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The Republican Party of Texas

- Women's History Month -

Dr. Mildred Jefferson (1926 - 2010)



Papers of Mildred Jefferson (1947-2010).

When people think of Republican Party politics in Texas, one woman should immediately come to mind. Mildred Jefferson was a Texas trailblazer and American pioneer in the pro-life movement. She was born April 4, 1927, in Pittsburg, Texas. Dr. Jefferson distinguished herself throughout her career by accomplishing the following¹:

- ✓ Helped found the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), the nation's largest pro-life organization.
- ✓ Graduated from Texas College in Tyler, Tx summa cum laude in 1945.
- ✓ 1st Black woman to graduate from Harvard Medical School in 1951.
- ✓ 1st female surgical intern at Boston City Hospital.
- ✓ Crusaded four decades to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.
- ✓ Served on boards of more than 30 right-to-life groups.
- ✓ Testified before Congress in support of the unborn.
- ✓ Ran for U.S. Senate three times, 1982, 1984, 1990 with her pro-life platform.

She came from a family wherein her mother was a schoolteacher and her father a Methodist minister.

Dr. Jefferson considered herself a Lincoln Republican. She believed in a philosophy based on humanitarian individualism and enlightened capitalism.² Although she was once recognized as one of the “Ten Most Admired Conservative Women” by the *Conservative Digest*, she was still not able to translate such notoriety into political victory when she went on her quest to unseat then five-term incumbent Edward Kennedy for the U.S. Senate (Mass.).³ Not to be dismayed, she continued to impact lives politically, as she had greater influence protecting the lives of the unborn.

As a doctor she was recognized for her energy, oratory skills, and dedication to the cause of protecting the lives of the unborn. She is quoted as saying, “ I am not willing to stand aside and allow this concept of expendable human lives to turn this great land of ours into just another exclusive reservation where only the perfect, the privileged and the planned have a right to live.”⁴ It is with such powerful words that she led the charge against abortion!

Since 1973, over 19 million Black babies have been aborted. This represents over 47 percent of the Black population.⁵ Dr. Jefferson’s works likely helped to ensure the number of abortions wasn’t higher. When she took the Hippocratic Oath, she believed in it and ascertained this also meant it prohibited the taking of life. Therefore, when the American Medical Association declared that physicians could ethically perform abortions, she became one of the founders of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) and remained active with this pro-life group until her death.⁶ At one point, when she was the three-time president of the NRLC, she was described as a General in the war on abortion!⁷

There’s no doubt, her positive impact helped saved countless lives and continues to have a rippling effect today! Her statement made in 1978 still rings true today. She noted, “People have to understand that when the state has no laws, the person who is in greatest danger is the person who is least able to protect himself or herself.”⁸ Such words don’t just impact lives, they save them! For, this, and so much more, honor and recognition are bestowed upon this historic Texas Trailblazer, Dr. Mildred Jefferson.

As always, there is so much more which can be learned from the rich history of Texas Republican politics. It is therefore paramount, that the lessons of the past be sought, thus ensuring a more prosperous and sounder future for generations to come. Thank you for taking the time to take embark upon this journey through history. Remember, *History Matters!*

Endnotes

¹ NRLC. 2019. Honors Dr. Mildred Fay Jefferson, The First African American Woman to Graduate from Harvard Medical School, and NRLC President from 1975-1978. *States News Service*.

² Quess, Jr. John F. 1994. Mildred Jefferson. *National Minority Politics*, 6(5), 31.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Review. 2010. “When Mildred Jefferson graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1951—the first black woman to do so—she took the Hippocratic Oath.” *National Review* 15 Nov. 2010: 12. *Business Insights: Global*. Web. 8 Mar. 2021.

⁵ Daniels, Christina, et al. (2015). The Effects of Abortion on the Black Community. Policy Report. Center for Urban Renewal and Education.

⁶ National Review. 2010. “When Mildred Jefferson graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1951—the first black woman to do so—she took the Hippocratic Oath.” *National Review* 15 Nov. 2010: 12. *Business Insights: Global*. Web. 8 Mar. 2021.

⁷ *Ebony*. 1978. 33(6), p. 78

⁸ Ibid. p. 88