

Crusade to Heal America

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Synopsis

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I am opposed to heart disease and cancer the way one is opposed to sin. With that as her battle cry, health activist and philanthropist Mary Woodard Lasker had a singular goal: saving lives by increasing medical research. Together with her husband, advertising genius Albert, they created the Lasker Foundation, bestowing the Lasker Awards. Known as the "American Nobels," these became the most prestigious research awards in America. The Laskers' next step was transforming the sleepy and ineffectual American Society for the Control of Cancer, reinventing it as the American Cancer Society in 1944. But the real increase in medical research funding occurred when Mary discovered a revolutionary source: the federal government. "I'm just a catalytic agent," she would insist, while she tirelessly lobbied Congress and presidents alike. She played a major role in expanding the National Institutes of Health from a single entity to the largest research facility in the world. A feminist who used her femininity wisely, Mary's ultimate victory was bringing together two political adversaries to help launch the original cancer moonshot: the 1971 National Cancer Act.

This deeply researched biography paints the portrait of a woman who was savvy, steely, and deliberate. Mary Lasker courageously positioned herself at the crossroads of politics, science, and medicine. At a time when women in research laboratories and the halls of Congress were anomalies, she smashed stereotypes.

Reader's comments

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