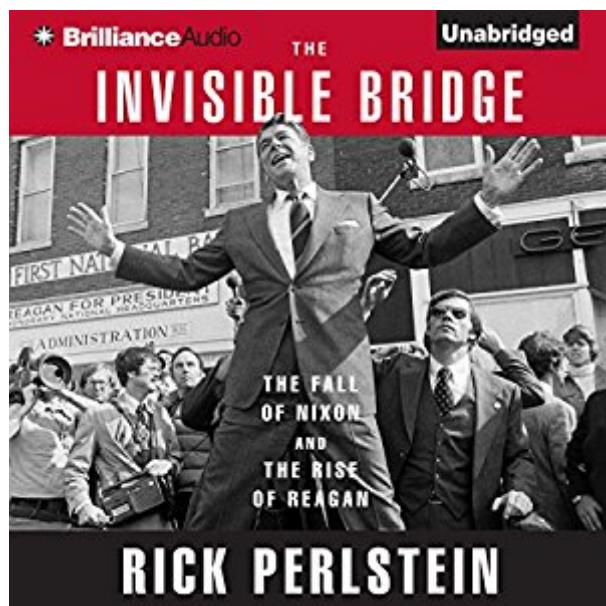


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The Invisible Bridge: The Fall Of Nixon And The Rise Of Reagan



Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Nixonland*: a dazzling portrait of America on the verge of a nervous breakdown in the tumultuous political and economic times of the 1970s. In January of 1973 Richard Nixon announced the end of the Vietnam War and prepared for a triumphant second term - until televised Watergate hearings revealed his White House as little better than a mafia den. The next president declared upon Nixon's resignation "our long national nightmare is over" - but then congressional investigators exposed the CIA for assassinating foreign leaders. The collapse of the South Vietnamese government rendered moot the sacrifice of some 58,000 American lives. The economy was in tatters. And as Americans began thinking about their nation in a new way - as one more nation among nations, no more providential than any other - the pundits declared that from now on successful politicians would be the ones who honored this chastened new national mood. Ronald Reagan never got the message. Which was why, when he announced his intention to challenge President Ford for the 1976 Republican nomination, those same pundits dismissed him - until, amazingly, it started to look like he might just win. He was inventing the new conservative political culture we know now, in which a vision of patriotism rooted in a sense of American limits was derailed in America's Bicentennial year by the rise of the smiling politician from Hollywood. Against a backdrop of melodramas from the Arab oil embargo to Patty Hearst to the near-bankruptcy of America's greatest city, *The Invisible Bridge* asks the question: what does it mean to believe in America? To wave a flag - or to reject the glibness of the flag wavers?

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Customer Reviews

Invisible Bridge depicts the fall of Richard Nixon through Watergate and Ronald Reagan's rise. In the previous volume, Nixonland, detailed the rise of Richard Nixon and the rise of a more conservative America after the unrest and upheaval brought on by liberalism run wild. The Invisible Bridge picks up the story from just after the 1972 election and Nixon's trouncing of George McGovern. Sadly, for Richard Nixon the good feelings were not going to last. The Watergate investigation would soon ruin a presidency. Watergate cemented the culture of cynicism toward politicians that is still present today. For a while, it appeared like nobody was clean. Into this void stepped Ronald Reagan who promised a return to an age of when America was innocent, choices were black and white and things weren't so complicated and confusing. Fair warning, if you love Reagan, you might want to avoid this book because Perlstein comes across as super liberal and liberals and Reagan are the political equivalent of oil and water. The fundamental question throughout the back half of the book is how did Reagan come so close to winning the Republican Nomination from Gerald Ford- a sitting president? Perlstein is at his best as he is exploring and detailing the conservative network of sorts that the forces that wanted Reagan were able to tap into. My favorite section was actually the last 50-100 pages and the primary fights in both parties and the high drama at the Republican National Convention (definitely a far cry from today's coronation oriented events.) While it is a good view of the political and societal view of America in the 1970s, I think Perlstein went overboard on some of his portrayals of Reagan and Ford.

Perlstein's effort, the third installment of his series, is an informative and insightful look at the fall of Nixon, as well as the incipient rise of Ronald Reagan. Perlstein manages to give us that look without just focusing on politics, but including the social issues that dominated the times, and weaving those events into his narrative. That might not be attractive to all, but I liked it, as it brings a fuller picture of what was on the minds of voters as political events unfolded. How political figures leverage those events to make their cases is often times forgotten when we look at the relative success (or failures) of the politicians of the day. As with both of the prior books there are references that show that some of our politics have not changed much over the years. Are the immigration debates new? I don't think so. "President Ford implored, 'We can afford to be

generous to refugeesâ€”as a matter of principle.â€” Mayor Daley of Chicago responded, “Charity begins at home.” The Seattle City Council voted seven to one against a pro-settlement resolution. California governor Jerry Brown said Congress’ refugee bill should be amended with a “jobs for Americans first” pledge. Explained Harvard sociologist David Riesman, “The national mood is poisonous and dangerous and this is one symptomâ€”striking out at helpless refugees whose number is infinitesimal.” Perlstein takes ground on Nixon that we have been over before, but it fits this story. The story evolves into the massive Ford/Reagan battle for the GOP nomination in 1976, with great detail on how that overall race developed. We even get a good peek at the rise of Jimmy Carter on the Democratic side. Perlstein focuses heavily on the GOP, and gives some great insight on how Ronald Reagan had superior political instincts, rejecting the standard advice given by advisors to great, and positive effect. (Reagan never condemned Nixon on Watergate when most of his own people wished he would) We all know how that Ford/Reagan nomination battle ended, and that is where Perlstein ends this story. Reagan’s loss brought out the Reagan naysayers, who underestimated his political appeal from the very start. After the loss many wrote him off, but his story was just beginning. Perlstein gives, to me, an unvarnished view of how Reagan managed to achieve his success, even in defeat. He gently mocks the left for not understanding Reagan’s appeal, while showing us the “tricks” of Reagan’s trade. As with the other two books I give this one high ratings, and enjoyed reading it very much. It is over 800 pages so it will not be for everyone, but for those interested in this era it is a great read!

I read Before The Storm and thought it was great. Nixonland I thought was ok. The Invisible Bridge is kind of a floundering mess. Perlstein does one thing very well, which is to provide color on the background of the times. He has an angle when he does it so there’s a good deal of cherry-picking facts that fit the desired narrative, but nonetheless you get a good picture of the spirit of the times. And as to what Perlstein does badly...literally everything else. In particular, he wastes page upon page on ridiculous pseudo-psychological analysis of Reagan, much like he did in Nixonland on Nixon. Some of this line of writing doesn’t even make sense--there’s a mention of how Reagan had some kind of lifelong obsession with meat coupled with a quote from a letter he wrote as a child about enjoying a steak, but nothing else about this supposed fixation or what on earth it means. It would be funny if it weren’t so stupid. If he had left out the attempted psychology, it would have merited 4/5 stars. It also would have been a lot shorter. The description of the convention in ’76 is

great (Tony Orlando was there?!) as was his work on the convention in '64 in Before The Storm.

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