

Discussion Questions for Barbara Jordan: American Hero

1. In the beginning chapter, the author talks about Barbara Jordan's "blackness" and says that it meant Jordan had to overcome 2 racial barriers in her life. One of them was white racist views and the other bias by the black culture toward "blacker skinned" people. How did Barbara address these two different obstacles in her path? What personality traits did she have that helped her?
2. What other racial, cultural, gender or socioeconomic factors in play during Barbara Jordan's life were most striking to you? How did they affect her? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
3. What role did religion play in Barbara's early life? What role did her father play in her life? Did these two influences change during her move from childhood to adulthood?
4. Barbara once said "If you're going to play the game properly, you'd better know every rule." Does that statement apply to her time in the Texas Legislature and her relationship with the "White Men's Club? Discuss her experiences in the Texas Legislature.
5. At the Democratic Convention, where Barbara Jordan was the first black woman to give the keynote address, the author recounts that Barbara was having difficulty walking up the steps and when Bob Strauss started to lecture her, she responded sharply..."Bob if you can get me up the damn steps, I can make the speech.". Why did you think she kept her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis private throughout most of her life? If you watched her speech (youtube.com), could you tell that she was suffering from MS? How did MS impact her work?
6. As Jordan became a Texas "politician", she developed a reputation for being pragmatic politician, that is, one who was a Moral Realist – that is, one who understands the use of power to achieve human good. Discuss Jordan's career in government as a "Moral Realist".
7. Describe Barbara Jordan's opening address to the Impeachment Hearings. If you were in Texas at the time, do you remember hearing it? Have you listened to it since then? What surprised you about the speech?
8. "For Barbara Jordan it came together during the impeachment proceedings," Rogers writes. "As she talked about the Constitution, she began her transformation from a politician to a patriot, from an inside player who could get a law passed to an inspirational leader.... Now she had a message that matched her voice.". Do you agree or disagree? How does her life "after Congress" illustrate your point of view?
9. Jordan felt strongly about the role of women in politics. "There is no place for women to be shy and retiring if they want to be leaders...Women have to take unwoman-like stance and be bold and aggressive. There are no instances in history where people voluntarily relinquish or give you a gift of power. Power has to be seized." How have things changed for women who are politicians?
10. In your opinion, who in today's time demonstrates Jordan's spirit of service, justice and patriotism? What is the lesson that can be taken from Barbara Jordan's life to pass on to the generation of girls growing up today?
11. Round Robin Discussion on Notable Quotes from Barbara Jordan
 - *More is required of public officials than slogans and handshakes and press releases. More is required. We must hold ourselves strictly accountable. We must provide the people with a vision of the future.*
 - *We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community.*
 - *One thing is clear to me. We, as human beings, must be willing to accept people who are different from ourselves.*
 - *I never intended to become a run-of-the-mill person.*