

## U.S. Postal Service Honours late U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan with 2011 Black Heritage Series Stamp



With the 34th stamp in the Black Heritage series, the U.S. Postal Service honors Barbara Jordan, one of the most respected and influential American politicians of the 20th century. The stamp is scheduled to go on sale in September.

Jordan's prodigious list of "firsts" includes being the first African-American woman elected to the Texas legislature, the first African-American elected to the Texas State Senate since 1883, and the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress from the South. She captured the attention and admiration of the nation with her intelligence and integrity, her ardent patriotism and steadfast dedication to public service, and her eloquent oratory and charismatic leadership. Staunchly determined to help extend social justice and federal protection of equal rights to all American citizens, Jordan dedicated her life to working for the benefit of others and her legacy will carry on for generations to come.

Barbara Charline Jordan was born February 21, 1936, in Houston, Texas. By the time she graduated from high school in 1952, Jordan was already a champion orator. At Texas Southern University, an all-black college, she continued to be involved in debate and oratory, winning a number of awards and graduating magna cum laude in 1956. She earned a law degree from Boston University and passed the Massachusetts bar exam in 1959. Later that same year, Jordan was admitted to the Texas bar and began practicing law in Houston.

Her entry into politics came when she volunteered for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960. Initially she was put to work licking stamps, but after she had an opportunity to demonstrate her oratorical skills, she was immediately promoted to the speaking circuit. She also helped manage a highly successful voter registration program in Houston. This volunteer experience prompted her to run for political office herself.

After losing two elections for the Texas House of Representatives in 1962 and 1964, she won a seat in the Texas State Senate in 1966, becoming the first African-American woman ever elected to that body, as well as the first black Texas State Senator since 1883. During her two terms in the Texas Senate, she proved to be a very effective and articulate legislator, working within the institutional system to push through bills such as those establishing the state's first minimum wage law and the Texas Fair Employment Practices Commission. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson invited her to a White House meeting concerning the civil rights initiative he was preparing to send to Congress.

Jordan's Senate colleagues elected her president *pro tempore* of the Texas legislature in 1972, earning her another distinctive "first"—the first black woman in the U.S. ever to preside over a legislative body. On June 10, 1972, she served as governor for the day when both the Texas governor and the lieutenant governor were out of the state. Although it was a ceremonial role, that day marked another milestone for Jordan as she became the first black governor in the U.S.

In 1972, Jordan received 80 percent of the vote when she ran for the U.S. House of Representatives from the 18th district in Texas, which included downtown Houston. With this decisive victory under her belt, Jordan went to Washington, D.C., with the accolades of her colleagues in the Texas State Senate. She knew that an important committee assignment would magnify her influence, so she pursued and obtained, with Lyndon Johnson's help, a coveted assignment to the House Judiciary Committee.

In the summer of 1974, as a freshman member of the Judiciary Committee, Jordan played a crucial role in the Nixon impeachment hearings. She gained national prominence with a lucid and moving speech about the nature of democracy. Describing her unwavering faith in the Constitution, she went on to present sound and persuasive reasons, based on the Constitution itself, for supporting each article of impeachment. Afterward, a supporter posted a message on 25 billboards in Houston that read "Thank you, Barbara Jordan, for explaining our Constitution."

In 1976, Jordan became the first woman and the first African-American to deliver a keynote address to the Democratic National Convention. Her televised speech—considered the highlight of the convention—described Americans as "a people in search of a national community...attempting to fulfill our national purpose, to create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal." Once again, Barbara Jordan's message resonated throughout the country.

Jordan ultimately served three terms in Congress, sponsoring and supporting numerous pieces of legislation extending federal protection of civil rights. Her record of success ensured social justice and equal rights for more American citizens.

In 1979, Jordan became a professor of public affairs and ethics at the University of Texas at Austin, where she quickly earned a stellar reputation as an extraordinarily inspiring and challenging professor. She was such a popular teacher, in fact, that student lotteries were held to make the final determination on enrollment in her classes. In 1982, Jordan was appointed to the university's Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy.

Throughout the years, Jordan continued to keep up with politics and national affairs and was a much sought-after lecturer. In 1987 she testified against the confirmation of Robert H. Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in 1992 she was a keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention in New York City. In 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed Jordan chair of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, a post she held until her death.

During her lifetime Barbara Jordan received many prestigious honors and awards, including the 1984 Eleanor Roosevelt Humanities Award, the 1990 Harry S. Truman Public Service Award, the 1992 NAACP Spingarn Medal, and the 1993 Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights. In 1994, President Clinton presented Jordan with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our nation's highest civilian honor. In 1984, Jordan was elected to the Texas Women's Hall of Fame. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1990 and the African-American Hall of Fame in 1993. Also in 1993, she was named one of the most influential American women of the 20th century by the National Women's Hall of Fame.

For more than 20 years Jordan suffered from multiple sclerosis. She died of pneumonia, as a complication of leukemia, on January 17, 1996, in Austin, Texas.

The portrait featured on the stamp is an oil painting by award-winning artist Albert Slark of Ajax, Ontario, Canada. Slark based his portrait on an undated black-and-white photograph of Jordan.

**For more information on the U.S. Postal Service Black Heritage Series, visit <http://www.usps.com>**