



The University of Georgia

School of Social Work
Office of the Dean

October 31, 2006

Dr. Susan C. Quinlan, Chair
Committee on Honorary Degrees
Department of Romance Languages
216 Gilbert Hall
Athens, GA 30602-1815

Dear Dr. Quinlan:

I write to nominate Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. for an honorary degree to be awarded at the University of Georgia's Commencement Ceremony in Spring 2007.

This courageous, brilliant, and charismatic leader, who has played such a vital role in our nation and excelled so magnificently in various domains, is more than deserving of an honorary degree from the University of Georgia. Given his stellar contributions to our University, state, region, and nation, it seems not only fitting, but essential that the University of Georgia take action to acknowledge the presence, contributions, and impact of this great American – a son of our state.

Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.'s contributions to society are both distinguished and broad. His brilliant career covers a wide spectrum of activities—civil rights, law, social and economic justice, political empowerment, and international business. His influence on the history of the University of Georgia, this region, and on the national and global political stage is almost unprecedented in the lifetime of one man.

He is nationally renowned for his illustrious service at the forefront of the civil rights movement. He is also well known for directing President Clinton's transition team in 1992 and for serving as a senior adviser to the former President. Though eminently successful in the corporate world, the bulk of his career has been devoted to civil and human rights.

He is currently the senior managing director of the investment firm Lazard Frères & Company in New York; a member of the board of directors for several major national and international corporations; and a member of the board of trustees of Howard University, the Ford Foundation, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Contributions to the University of Georgia

In 1960, after graduating from Howard University School of Law, Jordan heeded a call to service and returned to Atlanta to work in the law firm of civil rights attorney Donald L. Hollowell. He joined Hollowell in representing countless individuals across the state in cases involving flagrant civil rights violations. The most significant case was the historic *Holmes v. Danner* case that resulted in the admission of the first two black students to the University of Georgia—Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter. In examining admissions records of students who had applied to the University after the date that the admission office recorded the applications of Holmes and Hunter, Jordan discovered a key piece of unassailable evidence in support of the plaintiffs' claims of discrimination. This evidence was pivotal in Federal Judge William Bootle's decision to order the immediate enrollment of both applicants. On January 9, 1961, Vernon Jordan personally escorted Hunter through a hostile crowd of white segregationists to the University's Office of Admissions.

When the Holmes-Hunter Lecture series was established in 1985, Vernon Jordan returned to Athens, nearly 25 years after Holmes and Hunter enrolled at UGA, to give the inaugural keynote lecture.

Since Fall 2005, in a manner characteristic of his long-standing commitment to public service and civil rights, Jordan has taken on the leadership role as Chairman of the endowment committee for the Donald L. Hollowell Professorship of Social Justice and Civil Rights Studies in the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia. Jordan made a substantial lead gift to the Hollowell Professorship and his prominence has helped recruit and develop a diverse endowment committee composed of distinguished leaders in business, civil rights, and education.

Contributions to Georgia and the Region

After the civil rights achievement at the University of Georgia, Vernon Jordan served the civil rights movement in various roles for the next 20 years. Later in 1961, he took on one of the most audacious jobs in the South: he joined the staff of the NAACP as the Georgia Field Director. In this position he advocated for civil rights and responded to allegations of racial discrimination during a time of massive resistance and blatant racial violence. He promoted voter education and organized successful voter registration drives, whereby disenfranchised individuals became voting citizens.

In 1965, he took on yet another advocacy role in the struggle for social justice: Director of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, the oldest interracial organization in the South. In this role, Jordan orchestrated voter registration campaigns in 11 Southern states and conducted seminars, workshops, and conferences to help ensure equal access to the electoral process. His leadership and contributions helped to enfranchise and empower black voters and office holders and foster interracial tolerance.

Contributions to the Nation

In 1970, Vernon Jordan became the executive director of the United Negro College Fund and later became president of the National Urban League – an organization devoted to securing economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights for black and other oppressed or vulnerable Americans. His dynamic leadership moved the organization beyond training, education, and job creation to include lobbying corporations to hire more African Americans and establishing the policy journal, *The Urban League Review*. Jordan also spearheaded the publication of *State of Black America Reports*, a highly respected, annual journal written by experts about the social and economic progress of African Americans.

In 1980, he was wounded in an assassination attempt, and he later resigned from the National Urban League to become a partner with the prestigious Washington D.C. law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer, and Feld.

Jordan's influence nationally has continued through his law practice, which has included corporate, legislative, and international clients; service on several major corporate boards of directors; and service in the Clinton Administration.

Honors and Awards

Vernon Jordan has received many awards including the Alexis de Tocqueville award of the United Way of America, which honors leadership in volunteerism. In 2001, he was the recipient of the NAACP's highest honor, the Joel E. Spingarn Medal, awarded for distinguished achievement by African Americans.

One could argue that UGA is late in considering an honorary degree for Vernon Jordan. A graduate of DePauw University and the Howard University Law School, Jordan already holds honorary degrees from more than 50 American colleges and universities.

Vernon Jordan is one of the most distinguished, eminent, and influential citizens in America. Taking into consideration his remarkable record, brilliant contributions to our University, state, and nation, and current service to the School of Social Work and University, I strongly nominate him for an honorary degree. It would be especially significant for our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University to observe and participate in an experience where our University bestows an honorary degree on this great American

Sincerely,



Maurice C. Daniels
Dean and Professor