

Book Review - Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State by David Richards

Focus on American History Series. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. \$39.95, ISBN 0-292-77118-5.)

By Bill Hobby

David Richards was not only present at the creation of modern political Texas, he had a good deal to do with it. He and a few other lawyers led the legal and political fights for school desegregation, voting rights, and single-member legislative districts. In Once Upon a Time in Texas, Richards writes about the state from the 1950s to the 1990s, when its politics changed from those of the all-white Democratic-primary era to the inclusiveness that we see today. This is the period also immortalized in Billy Lee Brammer's classic political novel *The Gay Place* (Austin, 1978), and like it, Once Upon a Time in Texas is an invaluable memoir of the time.

Richards also had a lot to do with civilizing the University of Texas. In the 1950s the university administration did not hesitate to call out the Department of Public Safety to muzzle student dissent or oppose antiwar marches, which at least once drew 20,000 participants. As an attorney, Richards represented some of the arrested students and peace marchers. Today, of course, the University of Texas is a civilized, diverse institution that is one of the glories of the state.

Until 1965 the Texas Constitution prohibited any single county from having more than 1 of the 31 state senators or more than 7 of the 150 house members. Although Harris (the city of Houston) and Dallas Counties combined accounted for a quarter of the state's population, they had only one-sixteenth of the state senate and one-tenth of the house. Bexar County, containing heavily Hispanic San Antonio, was similarly underrepresented. These provisions, a flagrant violation of the "one-person-one-vote" principle, were set aside by the federal courts, and the subsequent redistricting enabled Barbara Jordan to be elected to the Texas senate in 1966. Two blacks were elected to the state house of representatives that same year.

The detailed accounts of the legal battles to expand the voting rights of students and blacks, and to secure the fair representation of minority groups through redistricting, are perhaps the most valuable parts of the book. Richards has described the second Reconstruction of Texas that he helped bring about only a generation ago. How appropriate that his book was published in April 2002, the same month that the Texas Democratic Party nominated an African American (Ron Kirk) for the U.S. Senate and a Hispanic (Tony Sanchez) for governor.

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