

YELTSIN



A LIFE



TIMOTHY J. COLTON

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Even after his death in April 2007, Boris Yeltsin remains the most controversial figure in recent Russian history. Although Mikhail Gorbachev presided over the decline of the Communist Party and the ending of Soviet mastery in Eastern Europe, it was Yeltsin—the first elected national leader in Russia's long history—who buried the Soviet Union itself. Brought to Moscow by Gorbachev, Yeltsin soon clashed with him and went on to play a key part in the unraveling of the Soviet superpower. In 1991, after the flags changed on the Kremlin, he embarked on a sweeping makeover of the new Russia. Although the nation was vastly changed by the time he retired as president in 1999, Yeltsin was forced to admit that he had failed to compel Russia towards democracy and free markets in a single leap.

In this, the first biography to treat Yeltsin's entire life, renowned Russia scholar Timothy J. Colton traces his development from a peasant boy in the Urals to a Communist Party *apparatchik*, and then ultimately to the nemesis of the communist order. Based on unprecedented interviews with Yeltsin himself, as well as family members and scores of former high-level officials, journalists, and businessmen, Colton explains why and how Yeltsin broke with single-party rule and launched his drive to replace it with democracy.

Yeltsin's intuitive judgment of situations, grace under fire, and mastery of power resources enabled him to begin the task at blinding speed. Once the Yeltsin revolution was under way, gaps in his vision of the future, psychological eccentricities, personal weaknesses, and institutional factors all conspired to slow and distort the process. Nonetheless, Yeltsin had an extraordinary impact on the Soviet Union and Russia, and thus on the entire world.

Yeltsin's attempt to bring democracy to Russia remains one of the great, unfinished stories of our time. As undemocratic and often anti-Western policies and rhetoric resurface in Putin's Russia, *Yeltsin* is essential reading for understanding the past, present, and future of this vast and complex nation.



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