



# On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller

*Richard Norton Smith*

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**NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *THE BOSTON GLOBE*,**

***BOOKLIST*, AND *KIRKUS REVIEWS*** • From acclaimed historian Richard Norton Smith comes the definitive life of an American icon: Nelson Rockefeller—one of the most complex and compelling figures of the twentieth century.

Fourteen years in the making, this magisterial biography of the original Rockefeller Republican draws on thousands of newly available documents and over two hundred interviews, including Rockefeller's own unpublished reminiscences.

Grandson of oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, Nelson coveted the White House from childhood. "When you think of what I had," he once remarked, "what else was there to aspire to?" Before he was thirty he had helped his father develop Rockefeller Center and his mother establish the Museum of Modern Art. At thirty-two he was Franklin Roosevelt's wartime coordinator for Latin America. As New York's four-term governor he set national standards in education, the environment, and urban policy. The charismatic face of liberal Republicanism, Rockefeller championed civil rights and health insurance for all. Three times he sought the presidency—arguably in the wrong party. At the Republican National Convention in San Francisco in 1964, locked in an epic battle with Barry Goldwater, Rockefeller denounced extremist elements in the GOP, a moment that changed the party forever. But he could not wrest the nomination from the Arizona conservative, or from Richard Nixon four years later. In the end, he had to settle for two dispiriting years as vice president under Gerald Ford.

In *On His Own Terms*, Richard Norton Smith re-creates Rockefeller's improbable rise to the governor's mansion, his politically disastrous divorce and remarriage, and his often surprising relationships with presidents and political leaders from FDR to Henry Kissinger. A frustrated architect turned master builder, an avid collector of art and an unabashed ladies' man, "Rocky" promoted fallout shelters and affordable housing with equal enthusiasm. From the deadly 1971 prison uprising at Attica and unceasing battles with New York City mayor John Lindsay to his son's unsolved disappearance (and the grisly theories it spawned), the punitive drug laws that bear his name, and the much-gossiped-about circumstances of his death, Nelson Rockefeller's was a life of astonishing color, range, and relevance. *On His Own Terms*, a masterpiece of the biographer's art, vividly captures the soaring optimism, polarizing politics, and inner turmoil of this American Original.

## **Praise for *On His Own Terms***

"[An] enthralling biography . . . Richard Norton Smith has written what will probably stand as a definitive Life. . . . *On His Own Terms* succeeds as an absorbing, deeply informative portrait of an important, complicated, semi-heroic figure who, in his approach to the limits of government and to government's relation to the governed, belonged in every sense to another century."—*The New Yorker*

"[A] splendid biography . . . a clear-eyed, exhaustively researched account of a significant and fascinating American life."—*The Wall Street Journal*

"A compelling read . . . What makes the book fascinating for a contemporary professional is not so much any

one thing that Rockefeller achieved, but the portrait of the world he inhabited not so very long ago.”—*The New York Times*

“[*On His Own Terms*] has perception and scholarly authority and is immensely readable.”—*The Economist*

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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#### **Margherita Pettit:**

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