

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.

KARL E. SCHEIBE, an emeritus professor of psychology and director of the Wasch Center for Retired Faculty at Wesleyan University, is the author of *The Drama of Everyday Life* (2000), among other books.

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

cal eye for detail, Perlstein mines news articles, numerous historical monographs and books of the period, and, to a lesser degree, archival documents to capture vividly the rage that animated this era's politics among both conservatives and the New Left.

Hardhats clubbed antiwar demonstrators in New York City, and Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, emerged as a "law-and-order vanguardist" who railed against campus ruffians and attacked the liberal media as "nattering nabobs of negativism." The National Guard, rifles and bayonets at the ready, cracked down on protesters at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago while chants of "kill the pigs!" went up as police waded into the crowds.

But there is a cartoonish and ultimately unconvincing quality to Perlstein's portrayal of political figures. Nixon is purely Machiavellian. Agnew is irredeemably vicious. George McGovern is utterly incompetent. Politicians of all stripes are depicted as lacking substantive ideas about public policy and foreign affairs. The Left and the Right are united only by their incivility and contempt for the other side. Human decency is virtually absent from these pages.

There are other problems as well. The narrative tends toward the grandiose, as if an already dramatic storyline had to be written with big and bold strokes to capture the tenor of the times. Perlstein italicizes ("Agnew *hated* beards"). When Nixon aide John Erlichman warned administration official Leon Panetta to stop saying that Nixon favored civil rights, Perlstein needlessly deadpans, "Silly Leon." Nixon is described as "lustily" pursuing his goals.

Still, Perlstein's history of violence in America—of street crime but also ideologically charged attacks on Americans by other Americans, and their effect on electoral politics—is a stark reminder of the bitter divisions of the Lyndon Johnson–Nixon years. Despite its overreach, *Nixonland* is an important work of synthesis, capturing a moment when ideological, racial, gender, and moral conflicts rent the electorate. While issues including class tensions, the growing influ-

ence of the Sunbelt in presidential politics, and Nixon's foreign policy receive short shrift, Perlstein provides a thorough and provocative analysis that reinforces, with a wealth of detail, the roots of conservatism's successes.

Whether American politics is still defined by the violence of Nixon's age, as Perlstein concludes, is debatable. Nonetheless, public morality did

emerge as a dominant factor in American politics in the late 1960s. The Watergate scandal ultimately derailed Nixon's career. But his Republican successors moved in to pick up the pieces, and *Nixonland* is a bracing reminder of how some

divisions from Nixon's presidency continue to haunt debates about abortion rights, flag pins, and gay marriage—issues likely to play a part in presidential politics for the foreseeable future.

MATTHEW DALLEK, a fellow at the Wilson Center, is the author of *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (2000).

Whether American politics is still defined by the violence of Nixon's age is debatable, but public morality did emerge as a dominant factor in American politics in the late 1960s.

Meet Mrs. Warren

Reviewed by Edith Gelles

MERCY OTIS WARREN'S REPUTATION is based largely on her magnum opus, the incomparable *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*. Published in 1805, it is one of the earliest histories of that era.

That an 18th-century woman was inspired to believe she could write history—indeed, did write it—is remarkable. Still, today her *History* is hardly known, much less read outside the circle of scholarly specialists on the revolutionary era. Unlike that of her friend Abigail Adams, Warren's place in the pantheon of the American Revolution has been shortchanged, even ignored, in the stream of recent popularizations of the founding "greats."

THE MUSE OF THE REVOLUTION:
The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation.

By Nancy Rubin Stuart.
Beacon. 314 pp. \$28.95