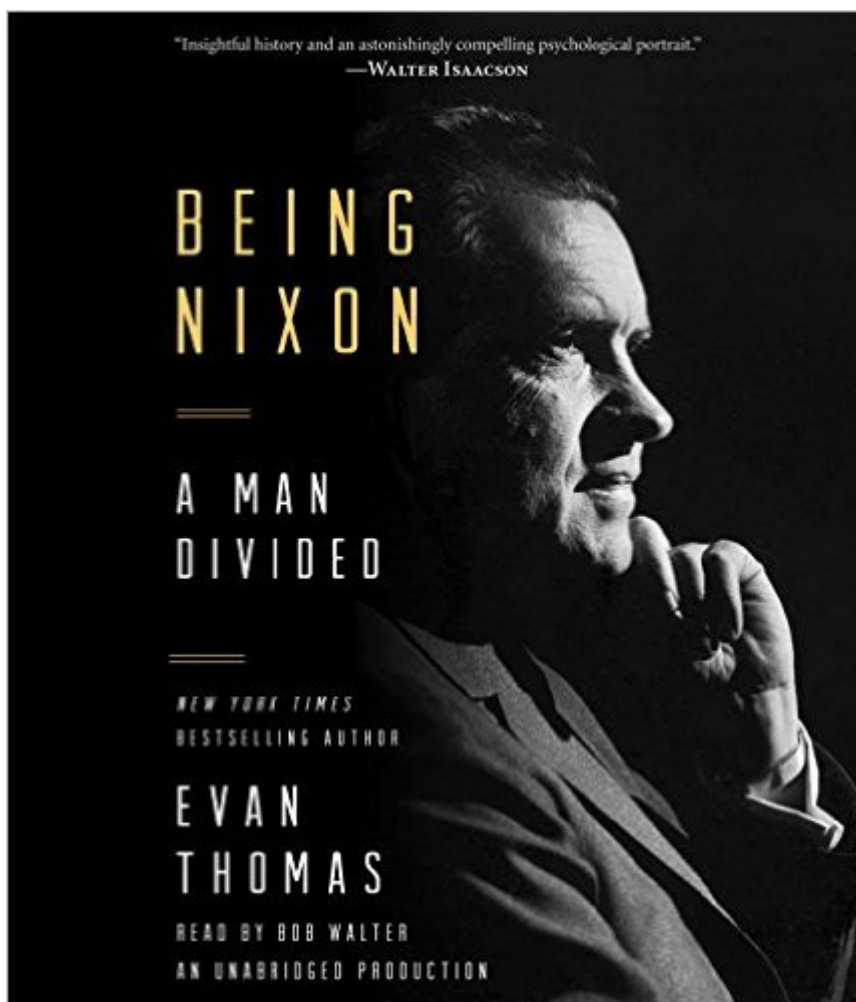


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Being Nixon: A Man Divided



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NAMED ONE OF THE TEN BEST NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY TIME AND ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH • "What was it really like to be Richard Nixon? Evan Thomas tackles this fascinating question by peeling back the layers of a man driven by a poignant mix of optimism and fear." —Walter Isaacson, author of *Steve Jobs* Evan Thomas delivers the best single-volume biography of Richard Nixon to date, a radical, unique portrait of a complicated figure who was both determinedly optimistic and tragically flawed. The New York Times bestselling author of *Ike's Bluff* and *Sea of Thunder*, Thomas brings new life to one of American history's most infamous, paradoxical, and enigmatic politicians, dispensing with myths to achieve an intimate and nuanced look at the actual man. What drove a painfully shy outcast in elite Washington society "a man so self-conscious he refused to make eye contact during meetings" to pursue power and public office? How did a president so attuned to the American political id that he won reelection in a historic landslide lack the self-awareness to recognize the gaping character flaws that would drive him from office and forever taint his legacy? In *Being Nixon*, Evan Thomas peels away the layers of the complex, confounding figure who became America's thirty-seventh president. The son of devout Quakers, Richard Nixon (not unlike his rival John F. Kennedy) grew up in the shadow of an older, favored brother and thrived on conflict and opposition. Through high school and college, in the navy and in politics, he was constantly leading crusades and fighting off enemies real and imagined. As maudlin as he was Machiavellian, Nixon possessed the plainspoken eloquence to reduce American television audiences to tears with his career-saving "Checkers" speech; meanwhile, his darker half hatched schemes designed to take down his political foes, earning him the notorious nickname "Tricky Dick." Drawing on a wide range of historical accounts, Thomas reveals the contradictions of a leader whose vision and foresight led him to achieve détente with the Soviet Union and reestablish relations with communist China, but whose underhanded political tactics tainted his reputation long before the Watergate scandal. One of the principal architects of the modern Republican Party and its "silent majority" of disaffected whites and conservative ex-Dixiecrats, Nixon was also deemed a liberal in some quarters for his efforts to desegregate Southern schools, create the Environmental Protection Agency, and end the draft. A deeply insightful character study as well as a brilliant political biography, *Being Nixon* offers a surprising look at a man capable of great bravery and extraordinary deviousness "a balanced portrait of a president too often reduced to caricature. Praise for *Being Nixon* "A biography of eloquence and breadth . . . No single volume about Nixon's long and interesting life could be so

comprehensive.â•â "Chicago Tribune âœTerrifically engaging . . . a fair, insightful and highly entertaining portrait.â•â "The Wall Street Journal âœThomas has a fine eye for the telling quote and the funny vignette, and his style is eminently readable.â•â "The New York Times Book Review âœThomas proves an amiable and fair-minded tour guide.â•â "The Boston Globe âœA measured, concise, and important American biography.â•â "Michael Beschloss, author of Presidential Courage
From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Please note that I am not reviewing Richard Nixon, but rather the biography of him by Evan Thomas, "Being Nixon: A Man Divided". There are two kind of political biographies. The first are those that are written with an "agenda" - either partisan or personal - and the second are those written to be non-partisan. The first kind of biographies may be more "fun" to read - particularly if you agree with the "agenda" - than the second, but "Being Nixon" is an excellent example of a fact-based, opinion-free book. I recently read and reviewed "Mormon Rivals: The Romneys, the Huntsmans, and the Pursuit of Power", and found it to also be free of political ideology. Evan Thomas - an author with an impeccable East Coast/Ivy League pedigree - would be the kind of person Richard Nixon would find very little kinship with. Nixon was raised in a small rural town - Whittier - outside Los Angeles, the son of struggling parents. His father was an unsuccessful business man but his mother, Hannah, urged her sons to succeed in life. She was a fervent Quaker, and was a life-long inspiration to Richard. After graduating from Whittier College, Nixon was offered a free ride in law school from Duke University. After law school, Nixon applied to "white shoe" law

firms but was turned down. He joined the US Navy after Pearl Harbor and was sent to the South Pacific. When he returned to California, he was "noted" by the local Republican power broker and offered a chance to run for US Congress. He campaigned hard, won the election, and then four years later to the US Senate, after a fairly dirty campaign. He joined Dwight Eisenhower on the national ticket for Vice-President in 1952, but was laid low by rumors of a slush fund.

This book is thunderous in its objectivity on Richard Nixon and his legions of enemies. Nixon was certainly an easy man to despise. His enemies hated him so intensively because he seemed a square old fogey in a hip new era and because his prosecution of the Vietnam War toward a hoped for "peace with honor" was repugnant to antiwar activists who sought an immediate end to what they saw as an unjust war. On the other hand, Nixon was an outrageously abrasive personality who inflamed animosities in the press and in Congress when he could easily have soothed them. So, a fair portion of the animosity was his own doing. Author Evan Thomas makes plain that Nixon set the table for his Watergate downfall both by callous stupidity and malignant contempt for those he perceived were persecuting him in the press, academia, and Congress. But Thomas gets beyond the war between Nixon and his enemies that climaxed in Watergate. He fairly portrays Nixon the Statesman who very possibly saved the world from a three-way nuclear confrontation between the USA, USSR, and China. He shows the Nixon who saved Israel from destruction when it was on the knife-edge of defeat in the October 1973 Yom Kippur War. He shows the Nixon who was cheered by six million Egyptians a few months later for "brokering an honest peace" between Israel and Egypt. The world today, which competes economically instead of militarily, is largely the world that Nixon envisioned in his inaugural speech of 1969. His grandeur as a peacemaker is brought to life. I've studied Nixon for much of my life. My father campaigned for him in 1960, so I grew up in a family friendly towards him. I've read every book he has written, plus the books by his detractors. I came of age during his term.

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