Valerie B. Jarrett, ’81

Valerie B. Jarrett has devoted much of her career to service—as a government official, a community activist, and a businesswoman known for championing urban revitalization.

Jarrett is a senior adviser to President Barack Obama, overseeing the Offices of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs, while chairing the White House Council on Women and Girls. The Council was created by President Obama in 2009 with the charge of providing a coordinated federal response to the challenges confronting women and girls, by ensuring that all cabinet-level agencies consider how their policies and programs impact women and families.

Jarrett also served as co-chair of the Obama-Biden Presidential Transition Team, and was a senior adviser to then-Senator Obama’s presidential campaign.

Prior to joining the Obama administration, Jarrett was the chief executive officer of the Habitat Company, a real estate development and management company headquartered in Chicago, with offices in Detroit, St. Louis, Oklahoma City, and Atlanta. The Habitat Company was the receiver for the Chicago Housing Authority during Jarrett’s tenure, responsible for the redevelopment of mixed-income communities on sites where large concentrations of public housing stood previously.

Jarrett’s career in real estate began after she graduated from Michigan Law, when she practiced real estate law with two private firms. She then transitioned to the public sector as deputy corporation counsel for finance and development for Chicago Mayor Harold Washington. She went on to serve as deputy chief of staff and commissioner of planning and development for Mayor Richard M. Daley, where she oversaw the redevelopment of Chicago’s neighborhoods, landmark designations, and economic revitalization.

During her career, Jarrett also has been active on numerous corporate and not-for-profit boards, including serving as the chair of the Chicago Transit Board, chair of the Board of the Chicago Stock Exchange, director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and chair of the University of Chicago Medical Center Board of Trustees.

In 2013, she was named one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people as well as the National Newspaper Publishers Association’s Newsmaker of the Year.