

Dr. Mary's monkey

BRONSON LUTZ, M.D. JOSEPH DANIEL FIEDLER ILLUSTRATION

Physician and columnist Dr. Bronson Lutz examines a book that alleges a 1960s medical conspiracy with global implications.

Any New Orleans list of best physicians from the 1960s would include Dr. Alton Ochsner, Sr., and Dr. Mary Sherman. Both Ochsner and Sherman had roots and degrees from the Midwest. Both schooled or trained in Europe during their formative years, migrated to New Orleans to practice medicine and were on the faculty at Tulane Medical School. Both died in New Orleans. Today, Ochsner is a local medical legend; Sherman is an unsolved New Orleans murder mystery.



Ochsner was one of the physician founders of the medical complex which bears his name and an early proponent of the link between smoking and lung cancer. He was a chest surgeon interested in all cancers and was elected national president of the American Cancer Society. He was also known for his ultraconservative politics, except when lobbying for federal funds to expand his hospital.

Early in her career, Sherman published several papers pertaining to viral research beginning in the 1940s. After medical school, she finished a residency in orthopedics – a tough row to hoe for a female physician in those days. In '52, Ochsner recruited Sherman to New Orleans. He offered her a partnership at Ochsner Foundation Hospital, her own cancer laboratory and a faculty position at Tulane.

From 1952 until her death in '64, Sherman, a widow before moving South, lived in an apartment on St. Charles Avenue near Louisiana Avenue. She was on the staff of several local hospitals but really thrived in her research laboratory, working with bone and soft tissue cancers. She published several research papers and served on expert committees dealing with bone pathology and cancers.

The late Don Lee Keith, a writer and editor of New Orleans Magazine, called me a couple of times over the years to discuss Sherman's death. Keith reconstructed the crime scene in his mind and was the first to smell a conspiracy with a cover-up. He was obsessed with Sherman's murder and wrote about it several times.

Former aide to Professor Longhair and advertising executive-turned-author Edward "Ed" T. Haslam has expanded on Keith's earlier work. He has written *Dr. Mary's Monkey*, a required book for conspiracy lovers. It's also an interesting read for those with memories of the New Orleans medical profession during the 1960s and '70s and really for anyone who wants an armchair visit back to the New Orleans of that era.

As with Ochsner and Sherman, a Tulane Medical School position brought author Ed Haslam to New Orleans in the 1950s, but the appointment was for his physician father. He moved here with his family at a young age and attended several local schools including the New Orleans Academy, Jesuit High School and Tulane University.

Haslam has woven Sherman's murder into a conspiracy tale involving a clandestine mouse laboratory operated by David Ferrie on Louisiana Parkway; a heavily guarded linear accelerator located Uptown; monkeys from Tulane Medical School; a young high school science fair winner and Lee Harvey Oswald's secret lover; and a plot to kill Fidel Castro with cancer causing monkey cells orchestrated by a right wing marriage between Carlos Marcello and Alton Ochsner, Sr. – the stealth viruses were then dumped in Haiti where they simmered for almost two decades before erupting into a worldwide epidemic of various cancers and AIDS.

Dr. Monroe Samuels performed Sherman's autopsy. Samuels documented the cause of death as a heart penetrating stab wound to the chest. The autopsy documented multiple other stab wounds to the abdomen, left arm and right leg. Her sexual organs were also lacerated postmortem.

Even more fascinating to Keith were the burn injuries. I can remember Keith reading me the autopsy report over the telephone a couple of decades after Sherman's death. A copy of this autopsy report is reprinted in Haslam's book.

The only remaining portion of Sherman's right arm was a piece of her upper arm bone. The rest of the extremity was burned to a crisp. The body was discovered in Sherman's bedroom and the bed was smoldering. However, neither Keith nor Haslam believed the fire was intense enough to have caused almost complete thermal destruction of an arm.

Haslam hypothesizes that government forces installed a huge clandestine linear accelerator on the Uptown grounds of the old U.S. Public Health Hospital. Sherman conducted experiments there to mutate monkey viruses to assist a CIA plot headed by Ochsner to mutate monkey viruses. Something went wrong with the linear accelerator and Sherman suffered a severe but non-fatal burn. If she had been taken to an emergency room, the nature of her burn injuries would've exposed their occult plot. One of her comrades sacrificed her with a knife wound to her chest. Her charred body was then moved to her apartment, more stab wounds were inflicted to make it look like a crazed sex killing and then her bed and body were set on fire.

I called Dr. Samuels, who remembers the autopsy and discounts an offsite thermal injury. "She had severe right-sided burns with exposure of her liver. There was no soot in her lungs meaning that she was dead before any fire. I have seen similar thermal burns in autopsies of bodies found on burning beds," Samuels says.

According to Haslam, the "official" plot to infect Castro with mutated and lethal viruses from New Orleans ground to a halt after Sherman's death. Haslam writes that David Ferrie, the funny looking pilot in Jim Garrison's cast of characters with glued pieces of carpet over his eyes for eyebrows, took over after Sherman's death. He harvested the most lethal of the mutated monkey viruses and delivered them to Haiti, a country despised by the racist Ferrie and with proximity to Cuba. From Haiti, unleashed viruses spread around the world causing a pandemic of AIDS and soft tissue cancers.

The book contains several factual errors unrelated to the conspiracy plot, ranging from a minor misnaming of a New Orleans housing development to major scientific glitches. Haslam gets a D in medical history and an F in virology.

In setting the stage for Tulane as an institution with a long history in tropical disease research and "capable and willing to conduct clandestine governmental work" Haslam writes: "It was Tulane that proved malaria was spread by mosquitoes." Tulane's roots in tropical medicine run deep and discoveries especially in parasitology defined Tulane as a major player in tropical diseases. However, a French army doctor and a British physician in the late 1800s discovered malarial parasites in blood and described its life cycle involving infected mosquitoes biting humans. Both received separate Nobel prizes; this work was not done at Tulane.

A frozen human blood specimen collected in 1959 has tested positive for HIV and it's implausible that radiated monkey viruses in the '60s independently mutated into this same virus. Ionizing radiation can indeed cause genetic mutations but Haslam's theory has a major flaw. Radiation can no more turn one virus into another virus than it can turn an apple tree into a fig tree. It just doesn't happen that way.

There are unanswered details. How did Haslam name his book *Dr. Mary's Monkey*? Not once did he document her association with a live monkey or with monkey research. Mysteries abound on many levels.

Ed Haslam – growing up in a conspiracy

The visitor's dock at Lake Pontchartrain. Haslam saw a sailor with a monkey. His father cautioned him to stay away from monkeys as they carried "weird viruses that we don't yet understand."

New Orleans Academy. Mrs. Ellis, a history teacher, warned students in 1963 or '64 that the polio vaccine contained monkey viruses that would spread through the blood supply causing a new generation of diseases. Two Ochsner grandchildren received an early dose of the Salk vaccine to show how safe it was. Both contracted polio. One survived and one died according to Haslam.

Jesuit High School. After David Ferrie's death, the son of the then-New Orleans coroner told his classmates, including Haslam, about a telephone conversation between his father and Bobby Kennedy. Nicky Chetta mesmerized the class with the contents of Ferrie's apartment at his death – priest robes, women's clothing, a clandestine medical lab with a dozen mice in cages, medical books, mice injected with monkey viruses and a discussion about biological weapons.

An apartment on Louisiana Parkway. Barbara, the author's graduate school girlfriend, lived in an apartment that once housed Ferrie's mouse lab. She baked bread to help dissipate the lingering mouse odors.

A graduate school sociology seminar at Tulane. Haslam quoted a Latin American graduate student identified as "Freckles" in a 1979 Tulane graduate seminar: "El Padrino is working on a virus ... You know, Ochsner. He is working on a virus to get Castro." Haslam added, "Freckles' comment was an indication of Latin perceptions of Ochsner's politics and evidence that a rumor did exist in certain Latin circles that Ochsner was or had been involved in a medical project which was trying to kill Castro."

Street knowledge. Garrison was nicknamed the Jolly Green Giant because he put fruits and nuts in the can.

The Audubon Building on Canal Street. Haslam visited a suite of offices inhabited by some mysterious men with boxes of files documenting the evils of Communism. He met Ed Butler, a man who once taped an interview with Lee Harvey Oswald and was the executive director of the Information Council of the Americas. Alton Ochsner founded INCA in 1961 to "prevent Communist revolutions in Latin America by teaching the sordid truth about Communism to the Latin American masses ... It was a right-wing propaganda mill loosely modeled on Radio Free Europe."

Did AIDS emerge from a secret laboratory in New Orleans?

An early and discarded theory on the origin of AIDS was that that the virus mutated out of nowhere. Another theory centered on the creation of the virus by scientists working in a germ warfare lab. Others attributed its origin to contaminated monkey tissues used in making substandard batches of polio vaccine sent to Africa in the 1950s

In *Dr. Mary's Monkey*, author Edward T. Haslam opines that AIDS originated from a botched experiment in a secret underground laboratory in New Orleans during the 1960s. A Tulane professor and Ochsner orthopedist experimenting with mutated monkey viruses

was brutally murdered as part of the cover-up. A rouge CIA operative, later under the spotlight of Jim Garrison's assassination probe, spirited the virus off to Haiti for a clandestine release that resulted in today's AIDS pandemic.

The polio immunization theory fell by the wayside a couple of years ago. Scientists found old batches of the implicated vaccine in a laboratory freezer. It tested negative for DNA to all known monkey viruses and strains of HIV.

The origin of AIDS is now widely accepted by scientists. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) jumped from primates to humans. Many diseases jump from animals to people. West Nile, influenza and hepatitis B are common examples of viral diseases that originated in other species.

Recent work by virologists, evolutionary biologists and molecular geneticists genetically traced the HIV virus infecting humans to wild chimpanzees living in a Cameroon jungle. There may be no cure or vaccine to protect against AIDS but the mystery of its origins has been solved.

Dr. Mary's Monkey: How the Unsolved Murder of a Doctor, a Secret Laboratory in New Orleans and Cancer-Causing Monkey Viruses are Linked to Lee Harvey Oswald, the JFK Assassination and Emerging Global Epidemics