

"THE BEST BOOK WRITTEN ABOUT THE 1960s." —NEWSWEEK



# NIXONLAND

THE RISE OF A PRESIDENT  
AND THE FRACTURING OF AMERICA

**RICK PERLSTEIN**

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER







---

**ALSO BY RICK PERLSTEIN**

*Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and  
the Unmaking of the American Consensus*

---

# **NIXONLAND**

---

**THE RISE OF A PRESIDENT  
AND THE FRACTURING OF AMERICA**

**RICK PERLSTEIN**

SCRIBNER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY



  
SCRIBNER

---

A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.  
1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2008 by Rick Perlstein

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address  
Scribner Subsidiary Rights Department, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

SCRIBNER and design are registered trademarks of The Gale Group, Inc., used under license by Simon & Schuster, Inc., the publisher  
of this work.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-7988-5

ISBN-10: 1-4165-7988-5

Visit us on the World Wide Web:

<http://www.SimonSays.com>



*To the memory of Paul Cowan (1940–1988) and J. Anthony Lukas  
(1933–1997), two heroes I never got a chance to meet.*

---

*To the memory of Allison Patricia Geier  
(October 31, 1999–February 7, 2007), whose wonderful family never  
got a chance to see her radiant soul set loose upon the world.*

*And finally, to the memory of the dozens of Americans who lost their lives  
at the hands of other Americans, for ideological reasons, between the years  
of 1965 and 1972. Their names are recorded throughout this book.*



# CONTENTS

---

## Preface

### BOOK I

- 1 Hell in the City of Angels
- 2 The Orthogonian
- 3 The Stench
- 4 Ronald Reagan
- 5 Long, Hot Summer
- 6 School Was in Session...
- 7 Batting Average

### BOOK II

- 8 The Bombing
- 9 Summer of Love
- 10 In Which a Cruise Ship Full of Governors Inspires Considerations on the Nature of Old and New Politics
- 11 Fed-up-niks
- 12 The Sky's the Limit
- 13 Violence
- 14 From Miami to the Siege of Chicago
- 15 Wednesday, August 28, 1968
- 16 Winning

### BOOK III

- 17 The First One Hundred Days
- 18 Trust
- 19 If Gold Rust
- 20 The Presidential Offensive
- 21 The Polarization
- 22 Tourniquet
- 23 Mayday
- 24 Purity
- 25 Agnew's Election

### BOOK IV

- 26 How to Survive the Debacle
- 27 Cruellest Month
- 28 Ping-Pong
- 29 The Coven
- 30 The Party of Jefferson, Jackson, and George Wallace
- 31 The Spring Offensive
- 32 Celebrities
- 33 In Which Playboy Bunnies, and Barbarella, and Tanya, Inspire Theoretical Considerations upon the Nature of Democracy
- 34 Not Half Enough

## Notes





# NIXONLAND

---



---

## **PREFACE**

---

**I**N 1964, THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE LYNDON B. JOHNSON WON practically the biggest landslide in American history, with 61.05 percent of the popular vote and 486 of 538 electoral college votes. In 1972, the Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon won a strikingly similar landslide—60.67 percent and 520 electoral college votes. In the eight years in between, the battle lines that define our culture and politics were forged in blood and fire. This is a book about how that happened, and why.

At the start of 1965, when those eight years began, blood and fire weren't supposed to *be* a part of American culture and politics. According to the pundits, America was more united and at peace with itself than ever. Five years later, a pretty young Quaker girl from Philadelphia, a winner of a Decency Award from the Kiwanis Club, was cross-examined in the trial of seven Americans charged with conspiring to start a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

“You practice shooting an M1 yourself, don't you?” the prosecutor asked her.

“Yes, I do,” she responded.

“You also practice karate, don't you?”

“Yes, I do.”

“That is for the revolution, isn't it?”

“After Chicago I changed from being a pacifist to the realization that we had to defend ourselves. A nonviolent revolution was impossible. I desperately wish it was possible.”

And, several months after that, an ordinary Chicago ad salesman would be telling *Time* magazine, “I'm getting to feel like I'd actually enjoy going out and shooting some of these people. I'm just so goddamned mad. They're trying to destroy everything I've worked for—for myself, my wife, and my children.”

This American story is told in four sections, corresponding to four elections: in 1966, 1968, 1970, and 1972. Politicians, always reading the cultural winds, make their life's work convincing 50 percent plus one of their constituency that they understand their fears and hopes, can honor and redeem them, and can make them safe and lead them toward their dreams. Studying the process by which a notably successful politician achieves that task, again and again, across changing cultural conditions, is a deep way into an understanding of those fears and dreams—and especially, how those fears and dreams *change*.

The crucial figure in common to all these elections was Richard Nixon—the brilliant and tormented man struggling to forge a public language that promised mastery of the strange new anger, anxieties, and resentments wracking the nation in the 1960s. His story is the engine of this narrative. Nixon's character—his own overwhelming angers, anxieties, and resentments in the face of the 1960s chaos—sparks the combustion. But there was nothing natural or inevitable about how he did it—nothing inevitable in the idea that a president could come to power by *using* the angers, anxieties, and resentments produced by the cultural chaos of the 1960s. Indeed, he was slow to the realization. He reached it, through the 1966 election, studying others: notably, Ronald Reagan, who won the governorship of California by providing a political outlet for the outrages that, until he came along to articulate them, hadn't seemed like *voting* issues at all. If it hadn't been for the shocking defeats of a passel of LBJ liberals blindsided in 1966 by a conservative politics of “law and order,” things might

have turned out differently: Nixon might have run on a platform not too different from that of the LB liberals instead of one that cast them as American villains.

---

Nixon's win in 1968 was agonizingly close: he began his first term as a *minority* president. But the way he achieved that narrow victory seemed to point the way toward an entire new political alignment from the one that had been stable since FDR and the Depression. Next, Nixon bet his presidency, in the 1970 congressional elections, on the idea that an "emerging Republican majority"—rooted in the conservative South and Southwest, seething with rage over the destabilizing movements challenging the Vietnam War, white political power, and virtually every traditional cultural norm—could give him a governing majority in Congress. But when Republican candidates suffered humiliating defeats in 1970, Nixon blamed the chicanery of his enemies: *America's* enemies, he had learned to think of them. He grew yet more determined to destroy them, because of what he was convinced was their determination to destroy *him*.

Millions of Americans recognized the balance of forces in the exact same way—that America was engulfed in a pitched battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. The only thing was: Americans disagreed radically over which side was which. By 1972, defining that order of battle as one between "people who identified with what Richard Nixon stood for" and "people who despised what Richard Nixon stood for" was as good a description as any other.

Richard Nixon, now, is long dead. But these sides have hardly changed. We now call them "red" or "blue" America, and whether one or the other wins the temporary allegiances of 50 percent plus one of the electorate—or 40 percent of the electorate, or 60 percent of the electorate—has been the narrative of every election since. It promises to be thus for another generation. But the size of the constituencies that sort into one or the other of the coalitions will always be temporary.

The main character in *Nixonland* is not Richard Nixon. Its protagonist, in fact, has no name—but lives on every page. It is the voter who, in 1964, pulled the lever for the Democrat for president because to do anything else, at least that particular Tuesday in November, seemed to court civilizational chaos, and who, eight years later, pulled the lever for the Republican for exactly the same reason.



---

# **BOOK I**



## Hell in the City of Angels

**Y**OU MIGHT SAY THE STORY STARTS WITH A TELEVISION BROADCAST. IT issued from the Los Angeles television station KTLA, for four straight August days in 1965, culminating Sunday night, August 15, with a one-hour wrap-up. Like any well-produced TV program, the wrap-up featured its own theme music—pounding, dissonant, like the scores composer Bernard Herrmann produced for Alfred Hitchcock—and a logo, likewise jagged and blaring. It opened with a dramatic device: a voice-over redolent of the old L.A. police procedural *Dragnet*—elements familiar enough, almost, to make it feel like just another cops-and-robbers show.

*“It was a hot and humid day in the city of Los Angeles, Wednesday, August eleventh, 1965,”* the gravelly narration began...

*“The City of Angels is the nation’s third-largest metropolis.*

*“Two and a half million people live here, in virtually an ideal climate, surrounded by natural beauty, and the benefits of economic prosperity.*

*“Within the vast metropolitan spread live 523,000 Negroes. A sixth of them reside in southeastern Los Angeles in an area that is not an abject slum in the New York or Detroit context, but nonetheless four times as congested as an average area in the rest of the city.*

*“The community had prided itself on its relatively harmonious racial relations, few demonstrations, no massive civil disobedience, little trouble from militant factions.”*

The camera tracks an ordinary-looking residential block, tree-lined and neat, a row of modest ranch houses fronted by postage-stamp lawns, suburban, almost. The angle came from a helicopter—KTLA-TV’s “telecopter” was the first of its kind. The utility of the Korean War–vintage Bell 47G-5 with the camera affixed to its belly had so far been mostly prurient: shots of the swimming pool where Marlon Brando’s maid had drowned; of the well that swallowed a darling little girl; of movie stars’ mansions being devoured by brush fires in the Hollywood hills. Now the chopper was returned to its wartime roots. Los Angeles’ black citizens were burning down their neighborhood.

When the Watts riots began, television stations sent in their mobile cars to cover it. They were stoned like a scene from Leviticus. The next day militants cautioned, or threatened, the TV crews not to come: they were all-white—the enemy. There was even fear that KTLA’s shiny red helicopter might be shot down, by the same snipers peppering the firefighters who were trying to douse the burning blocks.

The risk was taken. Which was why the worst urban violence in American history ended up being shown live on TV for four straight days, virtually nonstop.

Then, that Sunday-night wrap-up: The narrator paused, the telecopter slowed to a hover at the end of the tree-lined block, lingering on a single bungalow on the corner. Its roof was gone, the insides blackened like the remains of a weekend barbecue.

The voice-over intensified:

*“Then with the suddenness of a lightning bolt and all the fury of an infernal holocaust, there wa*

## *HELL in the City of Angels!*

~~Cue the music: shrieking trumpets, pealing from television speakers in Southern California recreation rooms and dens, apartments and bars, wherever people gathered, pealing as heralds, because American politics, for those white, middle-class folks who formed the bedrock of the American political conversation, could never be the same again.~~

Until that week the thought that American politics was on the verge of a transformation would have been judged an absurdity by almost every expert. Indeed, its course had never seemed more certain.

Lyndon Johnson had spent 1964, the first year of his accidental presidency, redeeming the martyr: passing, with breathtaking aplomb, a liberal legislative agenda that had only known existence as wish during John F. Kennedy's lifetime. His Economic Opportunity Act of 1964—the “war on poverty”—passed nearly two to one. The beloved old general Dwight D. Eisenhower came out of retirement to campaign against the Kennedy-Johnson tax cut. But Lyndon Johnson passed that, too. And then there was the issue of civil rights.

“Let this session of Congress be known as the session which did more for civil rights than the last hundred sessions combined,” Johnson intoned in his first State of the Union address. It was just five weeks after John F. Kennedy's assassination, seven months after Kennedy, alarmed by a wave of civil rights uprisings sparked in Birmingham, Alabama, had introduced the most sweeping civil rights bill since Reconstruction. It had been bogged down by Congress's recalcitrant conservative coalition of Northern Republicans and Southern Democrats. Even Martin Luther King's heroic hundreds of thousands of pilgrims marching on Washington couldn't unstick it. But President Johnson unstuck it. By June of 1964, the first session of the Eighty-eighth Congress had indeed done more for civil rights than the last hundred sessions combined: segregation in the United States in public accommodations was now illegal. “Our Constitution, the foundation of our republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I sign tonight forbids it,” Johnson said at a ceremony carried live on all three networks.

What the ceremony marked was not merely a law but a liberal apotheosis—an apparent liberal national consensus. Johnson's approval rating even among Republicans was 74 percent. Pundits and public-opinion experts proclaimed him an exact match for the spirit of the age. So, even, did conservative businessmen: speaking before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the president was interrupted for applause some sixty times. They had reason to cheer. So dynamic had the American economic engine become that it was fashionable to presume that prosperity could fix any social problem. “I'm sick of all the people who talk about the things we can't do,” Lyndon Johnson told an aide in one of his patented exhortations. “Hell, we're the richest country in the world, the most powerful. We can do it all.” The Great Society was the name Johnson gave his ambition. It “rests on abundance and liberty for all,” he said in a May 22 speech, “a society of success without squalor, beauty without barrenness, works of genius without the wretchedness of poverty.” The rhetoric was incredible. Still more incredible: it seemed reasonable.

The Republican Party spent the year of the liberal apotheosis enacting the most unlikely political epic ever told: a right-wing fringe took over the party from the ground up, nominating Barry Goldwater, the radical-right senator from Arizona, while a helpless Eastern establishment-that-was-now-a-fringe looked on in bafflement. Experts, claiming the Republican tradition of progressivism was as much a part of its identity as the elephant, began talking about a party committing suicide. The Goldwaterites didn't see suicide. They saw redemption. This was part and parcel of their ideology—that Lyndon Johnson's “consensus” was their enemy in a battle for the survival of civilization. For

- [download online The Heredity of Taste](#)
- [Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy \(Cornell Studies in Security Affairs\) online](#)
- [download online Scientific Man Versus Power Politics \(Midway Reprint Series\)](#)
- [read Behavioral Finance: Psychology, Decision-Making, and Markets](#)
- [download Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left \(The History of Communication\)](#)
  
- <http://twilightblogs.com/library/Paradoxes--Polity-Key-Concepts-in-Philosophy-.pdf>
- <http://honareavalmusic.com/?books/The-Deluxe-Transitive-Vampire--A-Handbook-of-Grammar-for-the-Innocent--the-Eager-and-the-Doomed.pdf>
- <http://www.rap-wallpapers.com/?library/Family-Of-Origin-Therapy--An-Intergenerational-Approach.pdf>
- <http://creativebeard.ru/freebooks/What-s-Wrong-With-Eating-People---33-More-Perplexing-Philosophy-Puzzles.pdf>
- <http://aneventshop.com/ebooks/Encyclopedia-of-Healing-Foods.pdf>