferson Patterson and Cheryl A. Stevens, *She Defined the Common Good*, 7 Hastings Women's L. R. 201 (1996).  
Available at: <http://repository.uchastings.edu/hwlj/vol7/iss2/1>

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## She Defined the Common Good

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This issue of the *Hastings Women's Law Journal* is dedicated to Barbara Charline Jordan—lawyer, professor, political pioneer and eloquent orator. During her lifetime, Barbara Jordan taught us conscience, integrity and courage, lessons too rare in today's world; yet lessons we all should follow. She was *our* role model, dedicated and committed to justice, peace, equality and human rights.

Barbara Jordan's life was a journey of firsts. In 1966, she became the first African American woman ever elected to the Texas Senate. During her years in the Texas State legislature, she co-sponsored and passed welfare reform legislation and a minimum wage law for those not covered by federal minimum wage laws. Barbara Jordan understood that Americans' needs were simple. "They want an America as good as its promise."<sup>1</sup> Throughout her life, Barbara Jordan fought to secure this goal for every American.

In 1972, Barbara Jordan and Andrew Young of Georgia were the first two African Americans elected to Congress from southern states since Reconstruction. In 1974, as the junior member of the House Judiciary Committee, Barbara Jordan courageously called for the impeachment of Richard Nixon stating: "My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution."<sup>2</sup> She pleaded with her colleagues to let "reason, and not passion . . . guide [their]

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1. Barbara C. Jordan, Commencement Address before the 1977 Graduating Class of Harvard University (June 16, 1977).

2. Barbara C. Jordan, Opening Statement to the House Judiciary Committee Proceedings on Impeachment of Richard Nixon (July 25, 1974).

deliberations, guide [their] debate and guide [their] decision."<sup>3</sup> These inspiring comments brought her national recognition and in 1976, as the first African American and the first woman to deliver a keynote address at a Democratic National Convention, she "sounded like the voice of God"<sup>4</sup> when she told the nation:

We must define the common good and begin again to shape a common good and begin again to share a common future. Let each person do his part. If one citizen is . . . unwilling to participate, all of us are going to suffer. For the American idea, though it is shared by all of us, is realized in each one of us.<sup>5</sup>

Undaunted by the hurdles confronting an African American woman, Barbara Jordan continued to fight for justice and civil rights with grace, good humor and unquestionable dignity. Although her tenure in the United States House of Representatives lasted but a short seven years, she continued to be a powerful force in *our* lives. Challenging the appointment of Robert Bork to the United States Supreme Court, Barbara Jordan testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1986. Troubled by the reactions to the Los Angeles uprising which followed the acquittal of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King, Barbara Jordan used the occasion of her keynote address at the 1992 Democratic National Convention to ask Americans to fight for a change. "We need to change the decaying inner cities from decay to places where hope lives. As we undergo that change, we must be prepared to answer Rodney King's haunting question, 'Can we all get along?' I say we answer that question with a resounding yes."<sup>6</sup>

We must carefully examine the ills which continue to plague our society and fight to maintain the goals and objectives Barbara Jordan fought so long and hard to secure, such as welfare rights and affirmative action. We must not forget the continuing struggle of the working poor, of the disenfranchised, of minorities and of women. Despite the eloquence, commitment and courage of Barbara Jordan, we are still "a divided nation."<sup>7</sup> As we approach the millennium we are still a nation defined in terms of the haves and the have nots. Many of the barriers which inspired Barbara Jordan to dedicate her life to public service still exist. In fact, in her death Barbara Jordan marked yet another milestone. She was the first

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3. *Id.*

4. Francis Clines, *Barbara Jordan Dies At 59, Her Voice Stirred the Nation*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 18, 1991, at A1.

5. Barbara C. Jordan, *Who Then Will Speak for the Common Good?*, Keynote Speech at the Democratic National Convention (July 12, 1976)[hereinafter 1976 DNC Speech].

6. Barbara Jordan, *Keynote Address at the Democratic National Convention* (July 13, 1992).

7. 1976 DNC Speech, *supra* note 5.

African American to be buried in the Texas State Cemetery.

This issue of the *Hastings Women's Law Journal* contains a variety of articles which examine our welfare system and the many challenges it faces. These challenges threaten the equality Barbara Jordan struggled to secure for all of America. Equality, like justice, remains an elusive concept that is not colorblind. If we are to survive as a nation, we must continue the struggle and strive to become "one people bound together by common spirit, sharing in a common endeavor."<sup>8</sup> Towards that goal this issue is dedicated to the lawyer-hero, the patriot, the prophet, and *our* role model Barbara Charline Jordan who exited this world on January 17, 1996.

*We will miss you BJ.*

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8. *Id.*