



Let the People In: The Life and Times of Ann Richards

Jan Reid

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Winner, Coral Horton Tullis Memorial Prize, Texas State Historical Association, 2012

Liz Carpenter Award for Research in the History of Women, Texas State Historical Association, 2012

When Ann Richards delivered the keynote of the 1988 Democratic National Convention and mocked President George H. W. Bush—"Poor George, he can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth"—she instantly became a media celebrity and triggered a rivalry that would alter the course of American history. In 1990, Richards won the governorship of Texas, upsetting the GOP's colorful rancher and oilman Clayton Williams. The first ardent feminist elected to high office in America, she opened up public service to women, blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, gays, and the disabled. Her progressive achievements and the force of her personality created a lasting legacy that far transcends her rise and fall as governor of Texas.

In *Let the People In*, Jan Reid draws on his long friendship with Richards, interviews with her family and many of her closest associates, her unpublished correspondence with longtime companion Bud Shrake, and extensive research to tell a very personal, human story of Ann Richards's remarkable rise to power as a liberal Democrat in a conservative Republican state. Reid traces the whole arc of Richards's life, beginning with her youth in Waco, her marriage to attorney David Richards, her frustration and boredom with being a young housewife and mother in Dallas, and her shocking encounters with Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter. He follows Richards to Austin and the wild 1970s scene and describes her painful but successful struggle against alcoholism. He tells the full, inside story of Richards's rise from county office and the state treasurer's office to the governorship, where she championed gun control, prison reform, environmental protection, and school finance reform, and he explains why she lost her reelection bid to George W. Bush, which evened his family's score and launched him toward the presidency. Reid describes Richards's final years as a world traveler, lobbyist, public speaker, and mentor and inspiration to office holders, including Hillary Clinton. His nuanced portrait reveals a complex woman who battled her own frailties and a good-old-boy establishment to claim a place on the national political stage and prove "what can happen in government if we simply open the doors and let the people in."

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