

Campaign Books Bring

By Stephen Isaacs

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"The one that really got me started in this business," says Victor Lasky — writer, biographer, sometime political hatchet man—"was Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Back in 1960, he wrote a thing called 'Kennedy or Nixon—Does It Make Any Difference?' which really was a hatchet job on Nixon. Incidentally, it's a very fine, fine book. It was a superb, brilliant job. It was aimed at the Jewish, intellectual, liberal community. I responded to it with a little pamphlet and, two or three years later, that turned into 'JFK, The Man And The Myth.'"

Lasky's book on Kennedy, published in 1963, might not have gained the notoriety his strangely underwritten 1970 job on Arthur Goldberg is receiving, but it sold better.

Arlington House, the conservative publishing firm in New Rochelle, N.Y., printed 116,000 copies of Lasky's "Arthur J. Goldberg, The Old & The New." The printing was financed by a straw company backed by Laurance Rockefeller, brother of the then New York governor, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Goldberg's 1970 opponent for the governorship.

Of those copies, 100,00 were sent to Republican county chairmen across New York, and 16,000 were put on sale. Most of the 16,000 came back unsold, says Arlington House president Neil McCaffrey.

"But JFK, The Man and the Myth" was another story. "We've gone close to 300,000 copies, in hard cover," says Lasky.

McCaffrey bought the rights to "JFK" from Macmillan, which also published Schlesinger's 51-page polemic. Schlesinger insists it was no hatchet job.

"I think it's a perfectly balanced book," said the historian, who has twice won Pulitzer Prizes and once a National Book Award. "It's



VICTOR LASKY

... author of six books

not a hatchet job in the Lasky sense. And it's a view of Nixon which holds up well over time, in view of what's happened since."

Lasky and Schlesinger are not unique in having written campaign books, an art form as old and as enduring as the American political system itself. Most cam-

campaign books are pro, rather than con and one former aide to the late President Johnson said that "it seems to me that I've never known of a candidate taking off without one."

Most national candidates have had them in recent years, from President Nixon's biography by Earl Mazon's biography by Earl Mazon (which was not subsidized) to "McGovern," the book that Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) asked Robert Sam Anson to write in 1972 and then wasn't so pleased with when it came out.

There was an authorized, supposedly subsidized book on Hubert Humphrey, whose campaign never paid for the copies it ordered, and the authorized Lyndon Johnson biography by Booth Mooney that ended up in 50 foreign editions.

Controversy,

but Not Big

Sales

There have been any number of books that have died aborning or, in galleys when candidacies collapsed.

While most of Lasky's attack on Goldberg consists of one innuendo piled upon the next, occasionally it is blunt:

- "To the manor (sic) born he (Goldberg) was not; but he certainly acts as if he were."

- "... Mr. Goldberg's lack of candor."

- He was on his way to being recognized as the important man he considered himself to be."

Schlesinger's "Kennedy or Nixon" uses no innuendo. Instead, it is blunt. For instance:

- "The hard fact is that Nixon lacks taste."

• It is hard to define the precise Nixonian quality. One word for it is 'corny'."

• "He lacks a solid sense of his own identity. . ."

• ". . . He does not care much about what is intellectually or morally the right or wrong position to take on questions of public policy."

Whereas the Lasky and Schlesinger books are in ways comparable in content, they differ greatly in how they were financed. Although Lasky claims that "liberal organizations" bought copies of Schlesinger's work in bulk, Schlesinger denies this. And Schlesinger's advance payment for writing his book did not come from the Kennedy campaign.

"I've never heard of a case where someone subsidizes an attack on his opponent," said Random House's Jason Epstein. "A book by Schlesinger or a book by James MacGregor Burns (whose "John Kennedy—A Political Profile," came out in 1959) is something else again. If Arthur Schlesinger came to us (Random House) with a campaign book, we'd probably publish it without a subsidy. That's not comparable in any way to Lasky's attack on Goldberg."

The reason, simply, is that Schlesinger is perhaps the nation's best-known historian, whose books often sell merely because of his name on the jacket.

Lasky's name will not sell books in itself—at least not so far. He has written six books, the last of which, "The Nixon Years" his version of the Nixon presidency up to January, 1972, in 300,000 words is going begging for a publisher. He says he made a great deal of money—he would not give the exact amount—from his critical book about John Kennedy, although his original advance, he recalls, was \$15,000. He was paid \$10,000 to write "Arthur J. Goldberg: The Old & The New."

Another principal difference between the two books is the fact that Schlesinger was writing of a presidential contest, Lasky of a candidate for state office.

"In the case of Arthur Goldberg," says "The New York Review's" co-editor Robert Silvers, "it really was special. Who would've paid to buy a book on Goldberg?"

The fact is, according to a

number of publishers, campaign books generally just don't sell well.

An example was "Where I Stand," a 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign book, in which the publisher hoped to somehow duplicate the massive sale of Goldwater's privately published "The Conscience of a Conservative." Tony Smith, Goldwater's long-time press aide, described "Where I Stand" as "a self-serving book, a part of the campaign. It was a collection of his policy papers and speeches, printed in paperback.

"It was a huge mistake," said Smith, "because whoever handled the deal had no idea what the publishing business was all about. . . They had the book printed and had absolutely no distribution system set up."

Hubert Humphrey's 1968 biography, entitled "A Man for All People; A Pictorial Biography," is another example of a campaign book that didn't sell.

Low Gillenson, president of T.Y. Crowell, was then editor-in-chief of Grosset & Dunlap. "It was a typical campaign book," says Gillenson, "but it was mildly interesting."

The Humphrey campaign ordered and reordered copies and Grosset eventually printed some 48,000 of them, even binding some in simulated leather for Humphrey to autograph for friends and large contributors.

"Everybody did a beautiful job on the book. The only thing was, the Democrats never paid us any money," says Gillenson.

Grosset's bath ended up somewhere between \$48,000 and \$56,000, he said.

"They're not in general a good investment unless a publisher has some assurance from a campaign organization," says McCalfrey. "They mostly bomb without it. I would not have published the Goldberg book without it."

Sometimes publishers and authors go ahead on an unauthorized but "pro" campaign book, hoping that a campaign later will decide to buy them in bulk.

Ralph deToledano says his "anti" book on Robert Kennedy, entitled "RFK: The Man Who Would Be President," published in 1967 by G.P. Putnam's, "sold very well. I think it sold about 30,000 or 40,000 copies in hardback and several hun-

cred thousand in paper until Bobby was assassinated. Then they took it off the shelves." That book, he says, was his idea, and he was paid an advance, of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 by the publisher.

Another book de Toledano wrote, however, had more unusual origins called "Claude Kirk's Man and Myth," came out during Florida Gov. Claude Kirk's re-election campaign in 1970. It was not a positive book about Kirk. As de Toledano says, "Kirk had generated a great deal of hostility."

"The book was on newsstands all over Florida during the primary," says de Toledano, "and it caused great controversy. Kirk got

on TV and said it was pornography and I responded by saying, 'He oughta know, it's the story of his life.'"

De Toledano insists that the book was not underwritten by the campaign of Jack Eckerd, who was trying to take the gubernatorial nomination from Kirk. He says the idea came from, and the research was done by, Philip B. Brennan, Jr. He identified Brennan as a Florida "writer and public relations guy who just wanted to write a book."

DeToledano borrowed money to print the book himself, he says, from Brennan and others, and paid \$15,000 to have 100,000 paperback copies printed, and sold about 50,000 of them. He says the book was about 150 pages long and he wrote it, using Brennan's research, in about three weeks.

"On this one," he said, "I figured it would be a very hot primary battle and I figured I'd do it myself. I made some money on it."

Another self-published book was Phyllis Schlafly's "A Choice Not An Echo", a tract in 1964 that extolled Barry Goldwater and did less for Lyndon Johnson.

"It sold 3 million copies and it never had a single advertisement," Mrs. Schlafly. She did that, she said, by selling them at low bulk rates—like 1,000 books for 20 cent apiece.

Mrs. Schlafly's book was not the best-known anti-Johnson book to come out in 1964, though. J. Evetts Haley put out a pocketbook called "A Texan Looks at Lyndon—A Study In Illegitimate



ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.
... blunt on Nixon

Power." Haley wrote of Johnson's "... ambitious desires, his vanity and monumental egotism, his vindictive nature and his evil genius."

One of Johnson's aides says there was never a question of the honest origins of Haley's volume—he truly detested Johnson. The book, published privately, sold in the millions.

An authorized biography of Johnson was first done by erstwhile staffer Booth Mooney in 1956.

"I was on his payroll part of the time when writing it," says Mooney, "but it wasn't a subsidized book." Anyway, a great many were bought in bulk by Johnson's friends."

The book, called "The Lyndon Johnson Story," sold moderately well after its 1956 publication.

Then, says Mooney, "Rogers Straus [of Farrar, Straus & Co.] called me up the night of the day Kennedy was assassinated," and asked him to update it in two weeks.

The new version, says Mooney, "did quite well." As

for the book, it had improved somewhat but not all that much. I think it sold 25,000 in hard cover, it was syndicated, it was an Avon paperback, and it went into approximately 50 foreign editions. I'll never do that well again."

During the 1972 campaign, McGovern used to tell reporters how Bob Anson had made mistakes in his biography. But eventually, says Anson, "I think he came to realize it was good because the press bought it."

The book, says Anson, "was hardly definitive. It was based on six weeks' reporting."

Anson struck an unusual financial arrangement on the book, published by Holt. "They paid me \$6,000 as an advance, which didn't last. I ended up taking a loan from Household Finance. He [McGovern] got \$2,500 out front to sit for the interviews, and then he got all the royalties. As a matter of fact, I suggested this. I didn't want to make money off of this."

The most significant book in the last several decades on that score was James

MacGregor Burns' book on John Kennedy, which narrowly tread the line between the campaign book genre and political scholarship.

"I'm always upset when my book is referred to as a campaign biography," says Burns. He defines a campaign biography strictly as "a biography written to help a candidate get elected instead of a kind of independent scrutiny. My main motivation as a scholar was to try an experiment, to do a biography of a man of the type we do when he is dead, but do it when he is alive when it seems much more appropriate for people to know about him then, when they need to know the information."

He feels he was successful. "It was well received from a scholarly standpoint," he says, "and not so well received by the Kennedys, which was to be expected . . ."

Above all, he [Kennedy] was concerned, he had a lot of things he questioned, particularly my questioning of how much heart he was willing to put into the thing."

Burns' "John Kennedy—A Political Profile" was in no small measure a turning point in Jack Kennedy's political career.

"MacGregor Burns' book was really an important book in legitimizing JFK in the liberal community," says Victor Navasky, a book expert for The New York Times who is currently managing Ramsey Clark's Senate campaign in New York.

"I was in Michigan at that time as a Kennedy organizer," recalls Navasky, "and the book had a big role in persuading the reform wing of the party that he was acceptable."

Navasky feels the Schlesinger book a year later helped, too, "for the speech-writing types who were themselves having trouble trying to articulate what the difference was."

Some political professionals feel that the campaign books may have a marginal value inside a campaign, not outside.

F. Clifton White, Goldwater's campaign manager in

1964, who has run a number of, successful conservative campaigns and who helped found the American Association of Political Consultants, says that, "I doubt if those books have any impact at all in terms of the general electorate."

"They may have a certain utility for the workers, at least in the case of the 'pro' book. It gives them a way to establish quick familiarity with the candidate. As for the 'anti' books, the people they are anti of spend an awful lot of time worrying about them, instead of doing something useful.

"I think television did a tremendous amount to minimize the effectiveness of these things. Earlier in American history, print was the basic mode of communication. We're all oriented to the tube nowadays, whether we think so or not."