Barbara Jordan: Governor for a Day

The Barbara Jordan Archives
Texas Southern University
When the State Legislature convened in the spring of 1972, it was fairly evident that State Senator Barbara Jordan was probably going to be moving onwards and upwards soon. The creation of the 18th Congressional District (with former President Lyndon B. Johnson’s backing) all but assured Jordan a spot in the House of Representatives after the upcoming primary. The Senate decided to give Jordan a rousing send off and make her “Governor for a Day.”
Jordan was elected president pro tempore (a Latin phrase meaning “for the time being”) of the Senate. The president pro tempore is legally third in succession to the governor’s office, so what this meant was that Jordan was the first African American woman to preside over a legislative body in the United States and the first African American ever to preside over the Texas Legislature. To make it official, Governor Preston Smith and Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes both made arrangements to be out of the state for Jordan’s historic date, June 10, 1972. The Governor for a Day planning committee, headed by prominent lawyer Leon Jaworski, sprung into action, preparing invitations and organizing ticketed events to help defray the cost of the celebration.

Fundraising letter from Leon Jaworski, a notable Houston attorney. Jaworski, a friend of Jordan’s, would go on to be the second lead prosecutor in the impeachment of President Richard Nixon (after original prosecutor Archibald Cox was fired) in the Watergate Hearings two years later.
Dear XXX:

My winning in the 18th Congressional District race by over 21 per cent was due to the hard work of many people like yourself and I want to take this chance to thank you and tell you of my deep appreciation.

On June 10, I will be having my Governor for a Day celebration which is the traditional day when both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor leave the state and the President of the Senate becomes Governor for the day. I was elected President Pro Tempore during the special Called Session of the Legislators on March 28, 1972, making me third in line to the Governor of the State of Texas.

The Governor for a Day ceremonies will include a full day of activities. I feel that this day is not only my day but belongs to all of you who through the years have helped and supported my career in public office. Therefore, I hope you will be able to join me.

In appreciation for your support and hard work as my block worker, if you are unable to attend June 10, I have two complimentary tickets to the Inaugural barbecue luncheon for you. Just return the enclosed envelope with your name and address and two tickets will be mailed to you.

Please tell all the people in your precinct to join us in our Governor for a Day celebration.

Sincerely,

Barbara Jordan

P.S. Tickets to the luncheon may be purchased by contacting my Houston office 674-9465 or by writing my Austin office, Capitol Bldg., P. O. Box 12668, Austin, Texas 78711.

Draft of invitation letter sent out to guests.

Dear XXX:

It is easy to simply say thank you, however, it is not easy to let you know the depth of gratitude I feel for your support in helping me become the Democratic nominee for Congress from the 18th District. A public servant needs friends; you are a friend. I want you to know that I am always available to you for any assistance that you may need.

Shortly you will receive a formal invitation to the Governor for a Day Celebration to be held on June 10 in Austin. There has been a great deal of effort to make this an interesting and informative celebration honoring Texas Art and Culture. I would be honored by your presence in Austin.

I promise you the best I have to give. I hope my performance in public office will continue to merit your confidence.

Sincerely,

Barbara Jordan

Draft of invitation letter sent out to Jordan's colleagues and other VIPs.
The Host Committee,
requests the honor of your presence at
Ceremonies and Activities
honoring
Governor Barbara Jordan
Saturday, the tenth of June
Nineteen hundred seventy-two
at the State Capitol
Austin, Texas
R.S.V.P.

Barbara Jordan Governor For-A-Day Activities
You can count on ______ persons being at the luncheon.
I also wish to make a voluntary contribution of $5.00 per
person toward the expense of the luncheon ______.
Sorry I won’t be able to attend. ______
Signed. ___________________________

__________________________
address
Jordan recalled, “…my secretary, Nita, and I arranged the program. I had decided that I wanted to make it possible for all the high schools in the old Eleventh Senatorial District [the Houston area] to come. I said to Nita: ‘We’re going to invite each of them, and anybody who cannot pay to come, we will offer to pay for them. Well, the buses came carrying the high schools, the junior high schools, the TSU choir which was to be on the program to sing, the entire Fifth Ward. I am told that there was no business on Lyons Avenue open that June tenth, 1972. I am told that everyone was in Austin for that Governor for a Day.”
May 25, 1972

__________

Dear ______:

State Senator Barbara Jordan of Houston will serve as Governor of the State of Texas, Saturday, June 10, 1972, while Governor Preston Smith and Lt. Governor Ben Barnes are out of the State. Senator Jordan is President Pro Tempore of the Texas Senate. Under provisions of the Texas Constitution, a special predetermined day is traditionally reserved to allow the President Pro Tempore to invite friends and supporters to the State Capitol to share in the honor of being Governor of the State of Texas.

Your fine school lies within the 11th Senatorial District, 18th Congressional District or within both districts. For that reason we want to extend to you the honor of having your band play at the Governor for a Day celebration.

Please contact us as soon as possible so that we can complete arrangements. We will look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

William L. Lyons
Activities Coordinator
Governor for a Day Committee
WLL:je

P.O. BOX 12048   AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711

GOVERNOR FOR A DAY
June 10, 1972

Schedule of Performance
Capitol Building - Rotunda
First Floor

10:45   Evan E. Worthen High School Band
        to
        Houston, Texas

11:15   Mr. Harold Sargent, Director

11:20   Andrew Jackson Junior High School
        to
        Houston, Texas

11:40   Mr. Ronald Crabb, Director

11:45   Texas Southern University Chior
        to
        Houston, Texas

12:15   Mrs. Ruthabel Rollings, Director

12:20   Texas Southern University Jazz Band
        to
        Houston, Texas

12:50   Mr. Lanny Steele, Director

12:55   Phillis Wheatley High School Chior
        to
        Houston, Texas

1:20    Mr. Frederick Harvey, Director

1:25    Booker T. Washington High School
        to
        Houston, Texas

1:55    Mr. Edwin Biggsy, Director

3:45    Phillis Wheatley High School Band
        to
        Houston, Texas

4:20    Mr. Harold Stripling, Director

4:20    Jack Yates High School Band
        to
        Houston, Texas

5:00    Mr. W. H. Bennett, Director

Draft of invitation letter sent to musical groups, including the TSU Choir and Jazz Band, May 25, 1972.

Musical performance schedule for the Governor For A Day ceremonies. Jordan specifically requested the TSU Choir and Jazz Band's attendance.
The ceremony took place at the state Capitol in Austin. Jordan, sworn in by her former TSU classmate Judge Andrew Jefferson, was surrounded by her family and friends. Jordan remembered: “Then the choir sang, and everyone spoke, and I gave my response. I really don’t recall what I said, because it wasn’t anything I worked on. I knew that some of my colleagues would have used that occasion to give their state of the State address, but I wanted it as a celebration for all my friends, and that’s just was it was.”
Program, Governor For A Day events,
June 10, 1972.

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES
HONORING

GOVERNOR BARBARA JORDAN

SATURDAY, JUNE TENTH
NINETEEN HUNDRED SEVENTY-TWO
STATE CAPITOL, AUSTIN, TEXAS

9:00 a.m. - noon
Tours of the Governor’s Mansion

9:00 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Exhibits of Black Culture throughout the Capitl Building

9:00 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Musical entertainment in Rotunda of Capitol Building

9:00 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Tours of the Capitol

9:00 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Tours of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library

BARRABA JORDAN GOVERNOR-FOR-A-DAY COMMITTEE
P. O. Box 12068, Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES
Saturday, June 10, 1972—State Capitol, Austin

9:30 a.m. INAUGURAL CEREMONY
Senate Chamber

The Honorable Barbara Jordan will take the oath of office to begin her day as Governor of Texas. Swearing-in ceremonies will be held in the Senate Chamber.

10:00 a.m. PRESS CONFERENCE
Governor’s Reception Room

Governor Jordan will meet with members of the press for a news conference in the governor’s reception room on the second floor of the capitol building.

10:45-1:00 p.m. OPEN HOUSE
Governor’s Office

All friends and constituents are invited to greet Governor Jordan in the Chief Executive’s chambers, second floor of the capitol building.

12:00-2:00 p.m. INAUGURAL BARBECUE LUNCHEON
Capitol Grounds

All guests are invited to join Governor Jordan in a gala inaugural luncheon on the capitol grounds.

2:00 p.m. PROGRAM
South Steps of Capitol Building

Governor Jordan will respond to tributes made by certain friends and constituents. Also, music and entertainment will be provided.
Cover of inauguration program, 1972. Jordan is standing in Houston’s Fifth Ward in the photograph.
Colleagues and well-wishers from all over Texas, including Delta Sigma Theta sorority sisters, bands, and choirs all came to celebrate Jordan’s historic moment. Jordan was showered with gifts and mementos: desk sets, jewelry, silver plates, and even a special telephone for her office (courtesy of Southwest Bell). One of Jordan’s official acts as Governor was to designate September 1972 as Sickle Cell Disease Control Month.

Jordan stated: “I want you to celebrate this day as a new day of new commitment when a new idea and a new sense of future is to be born in Texas, a new commitment that Texas will not tolerate different based on race, a day when Texas will fight injustice and inequality whenever it finds it.”
The Honorable Barbara Jordan  
Governor of Texas  
State Capitol  
Austin, Texas

My dear Governor:

As you assume your duties and responsibilities as Governor of Texas, please know that my thoughts and prayers are with you. Few Texans have had the honor or the privilege of serving in this, the highest office in our State.

It is an outstanding tribute to you that your colleagues in the Texas Senate selected you as President Pro Tempore, and your service as Governor for a Day on June 10, 1972, is an historic occasion indeed for the State of Texas.

May your day as Governor be an enjoyable occasion for you and the many Texans who will have an opportunity to share this deserved honor with you.

Ima and I join with all the people of Texas in offering you our very best wishes for a wonderful and exciting day.

Sincerely,

Preston Smith  
Governor of Texas

THE STATE OF TEXAS

to all to whom these presents shall come, Greetings: Know ye, that is hereby commissioned under the laws of the State of Texas with all rights, privileges, and emoluments appertaining to said office. In testimony whereof, I have signed my name and caused the Seal of State to be affixed at the City of Austin, this the day of A.D. 19__

P.S. Psc
Above: Certificate of authenticity for Texas flag presented to Jordan at the ceremonies. The flag stands today in the Jordan museum.

Left: copy of Jordan's gubernatorial proclamation signifying September 1972 as Sickle Cell Disease Control Month in Texas. The signed and sealed original has been lost.
Official Memorandum

By

BARBARA JORDAN
Governor of Texas

AUSTIN, TEXAS

GREETINGS:

In official recognition whereof, I hereby affix my
signature this ______ day of ______, 19____

Governor of Texas
Southwestern Bell Telephone custom manufactured a phone for Jordan, complete with engraving and a Texas State Seal, to commemorate Jordan's historic day as Governor. At the time, the multiple lines were considered state of the art. Today, the phone is on display in the Jordan museum. 

(Photo by Bill Malone)
Jordan’s triumph, however, was marked with tragedy. Almost immediately after the ceremony, Jordan’s father, the Rev. Benjamin Jordan, suffered a stroke; a state trooper saw him collapse and called for an ambulance, and the Reverend Jordan was rushed to a nearby hospital. In the confusion of all the well-wishers, the congratulation and the music, Jordan did not hear that her father had taken ill until she was back in the governor’s chambers. Jordan met her family at the hospital to check on Benjamin’s condition before returning to the capitol to change clothes for that evening’s reception. Ever the professional and private person, after talking it over with her family, Jordan made the decision to not mention her father’s illness, feeling that if she did it would be “all anybody will remember about the afternoon event…so there will be no mention of my father.”
Example of badges worn by "Official Hostesses" for Jordan's inauguration and the reception that followed.

Above: front and back of souvenir keychain.

Cocktail napkin from the gubernatorial reception.
Article from the Houston Chronicle's front page, Jordan's "Governor For A Day" scrapbook.
After attending the reception and getting the formalities out of the way, Jordan joined the rest of the family at the hospital, where Benjamin had taken a turn for the worse. Reverend Jordan died the next morning on June 11, 1972. Jordan later remembered the last time she spoke to her father: “I walked into the room and there he was with all his teeth showing. Just the most wonderful smile imaginable…I said, ‘Chief, you almost made the day…but you got to see me be governor.’ And he was still grinning.”
Father's death mars Sen. Jordan's triumph

State Senator Barbara Jordan, whose career has been a series of firsts, made history again this past Saturday as she was installed as governor of the State of Texas. Senator Jordan thus became the first black woman to serve as chief executive officer in any state in the nation.

The day was complete with official ceremonies, festivities, exhibitions, continuous performances in the rotunda and throngs of blacks from across the state who journeyed to the capital to share her triumph with Senator Jordan. Bands and choral groups from Phillips Wheatley, E. O. Smith, Jack Yates and other schools performed in her honor. A shadow was cast over the celebrations, however, when Senator Jordan's father, Rev. B. M. Jordan, suffered a stroke shortly after his daughter was sworn in as governor-for-a-day. He died the following day in an Austin hospital.

Rev. Jordan, who graduated from the seminary at Tuskegee Institute in 1928, was well known and loved throughout Houston and in the Fifth Ward community where he lived. A native of Edna, Texas, he had lived in Houston for more than 60 years and pastored the Greater Mount Pleasant Hill Baptist Church for 32 years. Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church for nine years, and Oak Hill Baptist Church until he retired in January of this year.

In addition to Senator Jordan, Rev. Jordan is survived by his wife Arlyne, daughters Mrs. Rose Mary McGowan, Mrs. Bennie Chriswell, and a sister, Mrs. Mamie Reed Lee.

Funeral services were held Wednesday at Good Hope Baptist Church.

In honor of his memory, members of the Texas senate set up a memorial scholarship fund to be directed toward study and research into sickle-cell anemia, a fatal blood disease which strikes mostly blacks. Senator Jordan had called Saturday for all Texans to support research to find a cure for the dread disease. Contributions to the fund may be sent in care of Senator Jordan's office.

Senator Barbara Jordan made another first Saturday when she was sworn in as governor-for-a-day. She is the only black woman to serve as chief executive officer in any state in the union. For story and pictures, please see Page 5.

Well wishers from throughout the state journeyed to Austin to honor Senator Jordan. Here, she speaks to a gathering in front of the capitol building.
Though the occasion was marred by her father’s death, Jordan was extremely honored to be named Governor for a Day, and there was no denying the fact that she had made history. Jordan’s turn as Governor of Texas, even just for one day in 1972, continues to inspire.

The Barbara Jordan Archives holds many items related to Jordan’s “Governor for a Day” honor. Jordan saved hundreds of photographs, as well as scrapbooks and other memorabilia, and there are others items related to this event in the Texas Senate Series of the Jordan Archives at Texas Southern University’s Special Collections.

Thank you letter from Jordan to TSU Pharmacy students and faculty, acknowledging flowers received, July 1972.
Text by Gary Chaffee

Artifacts from the Barbara Jordan Archives, RJT Library, Texas Southern University


Governor For a Day photographs by Bill Malone

Questions about this exhibit? Please contact:

Gary Chaffee, Archivist
chaffeegj@tsu.edu

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