

him up to it, but because Yeltsin himself thought Russia needed a leader with a “military manner” who could consolidate political authority. But Colton is convinced Yeltsin would have reversed the decision later if he’d had the chance.

The Yeltsin that emerges in Colton’s book is a powerful man of sharp political instincts and the courage to act on them. He generously gives away his wristwatches. He habitually snaps pencils in frustration. He remains loyal to friends from his hometown but promotes young economists to help run Russia. He makes mistakes, then apologizes to his fellow Russians for them.

Frequently, Colton sets Yeltsin off against Gorbachev, his chief rival. Born a month apart, the two men could not have been more different. While Yeltsin, the grandson of kulaks, was 30 when he received his party card, Gorbachev, a third-generation Communist, joined in his early 20s, when Stalin was still in the Kremlin. Yeltsin’s instincts, Colton says, were feline, while Gorbachev’s were more canine—“trained, trainable, tied to the known and to the previously rewarded.”

But it is in the comparisons to Putin, in most cases unstated, that Yeltsin truly shines. Yeltsin was roasted in the media over the brutal war he unleashed in Chechnya in 1994, but he did not try to silence his many critics or stop journalists from investigating alleged corruption, accepting the need for political debate and an independent press. “For the first sustained period in modern times, Yeltsin’s Russia was to be a land without political censors, political exiles, or political prisoners,” Colton says. Under Putin, this all changed. National television stations were deployed as propaganda tools of the Kremlin, and journalists who angered those in power lost their jobs and, in some cases, their lives. Berezovsky leads a long list of Russians who sought asylum abroad to avoid politically motivated criminal charges, and Russia’s prisons and mental hospitals once again began to collect political dissidents.

In stepping down on New Year’s Eve 1999, Yeltsin said he was confident that Russia would never return to the past and would “proceed only forward.” He then famously asked Putin to “take

care of Russia.” Putin let him down. With Putin’s installation this spring of his own handpicked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, a man who promises to fulfill “Putin’s Plan” and has made the former president his prime minister, Putin still rules.

But Colton concludes that there is still hope for a democratic Russia. Yeltsin gave Russians a personal independence that they will not easily relinquish. His economic reforms underlie the growth that has improved the lives of his compatriots, who mistakenly thank only Putin. In his book, Colton is kind to Yeltsin. History will be, too.

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## HISTORY

### Meet and Greet

Reviewed by Karl E. Scheibe

ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC, boys mocked the Hitler salute during World War II. I recall holding a pocket comb under my nose with my left hand while extending my right arm, clicking my heels, and intoning, “Heil Hitler!” I never closed the gap of consciousness between my own German heritage and my pleasure in ridiculing my father’s native land. To this day, one may mock and scorn the Nazis without fear of offending anyone’s sensibilities. Mel Brooks’s uproarious comedy *The Producers* milked this standard Nazi greeting to great effect. How is it that the defining pole of manifest evil in our times is at once chilling and funny?

In *The Hitler Salute*, German sociologist Tilman Allert has given us an analysis of the famous greeting that is both thorough and modest, accessible and profound. In the scope of 100 pages, he provides a history and interpretation of a most remarkable and telling feature of the totalitarian regime that was National Socialism. By decree from the very beginning of the Nazi era in 1933, this salutation, involving voice and gesture, was pre-

#### THE HITLER SALUTE:

On the Meaning of a Gesture.

By Tilman Allert.  
Translated by Jefferson Chase. Metropolitan.  
115 pp. \$20

scribed. It was “a historically unique phenomenon that, for the span of 12 years, politicized all communication within German society.”

It is astonishing to observe that the entire German nation quickly abandoned the greeting rituals and habits established over centuries (*grüß Gott, auf Wiedersehen, guten Tag, servus*) in favor of a salute that was a test and a manifestation of loyalty, a pledge of allegiance to a charismatic leader, and a confession of pious faith in the new order. Of course, there were protests and exceptions. Jews were neither expected nor allowed to use the greeting. Allert notes that the military was slow to substitute the new greeting for its traditional salutes. The Catholic Church did not fall into line immediately. And within families, especially those of the aristocratic classes, traditional greetings survived. But by the end of the war, in 1945, the salute had been assimilated into the routines of everyday life. Then, with Germany’s defeat and the death of Hitler, the custom was abandoned virtually overnight—except by certain prisoners of war and a few fringe political groups.

This work constitutes a brilliant example of what Erving Goffman referred to as the micro-analysis of the interaction order. The theoretical structure of the book is drawn from classical sociology—in particular the thought of Max Weber. Greetings are the means by which individuals enter into social arrangements and relationships; the ways greetings are given, received, and reciprocated provide a means of reading status, power, group identity, and disposition toward cooperation or hostility. What sets the Hitler salute apart is that it did not grow out of popular custom, but was imposed from the top down. The comparison that most readily comes to mind is from Aldous Huxley’s 1932 novel *Brave New World*, in which the citizens of his futuristic society are expected to employ the sign of the T as a gesture of solidarity.

No longer could an individual take public exception to the course of events or seek pleasure in the company of others who might share one’s passions. The only permissible pleasures were collective, communal. “Ultimately,” Allert asserts, “what made it possible for Germans to accept the Hitler greet-

ing was neglect, an attitude in turn made possible by a perception of society that so attenuated people’s expectations of social exchange they became indifferent to the presence of others.” Ordinary Germans, under the watch of suspicious Nazi authorities, abandoned previous social values and lost their trust in social interactions. The path to the extermination camps was paved by such neglect and indifference.

The elimination of individuality betokened by the universal Hitler salute was a form of madness. The relief from this madness was a return to normality—including the capacity to laugh at what was once so tragic.

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## Day of the Jackal

Reviewed by Matthew Dallek

IN 2001, HISTORIAN RICK Perlstein published *Before the Storm*, which examined the conservative ascendancy through the lens of Barry Goldwater’s 1964 White House run. Now comes the sequel, *Nixonland*, in which he explains how Richard Nixon emerged in the Goldwater aftermath as the unscrupulous tribune of a “silent majority” infuriated by the social instability gripping America.

Though the style is overwrought, *Nixonland* is, at times, an eloquent narrative of a society in chaos. Perlstein argues that Nixon capitalized on that unrest—crime, rioting, pornography, “women’s liberation”—to win the presidency. Appropriating the tactics and strategies of conservative leaders such as California governor Ronald Reagan and Alabama’s George Wallace, Nixon used racial codes, patriotic symbols, and get-tough language to appeal to suburbanites who sought the restoration of order to their streets and college campuses.

Nixon’s appeal to the “silent majority” and his us-versus-them brand of politics is by now a relatively familiar story. Yet, with an anthropologi-

**NIXONLAND:**  
The Rise of a  
President and  
the Fracturing  
of America.

By Rick Perlstein.  
Scribner. 881 pp. \$37.50