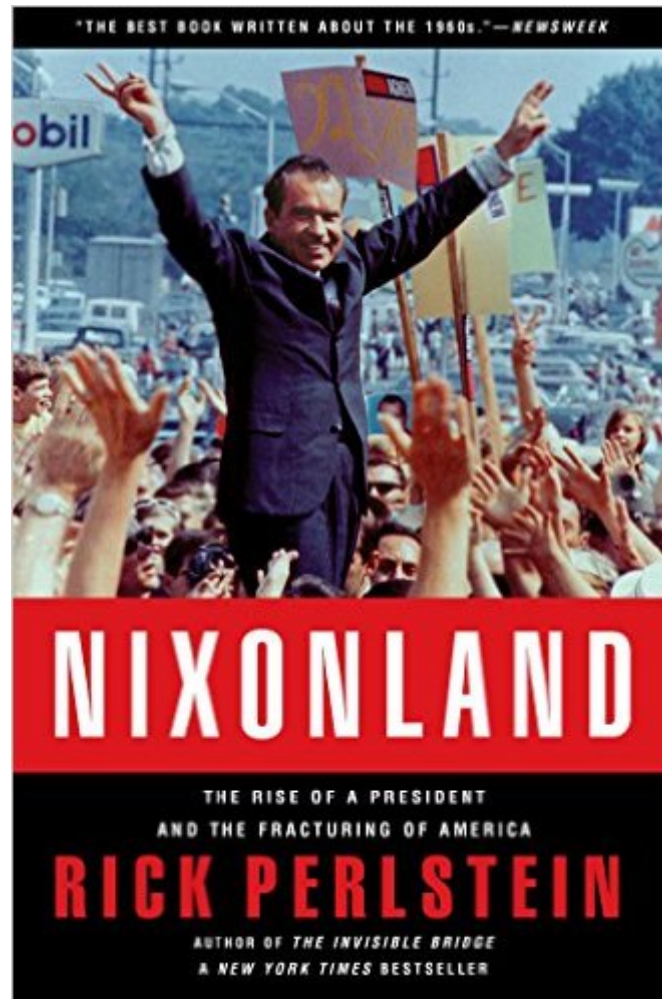


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Nixonland: The Rise Of A President And The Fracturing Of America



Synopsis

Told with urgency and sharp political insight, *Nixonland* recaptures America's turbulent 1960s and early 1970s and reveals how Richard Nixon rose from the political grave to seize and hold the presidency. Perlstein's epic account begins in the blood and fire of the 1965 Watts riots, nine months after Lyndon Johnson's historic landslide victory over Barry Goldwater appeared to herald a permanent liberal consensus in the United States. Yet the next year, scores of liberals were tossed out of Congress, America was more divided than ever, and a disgraced politician was on his way to a shocking comeback: Richard Nixon. Between 1965 and 1972, America experienced no less than a second civil war. Out of its ashes, the political world we know now was born. It was the era not only of Nixon, Johnson, Spiro Agnew, Hubert H. Humphrey, George McGovern, Richard J. Daley, and George Wallace but Abbie Hoffman, Ronald Reagan, Angela Davis, Ted Kennedy, Charles Manson, John Lindsay, and Jane Fonda. There are tantalizing glimpses of Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Jesse Jackson, John Kerry, and even of two ambitious young men named Karl Rove and William Clinton -- and a not so ambitious young man named George W. Bush. Cataclysms tell the story of Nixonland: -Angry blacks burning down their neighborhoods in cities across the land as white suburbanites defend home and hearth with shotguns -The student insurgency over the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention -The fissuring of the Democratic Party into warring factions manipulated by the "dirty tricks" of Nixon and his Committee to Re-Elect the President -Richard Nixon pledging a new dawn of national unity, governing more divisively than any president before him, then directing a criminal conspiracy, the Watergate cover-up, from the Oval Office Then, in November 1972, Nixon, harvesting the bitterness and resentment born of America's turmoil, was reelected in a landslide even bigger than Johnson's 1964 victory, not only setting the stage for his dramatic 1974 resignation but defining the terms of the ideological divide that characterizes America today. Filled with prodigious research and driven by a powerful narrative, Rick Perlstein's magisterial account of how America divided confirms his place as one of our country's most celebrated historians.

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Customer Reviews

This is a four-part story of Richard Nixon's reign. Each section is devoted to one of the four elections of 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1972, and thus it is a political history that attempts to capture and make sense of the temper of those turbulent and changing times as seen primarily through Richard Nixon's character. In this sense it parallels Oliver Stone's biopic called "Nixon." When Nixon prepared to make his second run at the Presidency, Vietnam had ignited a rage in the nation's young. This rage intersected with the cultural cross currents of the quickening pace of the civil rights movement and the rise of leftwing radical groups. Many conservative whites thought the wheels were coming off the nation morally and culturally. Nixon, seen by many at the time (and since by historians), as a tragic but brilliant figure, wore his deep felt hurt, anger and anxieties on his sleeve for all to see, but despite this he was judged (and proved to be) a smart political tactician. Perlstein's story centers on Nixon's character and how it proved to be a critical factor in shaping both domestic and foreign policy during his reign and in the process being responsible for making fundamental realignments in American domestic politics as well as changing the course of U.S. foreign policy with his ground breaking overture to China. During the first part (1966), reading the tea leaves left by Reagan who had recently won the California governorship on a new "law and order" platform, and encouraged by a resounding defeat of a host of liberal LBJ legislation -- by essentially the same "law and order coalition" -- Nixon could see where the future was headed and plotted a course that he hope would set the troubled nation on a more even keel and get him elected in the process.

Perlstein uses the rise of Richard Nixon as a way of illustrating the rise of modern Republicanism, with its populist themes, often faux populist policies, and its relentless negativity. None of these things were invented by Nixon, his circle, or the GOP, but he certainly provided a vehicle for making them central to Republican power since the 1960s. Although Nixon is the central figure of the book,

Perlstein also provides a narrative that describes what happened to the Democrats and how they came to fall out of power, even as a majority of voters tended to endorse the majority of their positions. The book is not a full scale biography of Nixon and some sections show obvious signs of editing which probably excised details that would be important to people not familiar with Nixon's life or major events of the 1960s. The book also relies a lot on secondary sourcing and could have used more aggressive fact checking on key details (e.g., Hugh Scott did not represent Ohio, Wayne Hays was not from Cleveland and, most embarrassingly for a resident of Chicago's South Side like Perlstein, the Dan Ryan Expressway goes no where near the West Side. Perlstein also goes with less credible accounts of Eisenhower's decision to place Nixon on the ticket (Eisenhower wanted Earl Warren) and the sweep of Eisenhower's disdainful treatment of his vice president (e.g., waiting until the last minute to endorse him in 1960) is not fully developed. The phoniness of Nixon's striving also gets a bit lost. Nixon was a poor relation (his mother's family were the local gentry), but never knew real poverty--unlike Lyndon Johnson, who shared many of Nixon's grievances about the world, or George McGovern whose view of life was more optimistic than that of Nixon or Johnson.

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