



Nat Hentoff, Iconic Columnist and Civil Liberties Advocate, Dies at 91

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Nat Hentoff, the civil liberties advocate and columnist who wrote about jazz and politics everything in between during a career spanning seven decades, died Saturday at 91, his son said.

Hentoff started his career in the closing days of World War II and continued to write until his death.

He was best known as a civil liberties advocate and political commentator and wrote a regular weekly column for years in New York's liberal Village Voice. After being laid off by the Voice in 2008, he became a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Hentoff was also a renowned jazz critic and a major figure in the jazz industry who was named an NEA Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Hentoff was the author of more than 30 books, including novels, young adult books, and non-fiction books, many dealing with the U.S. Constitution and free speech.

He was a jazz critic in New York in the 1950s and went on to write books in the 1960s and 1970s. He also became an activist, marching against the Vietnam War and marching for civil rights.

Hentoff was born in Boston to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. The New York Times reported that he tried to rebel at the age of 12 by publicly eating a salami sandwich as people walked by him on the way to synagogue, which angered his father and his neighbors. He said later that he did it in order to know how it felt to be an outcast, calling the experience "enjoyable."

He attended Boston's Latin School, and graduated with honors from Northeastern University in 1946. In 1950, he was a Fulbright fellow at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Despite his Jewish roots, Hentoff proudly proclaimed himself an aethiest.

Although he was widely known for his liberal views, Hentoff broke with his left-wing orthodoxy to support the U.S. led war in Iraq. He also wrote passionately against abortion rights, a stance that rankled fellow liberals.—With JTA