

# Barbara Jordan was a legend in her own time

**Bernice P. Jackson**



Who could ever forget her deep, thundering voice with that wonderful elocution and the brilliant thoughts behind the words? If you ever heard Barbara Jordan speak, you never forgot it. You never forgot the moral authority, the integrity, the brilliant analysis and the truth of her words.

February is Black History Month and Barbara Jordan was a black history maker from her college days. A graduate of Houston's segregated schools, she attended the all-black Texas Southern University, where she joined the debating team. It was that team which maneuvered the Harvard debate team to a tie. "When an all-black team ties Harvard, it wins," Ms. Jordan

recalled.

She made history again when she became the first African American ever to be elected to the Texas Senate and the first black elected to the Congress from the South since Reconstruction. "She proved that black is beautiful before we knew what it meant," said President Lyndon Johnson, who was Jordan's mentor.

She spent only seven years in the U.S. House of Representatives, but she will be remembered forever in our nation's history. "There is no black woman in politics today that is not in her debt," said Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington D.C.'s congressional delegate.

Barbara Jordan will be remembered forever for her fierce determination to protect the U.S. Constitution during the Watergate fiasco and the ensuing congressional impeachment hearings. "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is



Barbara Jordan

total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution," she said during

those hearings. But then she reminded the nation that she had felt left out the Constitution by the mistake of George Washington and

Alexander Hamilton, "but through the process of amendment, interpretation and court decision I have finally been included in 'We, the people.'"

Barbara Jordan will be remembered forever for her integrity and her ability to call the nation into account. Most recently, as chairperson of the Commission on Immigration Reform, she spoke out against a proposal to deny automatic citizenship to the children born in this country to illegal immigrants, saying, "To deny birthright citizenship would derail this engine of American liberty."

In 1979, after serving only three terms in the House of Representatives and stricken with multiple sclerosis, Barbara Jordan announced her retirement and plans to return to Texas to teach at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. Her courses were so popular that students had to enter a lottery to take them and her students

remember her always having a copy of the Constitution in her purse.

Barbara Jordan once said that she never intended to be a run-of-the-mill person and clearly she succeeded in her goal. The daughter of a Baptist minister who worked two jobs to pay for her college tuition, she recently visited the elementary school named for her in Austin. She told the students, "Study hard in school, and don't let people put you in a box and close it." Barbara Jordan didn't let anyone put her in a box.

Had her health held out, she may have added the vice presidency or even the presidency to her list of firsts. Barbara Jordan was a black history maker who lived in our time. She was, indeed, a legend in her own time.

**BERNICE P. JACKSON** is executive director of the Commission For Racial Justice in Cleveland.

## Mobilize the disaffected to work for change

**Marian Wright Edelman**



The countdown to the 1996 general election has begun. We have less than a year to persuade our fellow citizens to register and vote in this election for the sake of our children.

Many of us African Americans who struggle the hardest to provide for our children are among those least likely to vote on election day. In the November 1994 election, only 39 percent of black citizens voted.

It's easy to understand why many citizens fail to vote. Those who are the least powerful and work the hardest often have little flexibility on election day to juggle work, child care, children's school

schedules and voting. It's no wonder that many put voting at the bottom of that list, especially when so many folks seriously doubt that their vote makes any difference.

Sadly, this way of thinking creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the voting process ends up being dominated by those who are more likely to oppose the kinds of government aid and services that will help our children, young people, and struggling families build productive lives. It doesn't have to be that way. It may be true that individuals by themselves seldom can make much of an impact on a national level, but ordinary citizens acting together have the power to make a big difference.

Today's and tomorrow's young working parents need representatives in Congress and state legislatures who worry about the economic slide that young families have

suffered over the past two decades. Legal-immigrant communities need political leaders who firmly reject growing anti-immigrant and anti-child sentiment. And African Americans, other minorities, and poor communities all need representatives who understand the needs of vulnerable children and families.

During the next 11 months, we must persuade reluctant voters to mobilize to elect national and state leaders who care about families' struggles to raise healthy, educated children in the face of so many difficult challenges. In 1994, fewer than 1,000 votes determined the outcome in seven separate congressional races. In one congressional district, just 21 votes separated the winning and losing candidates. In one U.S. Senate race in 1994, the winner was decided by fewer than 27,000 votes. In that state, there were 91,000 black citizens of voting age,

but only 24,000 went to the polls. Sixty-seven thousand potential black votes were lost.

Millions of potential voters know that this nation is taking a wrong turn by turning its back on children. As some political leaders call for balancing the federal budget by 2002, we must insist that they don't do it on the backs of the young and poor, who already suffer the most. By making sure these same citizens register, question candidates about their priorities, and vote next November, everyone can help foster public policies that support the efforts of ordinary American families and protect children's well-being. We have our work cut out for us before the 1996 election.

**Bennettsville, S.C. native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN** is president of the Children's Defense Fund, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children.

## UNC-Chapel Hill gift from black publishers is a step in right direction

**By William Turner**  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The N.C. Black Publishers Association, representing owners and publishers of some 14 black newspapers in the state, has pledged \$100,000 towards the building and support of the Sonya Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The center's new director, Gerald Horne, was presented the pledge by NCBPA president, Winston-Salem Chronicle publisher, and UNC grad Ernie Pitt. Mr. Pitt and his associates have experienced a little opposition and controversy for this risky yet noble decision.

The amount was quite generous in light of a recent Wall Street Journal article that highlighted the finding that the black professional class "is indifferent" when it comes to charitable appeals — even when "black causes" are the recipients.

Even more than its liberality, the gift was unprecedented, pressure-packed and complex because it reflects the decision of black business people who sell their products to blacks, but must chiefly obtain their advertising monies from white businesses.

On top of that is where their money did not go: to the hard strapped black institutions in N.C. Giving \$100,000 to UNC-Chapel Hill was a risky

move. What with all their readers who went to Winston-Salem State, N.C. A&T, Fayetteville State, and among others, N.C. Central and Johnson C. Smith University. Risky, maybe, but, in my view, absolutely bold and realistic.

For its bountiful and unprecedented contribution, the association will have a resource room in the Cultural Center designated to black print journalism and broadcast media issues.

Undoubtedly, archival materials and roots of North Carolina's black press will be displayed. Not only will this be a resource for all students to learn about the history of the black press and the special drive of black print and broadcast journalism; in addition, the NCBPA Media Room in the center will add to the rich organizational mosaic that is the very life fabric of an institution like UNC.

UNC is the place where many of the big players play and where serious and weighty decisions are debated and rendered into the public domain. UNC is one of America's oldest and most prestigious public universities — up there with Michigan and UCLA. Its board represents some of the premier participants in the business, civic, political, and educational culture of North Carolina, the Southeast, the nation and the

world. UNC — "this white school" — not only lures some of the nation's best (black) basketball players, it appeals to some of the country's creme de la creme black faculty members and researchers. UNC has more black endowed professors than any other college in the nation, including Chuck Stone, one of the deans of black journalism. The new head of the Black Cultural Center — historian Horne — recently of the University of California-Santa Cruz — has published nine books, two in the last two years.

The gift is also defensible — for those who need to be convinced — because, truth be told, many graduates of historically black colleges get in line to send their kids not to the colleges they attended, but to "white schools" like UNC. I suggest to the N.C. Black Publishers, who are scorned by some blacks for their gift, ask the naysayers: Who's kidding whom?

According to the Wall Street Journal article (Jan 29, 1996), "Black Charities Say Growing Black Middle Class Isn't Giving Enough," only 4 percent of the 60,000 alumni of Howard University gave money to their alma mater last year.

To be sure, middle class and well-to-do blacks do give. They give to their extended families; and, to a lesser

extent than they should, to groups such as the NAACP and Urban League. Blacks give more of their charitable offerings to their churches, especially those seemingly endless "building funds."

Many blacks, like me, can relate to the many compelling sources to which they are asked to give. Many of us — including the publishers — are just three missed paydays and a car note away from slipping from the middle class. We got no home down payments and stock folders from Ma and Pa. But, times, have changed and we must do more for our people and our total society than our parents, even when it hurts our purses and someone's warped feelings.

Bottom line: I extend my kudos to NCBPA. Their action speaks to the idea of change: Black America cannot change unless it survives, but black America will not survive unless it gives. And, black folks giving \$100,000 to UNC is a good change — small change — since they still need \$7 million. Other blacks giving to this cause will change the influence equation needed to effect even more change at UNC and the entire educational system in North Carolina, of which historically black colleges are a part. It takes something to the table other than an outstretched hand and hot air criticism.

God's speed to NCBPA. As your predecessors did, you have set the pace for change in the African American community. You put your money where your pen is;

**WILLIAM TURNER** lives in Winston-Salem.

## We can't afford to slip on slippery budget banana

By Charles E. Belle

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

When everyone is running about and shouting above your head, not only do you not know what is going on, but you are probably the only sane person in the area.

The general public is wondering what the devil the whole fuss is about the budget. "To balance or not to balance" — that is not the question. Whether it is better to be without some food for now or pay more for all of it later. No problem, raise taxes! But whose taxes do your raise?

*A 1994 Columbia University homeless study estimates 12.5 million people are actually homeless, but have stayed off the streets by moving in with friends and family for short period of time.*

All around the world, developing nations are facing a basic problem. The number of people who work and pay taxes, relative to the number of people who do not work and/or do not pay taxes is shrinking. The flight of low-skilled jobs to foreign, low-wage soils is beginning to take an effect. Thus, the welfare and social service programs put in place after World War II, back when America had an abundance of skill and unskilled jobs, are being scrutinized for cutbacks.

Clinton is trying desperately to downsize with dignity. Democrats developed most of the plans. Practical and not so practical Republicans are ready to reduce the plans rather than raise taxes from a shrinking working population ratio. The failure of these two forces to find common ground can mean a catastrophe for the country's future. The nation must be careful not to let its future slip away during a stalemate.

The U.S. budget must be balanced by providing the necessary social welfare services more efficiently, by cutting their costs, not their services. There are 34 million plus people 65 years of age and over in our country. It is true that elderly Americans have the highest discretionary income of any age group. A small third, a mostly white group, control most of their \$14 trillion in assets. Their funds are not equally distributed among gender, racial or ethnic groups. Another growing problem is the 85 million baby boomers who will become old, but not affluent, in their later years. To remove or deplete Medicare and Medicaid would ensure an impoverished aged, ill cared for U.S. population in the 21st century. The signs of the time reflect itself already in the homeless today. A 1994 Columbia University homeless study estimates 12.5 million people are actually homeless, but have stayed off the streets by moving in with friends and family for short periods of time. This winter time of year finds hundreds of people spending the night in such places as the nation's busiest airport, O'Hare Airport in Chicago. These places would have an overflow if Medicaid payments going to nursing homes were cut, sending patients into the streets.

The call to cut Medicare is shown on the surface as equal say some by cutting entitlements to all Americans, but it in fact affects the poor more profoundly. President Clinton is correct in his stance to stop Medicare and Medicaid cuts. However, the need to review and revise all social revenues must be undertaken at this time. The nation has little choice but to cut costs and modernize our social welfare system. The election of a Republican Congress is a calling from those working that they are not prepared to pay an increase in taxes to maintain the current outmoded system. The Republican-controlled Congress is demanding twice the amount of cutting in Medicare and Medicaid as the President. The \$150 billion difference is too much and too soon. Neither the President nor the Congress can cut entitlement programs for the poor, the sick and the elderly without watching the harsh effects of their cuts on people. President Clinton appears to be watching the Congress and Congress appears to be watching the president. We hope neither loses sight of the public and slips down.

**CHARLES E. BELLE** is a National Newspaper Publishers Association columnist based in Washington.

### What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160.

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