

OBITUARIES

Victor Lasky, Author, Journalist, Dies at 72

By J.Y. Smith

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Victor Lasky, 72, the author of highly critical books on such public figures as John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter and a journalist whose views were associated by many with the Republican Party and conservative organizations, died of cancer yesterday at Georgetown University Hospital.

At different times in his career, Mr. Lasky was a newspaperman in New York and Chicago, a Hollywood screenwriter, a lightning-quick writer of campaign biographies and a columnist for the North American Newspaper Alliance. But he was best known for such books as "J.F.K.: The Man and the Myth."

The book undertook debunking what Mr. Lasky regarded as the myths surrounding the glamorous young president. It appeared shortly before Kennedy's death. Its impact was such that when the president fell to the assassin's bullets on Nov. 22, 1963, the publisher, the Macmillan Co., immediately withdrew it. But distribution soon resumed, and it went on to spend several weeks on the best-seller lists.

Critics, some of them openly partisan, derided it as a mere cut-and-paste compilation of rumor, a scurrilous effort devoid of any original reporting on pretense of objectivity. Kennedy supporters were infuriated. Writing in *The Washington Post Book World*, Nick Thimmesch said that then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy was so angry that he had Mr. Lasky's telephone tapped.

Similar criticisms were leveled at Mr. Lasky's subsequent books, which included "Robert F. Kennedy: The Myth and the Man" (1968), "Arthur J. Goldberg: The Old and the New" (1970) and "Jimmy Car-

ter: The Man and the Myth" (1979). But some said Mr. Lasky had shed useful light on aspects of important people that previously had been shielded from press.

In "It Didn't Start With Watergate," which was published in 1977, Mr. Lasky, an unabashed admirer of Richard M. Nixon, argued that the press was following a double standard. He said earlier presidents, including Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt, had authorized worse abuses than any that occurred under Nixon, and that the press simply ignored them.

In 1974, when Nelson A. Rockefeller was nominated to be vice president, it was learned that Mr. Lasky's book on Arthur Goldberg actually had been financed by Laurence Rockefeller as part of Nelson Rockefeller's campaign for reelection as governor of New York in 1970. For a brief time, it appeared that this might cause problems for Rockefeller's confirmation as vice president. For his part, Mr. Lasky said he had not known about the arrangement with Laurence Rockefeller, but that he had benefited from the publicity surrounding the matter.

Whatever critics said of his books, Mr. Lasky asserted that he was content to let his readers be his judge. "I can't get excited about political criticism," he said in an interview with "Contemporary Authors" in 1982. "Let me put it this way: I dish it out—I can take it."

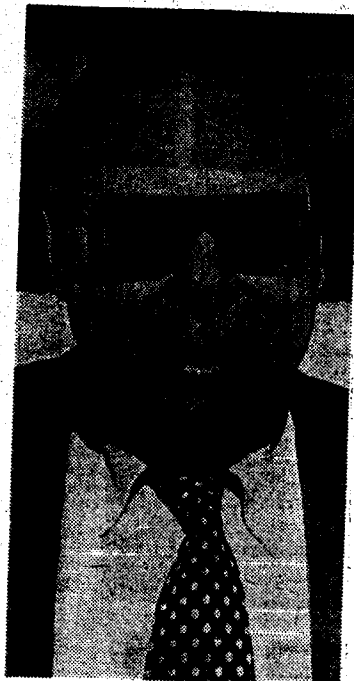
A native of Liberty, N.Y., Mr. Lasky grew up in New York City. He graduated from Brooklyn College. In 1941, he joined the *Chicago Sun* as a New York correspondent. During World War II, he served in the Army and went to Europe as a correspondent for *Stars and*

Stripes, the Army newspaper. Injured in a jeep accident after Germany's surrender, he returned to the *Sun*, but worked in Chicago.

In 1947, he joined the *New York World Telegram and Sun* in New York. In 1951 and 1952, he worked for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood. He later worked for RKO General Teleradio and Radio Liberty. From 1962 to 1980, he was a columnist for the *North American Newspaper Alliance*. He lived in New York until moving to Washington in 1970.

Mr. Lasky's first book was "Seeds of Treason," an account of the Alger Hiss espionage and perjury case, which he wrote with Ralph de Toledano in 1950. The Hiss affair brought Nixon to national prominence for the first time, and Mr. Lasky's friendship with the former president dated from that period.

His other books included "Say, Didn't You Use to be George Murphy?," a campaign biography he wrote with Murphy in 1970, and "Never Complain, Never Explain: The Story of Henry Ford II," which appeared in 1981.



VICTOR LASKY

If some critics found value in Mr. Lasky's earlier efforts to demythologize figures who seemed larger than life, his later books, including the ones on Carter and Ford, were criticized for containing "nothing new." These critics said styles had changed and that the new journalism, by placing every aspect of the lives of public personages under a microscope, had left Mr. Lasky with nothing to expose.

In addition to his books and his column, Mr. Lasky was a frequent contributor to such magazines as Reader's Digest and The Saturday Evening Post, and he also appeared frequently on television. He credited his wife, the former Patricia Pratt, whom he married in 1952, with playing an important role as a researcher, editor and typist in all of his work.

In addition to Mrs. Lasky, of Washington, survivors include two sisters, Lee Frankel of Queens, N.Y., and Mildred Sayles of Brooklyn.