

A black and white portrait of Barbara Jordan, a Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing glasses and a patterned top. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

**The arts are an  
integral part of  
us and have often  
been pivotal in  
reinvigorating  
our national spirit.**

**— Barbara Jordan, 1993**

**I AM MOST DELIGHTED** to be included among the list of distinguished persons who have presented the Nancy Hanks Lecture. Thank you for the honor.

In 1988, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., gave this lecture. He referred to the well-regarded work he and his father have done in developing and promoting the idea of the cycles of American history. I quote now from his book, which bears that name:

*Wise men have remarked on a pattern of alternation, of ebb and flow, in human history. "The two parties which divide the state, the party of Conservatism and that of Innovation," wrote Emerson in 1841, "are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made. . . . Now one, now the other gets the day, and still the fight*

*renews itself as if for the first time, under new names and hot personalities." Innovation presses ever forward; Conservatism holds ever back. We are reformers spring and summer, in autumn and winter we stand by the old; reformers in the morning, conservers at night. "Innovation is the salient energy; Conservatism, the pause on the last movement."*

Continuing, from Professor Schlesinger:

*Half a century later, Henry Adams applied a more precise version of the cyclical thesis to the first years of the American republic. "A period of about twelve years," he wrote, "measured the beat of the pendulum. After the Declaration of Independence, twelve years had been needed to create an efficient Constitution; another 12 years of energy brought a reaction against the government then created; a third period of twelve years was ending in a sweep toward still greater energy; and already a child could calculate the result of a few more such returns."*

We are properly positioned in time, in this year, 1993, to begin a new cycle. Optimism is fairly drip-

ping from the air. A new generation of leaders struggles — at first, somewhat awkwardly — to find its sea legs. Old words are coming out of new mouths as we seek to find our niche. This is not a time to be shy. One way to guarantee that this sense of hope will not be lost is to act on it now.

If your thing, that is, your interest, concern, involvement or passion, is the arts, you are probably at this moment in time somewhat reluctant to speak too loudly. With all the rhetoric of budget deficits and sacrifice perhaps you feel that it would be somehow sacrilegious to talk about the arts. Wrong! The arts are an integral part of us and have often been pivotal in reinvigorating our national spirit.

The primary thesis of my remarks today is that the arts, instead of quaking along the periphery of our policy concerns, must push boldly into the core of policy. The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature and help to shape our identity. Or as a young student in a class at Laguna Gloria Art Museum in my hometown of Austin, Texas, wrote, "Every feeling comes out on my paper and in my drawings." The arts are not a frill and should not be treated as such. They have the potential to become the driving force for healing division and divisiveness.

I would guess that few of you in this room think that the arts are a frill. I doubt that you would be here if you held that view. But each of us knows that to further what progress the arts have made as an integral part of American life — we must reason with those who are inclined to consider the arts as one of those things to be dealt with seriously much later on.

I want to offer to you today a premise, with which I hope you agree, that in this time of change in American life, in this new administration of hope, in this time of putting people first, it is the arts that are uniquely placed not just to tag along in the changes, but to be part and parcel of every bold new step we take.

I submit to you the idea that the arts can be the validation of the American dream. We heard President Clinton in his address to a joint session of Congress last month speak about renewing our economy so that the American dream can be a possibility for everyone. No one disputes that a healthy economy is part and parcel of the American dream. But it is our job to teach emphatically that the arts are more than just the decorations on that dream.

## **1993 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy**

**March 16, 1993**

**The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts,  
Eisenhower Theater  
Washington, D.C.**

*Sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.*

## **Barbara Jordan**

And what precisely is the American dream? It is — that we are one people.

*E Pluribus Unum.* The Latin phrase on the great seal of the United States literally translated means one from many. We need to re-attach *pluribus* to *unum* — the many to the one. That motto challenges our diversity. No nation on the face of the earth had tried so bold an experiment until us, the Americans. No one thought that success would come easily. Even though the founders were aggressive in pursuing liberty, their quest for equality failed to include all. They envisioned no role for former slaves and deferred for a century even thinking about the issue. Even the great democrat of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson, was apprehensive. He — quoting now from a recent *Wall Street Journal* article — “feared that a simple biracial America, white and black as equals, would not long endure. He advocated Black Freedom, but remained paralyzed by its implications.”

Jefferson articulated his quandary regarding slavery when he said, “We have the wolf by the ears and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” What frustration!

**THE ARTS CAN HELP US** painlessly to articulate and showcase our oneness. The arts have no pigmentation. The American Dream has survived many attacks from our deadliest war to Rodney King. That’s a long stretch. To borrow a phrase from William Faulkner, I remain confident it will continue not just to survive, but to prevail over the attacks from extremists of every ilk. Today, we are made uncomfortable by newly awakened notions of “ethnic cleansing.” Why the discomfort? Perhaps we are haunted by our past. Again, we do not know what to do with that wolf.

Assimilation was *never* the goal of the diverse ethnic groups in America. Inclusion without discomfort is now and ever will be the goal. Maybe one day we will be comfortable enough with each other to drop the hyphens. There should be no hyphenated Americans. The idea of a melting pot was and remains a myth. Universal inclusivity is not a radical idea. The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, writing under the Bush Administration, concluded that, “American culture incorporates the heritage of many people and thereby provides a unique context for multicultural understanding.”

But what is there that can transcend deep differences and stubborn divisions? I suggest the arts. They have a wonderful universality. Art has the potential to unify. It can speak in many languages without a translator. Art does not discriminate — it ignores external irrelevancies and opts for quality, talent and competence. Let me quote again from the children attending the class at the Austin museum — children who could not have attended without scholarships. When asked if they were surprised at what their classmates had made, as well as what they had made themselves, some of the responses were, “Yes, because I didn’t expect to see some of the things I could do,” and, “Yes, I didn’t think I could do it that good,” and, “I was surprised that all the art work turned out great.” Again, art unifies, it does not discriminate.

We are all concerned about the economy. We know it has been in a deep rut and President Clinton is struggling mightily to find the tools to get us out. We need to make our voices heard with the message that the arts should not be overlooked in the economic decisions being made today. I applaud our President for seeking to avoid the quick-fix mentality that got us where we are today. It is only in long-term solutions that we will thrive. And I think the arts offer one of those long-term solutions. Yes, this is one of those “radical” ideas spelled out by none other than the last Administration’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

There is no reason, patrons of the arts, to apologize

**The arts, instead of quaking along the periphery of our policy concerns, must push boldly into the core of policy.** The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature and help to shape our identity.

Art has the **potential**  
to **unify**. It can speak in  
many languages without a  
translator. **Art** does not  
**discriminate** — it ignores  
external irrelevancies and  
opts for quality, talent and  
**competence**.

for beauty. But it is important in this time of economic worries to articulate what is obvious to each of us — that art does more than stimulate and please the senses. The arts, in the words of the President's Committee, are integrally related to the U.S. economy and contrib-

ute to our nation's wealth, competitiveness and growth. If we look just at the copyright industries of broadcasting, records and tapes, motion pictures, theatrical productions, newspapers, periodicals and books, plus computer programming and software, we find a contribution of more than \$173 billion, or 3.3 percent of our gross national product. Add art, photography and architecture and you find a

contribution of almost 6 percent to the GNP from the arts — more than food, apparel, chemical and refining industries combined.

These figures don't include the direct economic impact of increased tourism and revitalization of downtown urban areas. Nor do these figures speak to a vital part of the American dream: the arts provide a passage out of poverty for thousands of economically disadvantaged individuals. Professional sports may capture the imaginations of many economically impoverished young people, but the arts — historically more open to all of the diverse segments of our society — provide the careers that can lift young men and women out of poverty.

And why is it that the arts can work this economic magic? It isn't magic, it's common sense. There is a direct relationship between the arts and self esteem. Again, quoting from the children in the Laguna Gloria

museum school: "No one can say your art is ugly because it is in the eyes of the beholder." One child learned "that I could be productive." Self esteem is a good that each individual cherishes. An artist creates beauty and others enjoy it. He or she gets pleasure in knowing that he is the source of that pleasure and thus, regard for self is enhanced.

Self-esteem is a value which forecloses destructive tendencies; that is, you cannot feel good about who you are and where you are and simultaneously destroy your neighborhood. Such a contradiction is inherent and would be personally painful and debilitating.

I have just echoed the thoughts of Jacques Barzun, who in the 1973 Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, declared that "art is power." He said that art "influences the mind, the nerves, the feelings, the soul" and that it "carries messages of hope, hostility, derision and moral rebuke. It can fight material and spiritual evils and can transmit the ideals of a community now living, long past, or soon to be born." The arts are a multi-generational communicator.

In order for the arts to live up to the ambitious agenda I have prescribed, those of us who are patrons and supporters must be more than distant observers and appreciative spectators. We need to seek a permanent place in public school curricula for arts education. I commend the *New York Times* for its attention in a number of recent articles entitled "Missing Muses." Those articles point out that art classes teach the very qualities educators believe can re-invigorate American schools — analytical thinking, teamwork, motivation and self-discipline.

In Austin, an elementary school teacher is quoted as saying, "Fine arts is where every child can succeed. It doesn't matter if the child is a genius or a slow learner. You have a natural at-risk program at every school." A school board trustee said, "Public school arts programs are the only outlet that poor people have. While some families can afford private lessons, there are thousands of others who can't." That trustee was obviously not in the majority when, two years ago, the Austin School board cut art and music and physical education classes out of its kindergarten curriculum as one way of balancing its budget. Some of the district's schools have managed to re-institute those classes, but only through extraordinary efforts by teachers, parents and private contributions.

**THE ARTS DESERVE** a higher place on America's public policy agenda. Sondra Myers, the cultural adviser to Pennsylvania's governor, recently wrote:

*At this moment of political change — which offers the promise of a people-centered political agenda — we must wake up to the realities of our rich cultural resources and make the case for the integration of culture into public policy. We need to use every asset at our disposal to restore a sense of community and humanness to our society.*

We must — to borrow a phrase from the 1960s — seize the moment that has been handed to us. We are embarking on the first movements in a new cycle in American history. We have just completed a cycle during which the arts survived but only by scratching and clawing to hold the gains of the previous cycle. It is up to those of us in this room to lead the way. We must be sure that our President and the Congress — and the American people most of all — understand that the arts can lift us all up.

I listened on January 20th to Maya Angelou as she captured beauty in language. She said:

*Here on the pulse of this new day  
You may have the grace to look up and out  
And into your sister's eyes and into  
Your brother's face, your country  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope  
Good morning.*

I listened; I heard; I believed. Patrons, practitioners, supporters of the arts . . . I say to you — very simply, with hope — good morning. Have a very good day. ■

## Barbara Jordan

The Honorable Barbara Jordan held the Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin. From 1972 to 1978, she represented the 18th District of Texas in the United States Congress, where she helped enact into law major civil rights legislation. Jordan achieved national recognition as a member of the House Committee on the Judiciary when it moved to impeach President Nixon in 1974. She served on several corporate boards and received more than 25 awards and honors. Jordan was a founder and board member of People for the American Way. Barbara Jordan died in 1996.