Barbara Jordan  
LBJ Lecture Nov. 4, 1982

Introduction of the Honorable Barbara Jordan  
The Second Lyndon Baines Johnson  
Distinguished Lecturer  
Robert L. Hardesty  
President  
Southwest Texas State University

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the second of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Distinguished Lectures.

The Lyndon Baines Johnson Distinguished Lecture Series began in April of this year as a tribute to SWT’s most distinguished alumnus. President Johnson wanted to institute a program such as this to bring outstanding national leaders to this campus but he died before the project was completed. We are doing it for him now.

And—I am happy to announce—today we are launching a comprehensive fundraising campaign to raise $200,000 for the Lecture Series Endowment. The proceeds from the endowment will provide operating money for the continuation of the series in perpetuity.

Our steering committee for the endowment drive is headed by two other SWT Distinguished Alumni who were also close personal friends of President Johnson—the Honorable Willard Deason and the Honorable Walter Richter. They will be joined by about a dozen others on the steering committee. I know that you join me in wishing them well in their efforts.

We often hear of people who have become “legends in their own time” and, if that somewhat overworked phrase ever could be applied realistically, it would be to describe the Honorable Barbara Jordan As much as any other woman of our time, she has captured the admiration of all Americans.

Consistently called “one of the most influential women in America,” she has served the people of Texas and the nation with distinction since 1966 when she was first elected to the Texas Senate. As President Pro Tempore of the Texas Senate, she served as “Governor for a Day,” the first black woman “governor” in American history.

But her most remarkable achievements were noted in her Congressional service as the dynamic and straightforward Congresswoman from the 18th Texas Congressional District from 1972 through 1978. She brought to the halls of the Capitol a presence that had no equal. She was decisive and outspoken—not what was expected from the stereotyped “black” and “female.” Yet she never lost sight of her minority status and set to work right away to bring changes that would benefit all minorities everywhere in this land.

Through her work in amending the Voting Rights Act, bilingual ballots were introduced and the Act’s coverage was expanded. She backed legislation that would eliminate vertical price-fixing schemes and worked for fairness in civil rights law enforcement.

Most of us remember her best for her role as a member of the Committee on the Judiciary during the Nixon presidency.
All of us were awed by her oratory when she delivered the keynote address at the 1976 National Democratic Convention. I had the privilege to be in the Hall when she delivered that address and it was an unforgettable experience.

A lawyer by profession, Professor Jordan has earned degrees from Texas Southern and Boston universities and has honorary doctoral degrees from 25 others—including Harvard, Princeton, Notre Dame, Brandeis, William and Mary, Wake Forest and Tuskegee Institute.

Her autobiography—Barbara Jordan, A Self-Portrait—was published by Doubleday in 1979.

Time magazine named her one of the ten “Women of the Year” in 1976 and the Ladies Home Journal selected her as one of the eleven “Women of the Decade” in 1979. That same year a Redbook magazine poll identified her as the first choice among women who could be appointed to the Supreme Court.

In 1979 she left political office and accepted an appointment as the Lyndon B. Johnson Public Service Professor in the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. She now holds the Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy there.

With those LBJ connections and her close personal friendship with LBJ, her choice as SWT’s second lecturer in this series which honors President Johnson was inevitable. And I know the choice is one which LBJ would have applauded. For in many, many ways this remarkable woman symbolizes all that President Johnson dreamed of for this country.

Through her work and her personal integrity she has made an indelible mark on our way of life. She has overcome untold obstacles in her pursuit of fairness and equality. She has successfully defied the parochial political and social systems that had denied for decades what President Johnson called “the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy.”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great personal privilege to present the Honorable Barbara Jordan.

What Happens When the President Trusts Government?
The Honorable Barbara Jordan
November 4, 1982

In five years we will have a bicentennial celebration. The Constitution of the United States will be 200 years old in 1987. The framers of that document, motivated by the principles of limited government and individual liberty, drafted the instrument which provided the structure for the government of the United States. The framers were clear-headed about what they were doing and stated their purpose in the Preamble to the Constitution.

“We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

With those words and their accompanying articles, our government was formed. (I perhaps should say reformed.)
There are certain legitimate expectations the people have of their government. There are duties the government must perform on behalf of its people. The reciprocal duties and obligations of the government and its people render the slogan ‘Get the government off our backs’ empty and meaningless. We expect the government to maintain order, security and civility. We expect the government to establish justice and to promote the general welfare. In actualizing those expectations we anticipate that all citizens will be treated fairly. If from time to time circumstances and conditions require suffering, we expect equity in suffering. That is, no individual or group will be singled out for a disproportionate share of suffering. For many, government is their fail-safe mechanism. If for some reason an individual becomes stymied in his efforts to perform in the society as a productive citizen, he believes that the government will come to his rescue and help discover new ways and means of recovery. These expectations are legitimate because of promises the government made in its fundamental law, the Constitution.

The Presidency was established to implement these promises of government. The President must believe that government can carry out its promises. Again, the Constitution is clear.

*Article II, Sec. 1—“The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.”*

In paragraph 7 of Sec. 1 we find the following:

‘Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation: ‘I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States’”

What does it mean to faithfully execute the office? Does it mean a trade-off between providing for the common defense and promoting the general welfare? Does it mean the creation of a welfare state in which the dole is preferred to pay for work done? Does it mean the special interests must have a higher recognition than the general interests? Of course it means none of these things. When a President faithfully executes the Office of President, he takes hold of the reins of government and works for the implementation of programs which will bring not only external peace and security but inner peace and security. Such a President does not pursue economic policies which are so strange and different that no known economic theory applies and a new name has to be developed to label it—I speak of Reaganomics. A president who faithfully executes the office has a sense of history and a vision for the future. He envisions a society in which all men and women stand on level ground and certain starting places are not favored over others. He sees a society in which all people are free to soar to the upper reaches of their capacities. He sees unfettered opportunities. He trusts government. He does not fear government.

It is my view that Ronald Reagan does not trust government . . . but is generally hostile to government. For him government is the problem and forms no part of the solution. I contrast that view with Lyndon Johnson’s. President Johnson saw big problems and knew that big solutions were needed. He trusted government to be a part of those solutions and knew that it was an indispensable part. Lyndon Johnson gave us the Great Society and with it a wellspring of hope for large populations of citizens who previously saw only a bleak, dispirited and aborted future.
My guess is that Lyndon Johnson would not approve of my criticism of Ronald Reagan. He would want to keep the lines of communication open believing that as long as you could keep talking, the possibility of change and compromise remained alive. I base this assumption on an exchange which occurred during the civil rights conference which President Johnson attended. A group of black conference participants were very strident in their criticism of Richard Nixon, President Johnson suggested that the blacks seek a meeting with President Nixon. He advised, “When you talk to him, don’t call him a bad man. He doesn’t think he’s a bad man.” Ronald Reagan does not think he is an unfair man. He is probably well meaning. The fact that his policies have wreaked havoc with the lives of millions of Americans causes one to be very skeptical of this amiable, well-meaning President.

The Congress cannot be blamed for the failed policies and negative impact of the President’s policies. The Congress does not govern. The Executive governs. The Congress represents. The Constitution again is clear in its delineation of the powers of Congress. The Congress represents the people and it has the flexibility to do all things which shall be necessary and proper to carry out its powers. If the President shows the leadership necessary in proposing policies for the benefit of the whole people, Congress can be expected to cooperate with him and form a healthy relationship for promoting the general welfare.

Tension between the Executive and Legislative branches of government is to be expected. But such tension need not lead to a paralysis of government.

The elections held on Tuesday were carefully watched. The President took the unusual course of making the election a referendum on the policies of his administration. (Mid-term elections usually focus on local issues.) The voters did not send an unequivocal message. If Tuesday’s results said anything, it said “Stay the course” in the Senate, “Change the course” in the House, and “Strengthen the agents of change” in state houses as we gear up for the real battle in 1984. There were rumblings of dissatisfaction with the way things are but no one new emerged who could be a viable alternative to the President.

The framers of this constitutional democracy wanted at its head, not a titled nobleman swaddled in hereditary privilege, but a man of intellect, reason, and judgment. They envisioned a government which would tolerate enlightenment and dissent and remain subject to the will of the people. If the people were betrayed by government or the public trust abused, it was the duty of the people to change the government.

The President as the head of government is the trustee of the people. He holds their trust. As he faithfully executes the office, it is necessary for him to trust the instruments of implementation. In so doing, he can attack societal ills such as poverty and ignorance. The absence of such trust is destabilizing to the public weal and violative of the duty to establish justice and promote the general welfare.

*Lecture transcribed by Benjamin Hicklin, graduate research assistant, 2007-08*