Lee Harvey Oswald’s Last Lover?

The Warren Commission Missed A Significant JFK Assassination Connection

*It is reasonable to be suspicious of claims that challenge our understanding of history. But it is unreasonable to ignore evidence because it might change one’s mind or challenge the positions that one has taken in public. History shows us that new information is rarely welcome.*—Edward T. Haslam

*Lee Harvey Oswald was an innocent man who was a government intelligence agent. He faithfully carried out assignments such as entering the USSR and pretending to be pro-Castro.* . . .

*Lee Harvey Oswald was a brave, good man, a patriot and a true American hero.* . . .—Judyth Vary Baker

*If Judyth Vary Baker is telling the truth, it will change the way we think about the Kennedy assassination.*—John McAdams

Oswald in New Orleans in 1963

Lyndon B. Johnson famously remarked that Lee Harvey Oswald “was quite a mysterious fellow.” One of the most enigmatic episodes in Oswald’s adventure-filled 24-year life was his 1963 sojourn in his birthplace, New Orleans, where he arrived by bus on Apr. 25 and from which he departed by bus on Sept. 25, less than two months before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The Warren Report The Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination and concluded that Oswald, acting alone, was the assassin, found nothing of significance in Oswald’s 1963 stay in New Orleans. The picture painted by the 1964 Warren Report is of a lowly, lonely and disgruntled leftist and pro-Castroite who occasionally pretended to be an anti-Castro rightist. But the Commission’s investigation of Oswald’s five months in New Orleans in 1963 was, typically, inadequate. Six pages of the 1964 Warren Report focus on Oswald’s time in New Orleans in 1963, and in retrospect we can see that those pages amount to a bland, superficial account of Oswald’s activities in that city.
New Views of Oswald’s Visit to New Orleans We now know that the Warren Commission’s depiction of Oswald’s activities in his home town in 1963 is one-dimensional and essentially misleading. Since 1964, evidence has steadily mounted that the Warren Commission overlooked and the Warren Report omitted a vast amount of relevant, sometimes eye-popping information concerning Oswald’s New Orleans stay.

The first book to expose major flaws in the Warren Commission’s investigation of Oswald’s stay in New Orleans was Oswald in New Orleans: Case of Conspiracy with the CIA, by Harold Weisberg, published in 1967. Weisberg, who wrote nine influential books on the JFK assassination, was one of the assassination’s premier scholars.

The first scholarly article by an academic to persuasively challenge the Warren Commission’s version of Oswald’s sojourn in New Orleans was Michael L. Kurtz’s Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans: A Reappraisal, published in a Louisiana historical journal in 1980. Kurtz was a distinguished history professor at a Louisiana university and later authored several respected books on the Kennedy assassination.

Based on their own research, both Weisberg and Kurtz exposed the shallowness of the Warren Commission’s investigation of Oswald’s 1963 visit to New Orleans. They noted, for example, that the Warren Report failed to mention the odd fact that while in New Orleans, Oswald, an ex-defector to the Soviet Union and supposedly a committed Marxist, was an associate, and was
seen in the company, of David Ferrie, Guy Banister and other militants on the political right who had backgrounds in or connections to law enforcement agencies and intelligence organizations, or who were affiliated with anti-Castroite, anti-Communist, racist or extremist groups, or with organized crime.

Both Weisberg and Kurtz concluded that while in New Orleans Oswald behaved as if he were an undercover intelligence agent. Kurtz wrote: “What the Warren Commission failed to disclose is that Oswald led a double life in New Orleans, outwardly posing as a pro-Castro Marxist, but secretly associated with such rabidly anti-Communist individuals as Guy Banister and David Ferrie.” And Weisberg wrote: “Everything Oswald did in New Orleans in 1963 is consistent only with the establishment of what in the spy trade is called a ‘cover.’”

The U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, which reinvestigated the JFK murder in 1977-78, published a staff report confirming the existence of evidence that Oswald consorted with Ferrie and Banister while in New Orleans.

**The New Consensus** The information that has become available since 1964 has produced a consensus among students of the JFK assassination: there was a lot more to Oswald’s stay in New Orleans than the Warren Report reveals.

This consensus is one more in a string of vindications of former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, who (like Harold Weisberg and Michael Kurtz) maintained that while in New Orleans Oswald, working with Ferrie, Banister and others, had engaged in intelligence activities. Garrison also contended that there had been a New Orleans-based conspiracy to kill JFK, that Ferrie and Banister were among the conspirators and that the conspirators duped Oswald, setting him up to be the fall guy in the event the assassination occurred.

**Judyth Vary Baker** As a result of allegations made by Judyth Vary Baker, a woman who was born in Indiana in 1943, lived in New Orleans in 1963, and now lives incognito in Europe, the story of Oswald’s five months in New Orleans has, in the words of author Edward T. Haslam, “morphed into an 800 pound gorilla” that titillatingly includes a “sizzling little romance between a beautiful young woman and a soon-to-be-accused assassin.”

Because the CBS news show *60 Minutes*, concluding that her claims were not adequately corroborated, decided not to run a potentially dynamite episode on her, Judyth Vary Baker (hereinafter usually “JVB”) first came to the attention of the public in November 2003, when the History Channel broadcast Episode 8 of Nigel Turner’s nine-part documentary *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*. The documentary emphasizes discrepancies and inconsistencies in the Warren Commission’s Oswald-was-the-single-assassin theory. Entitled “The Love Affair,” Episode 8 recounted JVB’s story and included interviews with her.

**Judyth Vary Baker’s Story** JVB appears to care so much about Lee Harvey Oswald that she is even willing to defend Oswald against claims that he was sexually inadequate, or that he lacked sexual experiences with various women before marrying. JVB describes herself as “the last lover of Lee Harvey Oswald.”
Her story, reduced to its essence and omitting numerous interesting factual details, is that while living as a young woman (at first unmarried, then newly married) in New Orleans in 1963 she became a friend and then a lover of Oswald, who was also married; that she frequently traveled around New Orleans with Oswald and spent lots of time with him there; that the two of them ate together at restaurants and shacked up in hotel rooms, and that occasionally she went on double dates with Oswald; that through Oswald she met, among others, David Ferrie, Guy Banister and Jack Ruby; that in New Orleans she, together with Ferrie, Oswald, prominent local physicians and various other persons, clandestinely worked in secret laboratories on a hush-hush CIA plot to kill Fidel Castro by devising and then dosing him with an ultravirulent cancer virus; that this plot involved breeding horrific cancer viruses and carrying out lethal experiments on mice and later monkeys; that both she and Oswald had cover jobs, ostensibly working for Reilly Coffee Co. but in reality working with others on the secret CIA plan to assassinate Castro by means designed to make Castro’s death appear to be of natural causes; that Oswald was a loyal undercover agent for U.S. intelligence agencies; that Oswald sent anonymous warnings to the FBI in time to prevent the assassination, warnings which were unheeded; and that Oswald was framed for the JFK slaying, and murdered to prevent him from defending himself.

Interestingly, in his *Playboy* magazine interview way back in 1967, Jim Garrison spoke of David Ferrie’s interest in cancer research and his involvement “with a number of New Orleans doctors on means of inducing cancer in mice.”
In 2007, JVB’s claims again came to public attention when Edward T. Haslam published his book *Dr. Mary’s Monkey*. Haslam, whose father had been a prominent New Orleans physician, investigated the grisly unsolved 1964 murder of Dr. Mary Sherman in New Orleans, and discovered to his amazement that his “inquiry would connect some of the city’s most prominent citizens to ‘lone nut’ Lee Harvey Oswald, to the Mafia and to forces high inside the U.S. Government”.

Dr. Sherman, one of the nation’s leading cancer researchers, was, according to both Edward Haslam and JVB, part of the top secret, CIA-based research project to develop dangerous cancer viruses to infect Castro.

In his 1967 *Playboy* interview, it should be noted, Jim Garrison named Dr. Sherman as one of the physicians who worked with Ferrie on cancer viruses and expressed the view that her association with Ferrie was probably not “completely unrelated” to her gruesome murder.

Haslam interviewed JVB while working on his book, and several chapters and the appendix of *Dr. Mary’s Monkey* examine JVB’s story. A previous version of Haslam’s book, privately printed in 1995, and entitled *Mary, Ferrie, and the Monkey*, was written before Haslam ever heard of JVB.

Haslam’s book draws three broad conclusions about JVB, all favorable to her. First, yes, there is a Judyth Vary Baker, and she is who she says she is, the woman who was born in 1943 and lived in New Orleans in 1963. Second, JVB did know Oswald in New Orleans in 1963, and she did work with Oswald as a fellow employee of Reilly Coffee Co. Third, JVB had been trained to handle cancer viruses before she went to New Orleans.

*Me & Lee* JVB’s story again made the news in September 2010, when her *Me & Lee: How I Came to Know, Love and Lose Lee Harvey Oswald*, was published. This 600-page autobiographical book, a must-read, is plentifully interspersed with photographs of persons, places and documents. Although JVB’s claims may possibly involve hoax, fraud or mental derangement, or may be part of a disinformation campaign designed to confuse assassination researchers, on the whole *Me & Lee* is a believable book. Based on what we now know of long-concealed CIA crimes, conspiracies and depravities, JVB’s story has the ring of truth. To date, however, the story has not been proved to be either true or false.

The fiercest critics of JVB’s story are the usual suspects—the Warren Report’s diehard true believers, the people who never learn. Having read their slashing attacks on JVB, and having read JVB’s responses, I deem those attacks to be petty, factually inaccurate or suspiciously shrill in tone. I agree, therefore, with the reviewer who writes: “Judyth Baker seems to be a credible character in this story.”

**Was Oswald Innocent?** JVB acknowledges that she never saw Oswald again after he left New Orleans (although she says they stayed in contact by long-distance phone calls until two days before JFK was assassinated). Since she was not with Oswald during the two months just before the assassination, is she correct in insisting that Oswald was innocent and framed?
At this point it is impossible to say. But Lee Harvey Oswald was and is entitled to a presumption of innocence. His rights were not respected. He received cuts to his head and eye injuries while being arrested. He never had a chance to defend himself or contest the evidence said to indicate his guilt. His plaintive cry to the public for help, “I do request someone to come forward to give me legal representation,” was ignored, and he never got a lawyer. He was murdered while a handcuffed prisoner in police custody, and while in a police station in the presence of 70 officers.

Unlike the assassins of Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley, Lee Harvey Oswald had no known motive to kill a president. Furthermore, whereas assassins John Wilkes Booth, Charles Guiteau and Leon Czolgosz gloried in their murderous deed and boasted of it to all who would listen, Oswald, the alleged assassin of Kennedy, strongly denied assassinating anyone.

Lee Harvey Oswald’s public statements denying guilt, made during the two days between his arrest and his murder by Jack Ruby, deserve to be remembered: “I emphatically deny these charges.” “I didn’t shoot anyone.” “I haven’t shot anybody.” “I didn’t kill anybody.” “I’m just a patsy.”

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a Professor in the University of Georgia School of Law. He writes a piece for Flagpole on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy every year near the November 22 anniversary of that nation-shattering event.