Irving Kristol (January 22, 1920 – September 18, 2009) was an American columnist, journalist, and writer who was dubbed the “godfather of neo-conservatism.” As the founder, editor, and contributor to various magazines, he played an influential role in the intellectual and political culture of the last half-century; after his death he was described by The Daily Telegraph as being “perhaps the most consequential public intellectual of the latter half of the 20th century.”

1 Background

Kristol was born in Brooklyn, New York, the son of non-observant Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, Bessie (Mailman) and Joseph Kristol. He received his B.A. from the City College of New York in 1940, which was free to attend until the 1970s, where he majored in history and was part of a small but vocal Trotskyist anti-Soviet group who eventually became the New York Intellectuals. It was at these meetings that Kristol met Gertrude Himmelfarb, whom he later married in 1942. During World War II, he served in Europe in the 12th Armored Division as a combat infantryman.

Kristol was affiliated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom; he wrote in Commentary magazine from 1947 to 1952, under the editor Elliot Cohen (not to be confused with Elliot A. Cohen the writer of today’s magazine); co-founder (with Stephen Spender) of the British-based Encounter from 1953 to 1958; editor of The Reporter from 1959 to 1960; executive vice-president of the publishing house Basic Books from 1961 to 1969; Henry Luce Professor of Urban Values at New York University from 1969 to 1987; and co-founder and co-editor (first with Daniel Bell and then Nathan Glazer) of The Public Interest from 1965 to 2002. He was the founder and publisher of The National Interest from 1985 to 2002. Following Ramparts’ publication of information showing Central Intelligence Agency funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was widely reported elsewhere, Kristol left in the late 1960s and became affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute.

Kristol was a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a fellow emeritus at the American Enterprise Institute (having been an associate fellow from 1972, a senior fellow from 1977, and the John M. Olin Distinguished Fellow from 1988 to 1999). As a member of the board of contributors of the Wall Street Journal, he contributed a monthly column from 1972 to 1997. He served on the Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1972 to 1977.

In July 2002, he received from President George W. Bush the Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

Kristol married historian Gertrude Himmelfarb in 1942. They had two children, Elizabeth Nelson and William Kristol, the editor of The Weekly Standard.

Kristol died aged 89 on September 18, 2009 at the Capital Hospice in Falls Church, Virginia from complications of lung cancer.

2 Ideas

In 1973, Michael Harrington coined the term “neo-conservatism” to describe those liberal intellectuals and political philosophers who were disaffected with
3 Articles

- “American Intellectuals and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1967 (repr. in *On the Democratic Idea in America*).
- “When Virtue Loses All Her Loveliness,” *The Public Interest*, Fall 1970 (repr. in *On the Democratic Idea in America and Two Cheers for Capitalism*).
- “Utopianism, Ancient and Modern,” *Imprimus*, April 1973 (repr. in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*).
- “The Adversary Culture of Intellectuals,” *Encounter*, October 1979 (repr. in *Reflections of a Neo-conservative*).

4 Books

References


[6]


[14] Reflections of a Neo-conservative, p. 79


External links

- Website and bibliography of Irving Kristol’s writings
- American Conservatism 1945–1995, by Irving Kristol
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- **Irving Kristol**

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