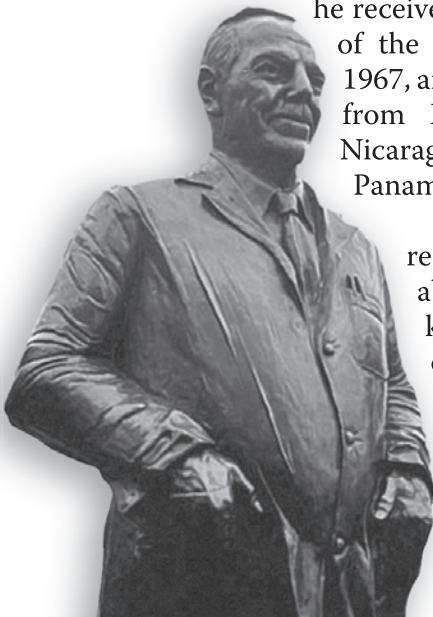


## CHAPTER 8

# Dr. O

**P**EOPLE TEND TO RESPECT both medical reputations and financial success. Dr. Alton Ochsner had plenty of both. Before his life was over he had been President of the American Cancer Society, President of the American College of Surgeons, President of the International Society of Surgeons, the Chairman of the Section on Surgery for the American Medical Association, and President of the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation, one of the largest medical centers in America, with annual revenues approaching \$300,000,000 per year. As a recognition of his contributions, he received the Distinguished Service Award of the American Medical Association in 1967, and he also received honorary awards from Ireland, England, Greece, Spain, Nicaragua, Columbia, Honduras, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, and Japan.<sup>1</sup>

As all could see, he was a highly respected man of medicine, clearly above suspicion as it is commonly known. But there was another side of Alton Ochsner which the public



Statue in front of  
the Ochsner Medical  
Foundation

did not see as clearly. He used his position and contacts to advance his right-wing political philosophy, and in the process developed a long complex relationship with powerful political figures and agencies of the U.S. government.

Ochsner was born in Kimball, South Dakota, in 1896,<sup>2</sup> towards the end of the era of sod houses and Indian massacres. The only son with five older sisters, Alton grew up the product of his German ancestry, and became what might be called an over-achiever. He attended the University of South Dakota and did his medical training at Washington University in St. Louis. His advanced medical training and many of the pivotal moves in his career were arranged by his uncle A.J. Ochsner, a famous surgeon who was chief of surgery at two hospitals in Chicago.



A.J. Ochsner's influence cast a long shadow. He was founder and later president of the American College of Surgeons, as well as head of surgery at the University of Illinois Medical School. His international contacts were considerable. A.J. saw to it that Alton trained under the leading surgeons of the day. A.J. Ochsner's best friend was William J. Mayo, founder of the famous Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, and when it was time for Alton Ochsner to start his own clinic, the Mayo Clinic was used as a model.<sup>3</sup>

In 1921, Alton Ochsner headed to Chicago to train at his uncle's elbow. He fainted at his first sight of surgery, and at his second, and at his third. His uncle told him to get a grip if he wanted to be a surgeon. He did. A.J. worked Alton hard and taught him his own set of medical standards, like "Don't operate on anybody who is not going to get well." Anxious to begin surgery of his own, Alton practiced by performing sur-

gical procedures on dogs in an outbuilding on the grounds of his uncle's hospital.<sup>4</sup>

Then in 1922, again thanks to his uncle's influence, Alton Ochsner headed to Europe for a two-year residency in Switzerland and Germany. The first big medical success of his career was bringing blood transfusions to Europe. Or should we say "back to Europe." Early attempts at blood transfusions had failed miserably. It was not until an Austrian physician named Karl Landsteiner developed techniques for blood typing that blood transfusions became safe. Landsteiner's original work had been ignored in Europe, so he came to the U.S. in 1912, and introduced the technique at A.J. Ochsner's hospital in Chicago.<sup>5</sup> Alton Ochsner learned to type blood while working in his uncle's laboratory. His uncle provided him with blood transfusion equipment to take with him to Europe.

There, Swiss doctors refused to perform blood transfusions because of the terrible results of earlier attempts. They were skeptical of young Ochsner's claim that the techniques which he had been taught in Chicago were safe. They first let him attempt a transfusion on what they considered to be an expendable patient, a criminal who had been shot by the police. If he died, it was no great loss to society. He survived.

Several days later the president of a Swiss bank entered the hospital suffering from heavy blood loss due to a ruptured ulcer. The Swiss doctors were unable to help the banker and feared the embarrassment of such a prominent person dying in their hospital. They asked Ochsner to do what he could. When the banker pulled through, Ochsner was proclaimed the blood transfusion expert of Europe. He lit up the European scene with his first medical article, telling of the magic of blood transfusions. It was written in German. He was an American medical celebrity in Europe at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>6</sup> A.J. was pleased.

In 1923, while still in Switzerland, he married the daughter of a wealthy American family whom he had met in

Chicago. Soon they departed on a kind of victory tour, visiting first European and then American medical clinics for several months. In Europe he got his first exposure to politics and witnessed epidemic inflation first hand. When he arrived, the exchange rate in Germany was four marks to the dollar; when he left, the rate was four million marks to the dollar.

In 1924, at the age of twenty-eight, he returned to the United States. Educated, trained, traveled, and connected, he was prepared to take full advantage of the dawning of the golden age of medicine.<sup>7</sup> Before long, he landed a full-time teaching position at the nearby University of Wisconsin. His stay was brief.

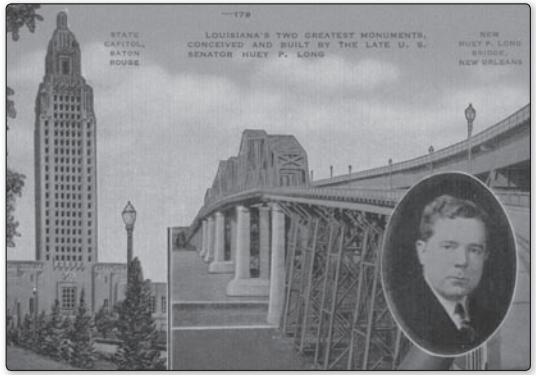
The hand of his uncle's influence can be seen again, when, in 1927, at the age of thirty-one and after just one year of teaching at the University of Wisconsin, Alton Ochsner was appointed Head of Surgery at Tulane Medical School, replacing Dr. Robert Matas, an internationally-known surgeon who had headed Tulane's surgery department for years.

During Ochsner's get-acquainted visit, Matas invited him to witness a spectacular display of the older physician's own surgical skill. Even if Ochsner did not accept the position, at least he could return home with a great story about Matas. In Ochsner's presence, Matas removed a 92-pound tumor from a 182 pound patient. The tumor was so large that it had to be impaled with ice tongs and lifted with a block-and-tackle pulley system bolted to the ceiling of the operating room. The remaining 90 pounds of patient died the next day from lack of blood. The technology of blood transfusions had not yet made it to New Orleans.<sup>8</sup>

The appointment of a young outsider over the heads of several well-qualified, older doctors, who were waiting in the wings to get the position, raised eyebrows and set in motion a camp of anti-Ochsner sentiment in the medical community which followed Alton throughout his career. But Ochsner's

success in New Orleans was so complete that this has been dismissed as jealousy.

Ochsner soon gained public recognition by stumbling into an incident with the powerful Louisiana Governor Huey Long over the management of the 1,732 bed Charity Hospital which Long had built. Ochsner's supporters characterized the situation as the competent Ochsner incensed over the appointment of an unqualified upstart. Actually Dr. Vidrine, whom Long appointed as Superintendent of Charity Hospital, was both a graduate of Tulane Medical School and a Rhodes Scholar. Both men were young. Vidrine was twenty-eight, and Ochsner was thirty-one. And both had their own agendas for improving the hospital and advancing their careers.



Vidrine had the support of the governor and was winning. Ochsner was ready to bail out of New Orleans, and wrote a letter describing his bitterness to a friend. The letter, which Ochsner claimed he never mailed, was lost in the halls of Charity Hospital and wound up in the hands of Huey Long himself.

Long, who was battling with Tulane for other reasons, used it as an excuse to throw Tulane Medical School, and Ochsner personally, out of the Charity Hospital. The incident gave Ochsner public notoriety and credibility with the elements of Louisiana which opposed Huey Long's populist agenda, which was just about everybody with money. This



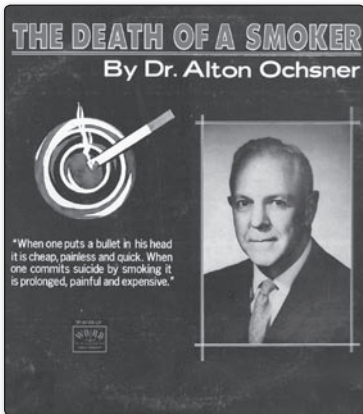
facilitated Ochsner's successful penetration of the elite social circles of New Orleans.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Ochsner's skill as a laboratory researcher grew. Clever and solution-oriented, he prided himself in developing practical medical innovations. As researchers go, Ochsner was a pragmatist, "the type of researcher who wasted no time in the laboratory."<sup>9</sup> He was fascinated by "the idea of serendipity," which is defined as "a gift for discovering valuable or agreeable things by accident,"<sup>10</sup> and it influenced his research. As a result of his research activities, he joined the *Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine*, and became an officer in its southern chapter. His biographers flirted with the idea that Ochsner might have even received a Nobel Prize, if he had been able to devote more time to his research efforts, but there is no evidence that the Nobel committee ever considered him for such.

However, if Ochsner should have received a prize for any of his medical work, his crusade against cigarette smoking would be my candidate. In 1936 he made a serendipitous observation, and became one of the first people to conclude that cigarette smoking was a cause of lung cancer. Noting that lung cancer was virtually non-existent in non-smokers,

and that incidences of lung cancer increased with the number of cigarettes smoked per day, he constructed a case that he took to the American Cancer Society. Here we see one of Ochsner's strengths at work: The clarity and certainty with which he saw medicine was comforting to everyone around him. And he was always willing to take action if he thought he could accomplish something positive. In Ochsner's words: "Of course, everybody thought

I was crazy, but now the evidence is so overwhelming that only the tobacco people disagree."

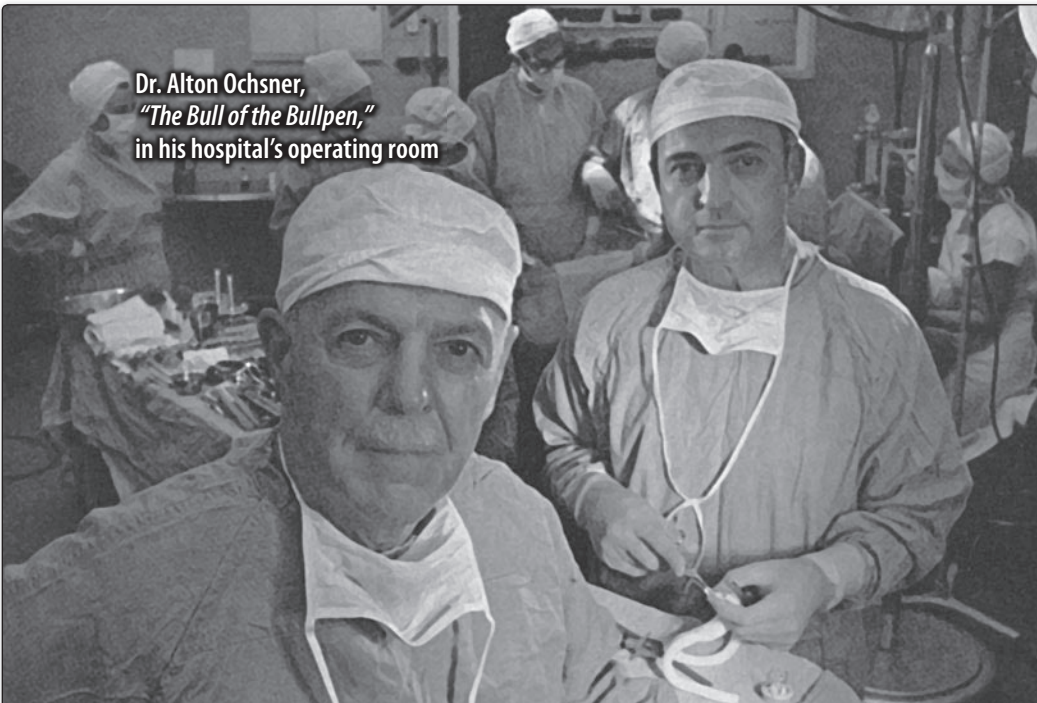


Ochsner went on to become President of the American Cancer Society in 1949 and sat on their Board of Directors with fellow elected-officer William “Wild Bill” Donovan, the celebrated founder and head of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (covert warfare and intelligence during World War II, and predecessor to the CIA).<sup>11</sup>

As a medical school professor, Ochsner was notorious for his demagogic tactics, the best known of which was “the bullpen.” Here, in an amphitheater full of hundreds of medical students, Ochsner conducted an intimidating hybrid of quiz-show and psychodrama, screaming questions at medical students and berating them over their answers. He justified these tactics by saying medicine was stressful. Diagnosis was a matter of common sense,<sup>12</sup> and medical students had to be taught to think under pressure. Many students were humiliated by the experience. One even fainted. When his own son was in the bullpen, Ochsner grabbed him by both lapels, shook him in front of his classmates, and yelled, “You’re not going to treat it any different than I would treat it.”<sup>13</sup>

Ochsner carried his philosophy of harsh discipline back into his home. To quote one of his sons: “My father used to beat the hell out of me.” Once he even broke a leather belt

Dr. Alton Ochsner,  
“The Bull of the Bullpen,”  
in his hospital’s operating room



during a beating. To quote his official biographers: “In a more tolerant time it might have been considered abuse.” But Ochsner was proud to be considered “the fastest belt in New Orleans.”<sup>14</sup>

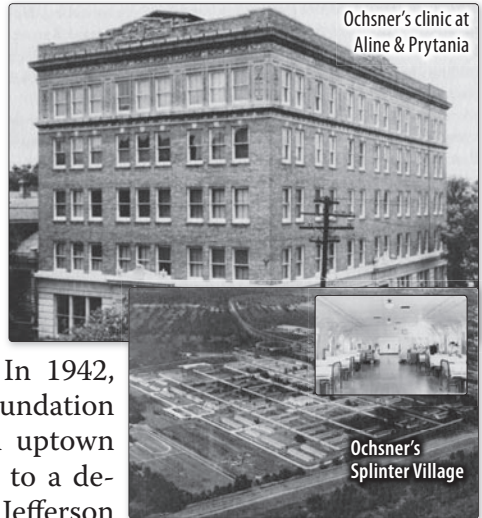
During an interview late in his life, Ochsner blamed all of the permissiveness of modern society (all of the drugs, political unrest and promiscuity of the 1960s and 1970s, even abortion) on the ill-conceived advice of Dr. Benjamin Spock, who suggested that physical punishment and negative reinforcement were not effective means of parenting. In Ochsner’s words: “...everything has to be disciplined. Even a dog has to be disciplined. A cat has to be disciplined.... You show me an undisciplined person, and I’ll show you an insecure person and an unhappy person.... We now have a whole generation of insecure, unhappy persons because they don’t know what discipline is, and it’s a direct result of the advice of Dr. Spock.”<sup>15</sup>

In the area of medical ethics, he was more forgiving, and conditionally embraced the concept of euthanasia: “I see no reason for keeping a person alive who otherwise has no chance of recovery.”<sup>16</sup> Further: “I think there’s nothing worse than to see a person who is a vegetable, who has no chance of ever being better... If I were in that position, I would want someone to put me out ... And, of course, the horrible thing about such situations is the tremendous cost of prolonging such cases.”<sup>17</sup>

The backbone of Ochsner’s medical reputation was his technical mastery in the operating room. He claimed 20,000 operations to his credit during his fifty-year career. Yet he was not perfect. At one point, he openly acknowledged that he had accidentally killed an unidentified patient by clamping off the artery to his lungs.<sup>18</sup> The most legendary of his surgical feats was the successful separation of Siamese twins.<sup>19</sup> The most dramatic of his operating room innovations was the use of a blowtorch on a patient during a radical mastectomy.<sup>20</sup>



Ochsner proposed that Tulane start its own hospital. When Tulane's board turned down the proposal, Ochsner asked if he could start his own; they did not object. He gathered together five of the department heads at Tulane Medical School and organized a multi-disciplinary clinic. Other New Orleans doctors feared the encroachment of a big-business approach to medicine, protested the establishment of the multi-disciplinary clinic which would compete with independent physicians, and appealed to the AMA to stop it. The AMA refused.<sup>21</sup> In 1942, the Ochsner Clinic and Foundation Hospital opened its doors in uptown New Orleans. Later it moved to a decommissioned military base in Jefferson Parish, and then relocated to its current home.



Today, the enormous medical complex stands like the Emerald City, rising high above the residential rooflines which surround its new home on Jefferson Highway. Across the front of the complex stands a string of flagpoles which welcome the elite of Latin America, flying flags from each of their countries. The idea of a medical facility which catered to the needs of Latin America's elite was integral to the concept of Ochsner's clinic,<sup>22</sup> and since its inception, Ochsner's medical facility has served the financial and political elite of Central and South America.



The Latin American angle was a natural for a medical clinic in New Orleans. And as we noted earlier, New Orleans was America's commercial pipeline to Latin America, and Tulane's reputation was golden in the region. For a group of Tulane doctors to form a medical clinic to serve the needs of the Latin elite was great news for those who could step on a plane in their capital city and be in New Orleans quicker than most Americans. To promote his clinic, Ochsner made over a hundred trips to Latin America during his career, and became friends with its rulers.

One event that helped jump-start his acceptance in these elite Latin circles was a phone call to Ochsner from Cordell Hull, the U.S. Secretary of State during World War II. Hull called Ochsner and asked him to take care of Tomas Gabriel Duque, the former President (and dictator) of Panama, who had helped U.S. intelligence organize a coup d'état against pro-Nazi elements during World War II.<sup>23</sup> Connections within these circles grew. Before it was over, Ochsner was the President of the Cordell Hull Foundation.<sup>24</sup> It is hard to find information on the Cordell Hull Foundation, but those who spoke to me about it said it was politically very active, sponsoring Latin American students in American universities, and giving scholarships to children of State Department employees.



Among his friends, Ochsner counted Anastasio Somoza, Nicaragua's former President (and dictator), who was run out of his country by revolutionaries in 1979. This relationship is what you might call a personal one, based on the letters in Ochsner's personal papers.<sup>25</sup> When Senora Somoza visited Tulane Medical School to investigate an exchange program between Tulane and the Nicaraguan government, a larger-than-life painting of Alton Ochsner was hung in the medical school for the occasion.<sup>26</sup> And Ochsner and Somoza shared mutual anti-Communist objectives. Somoza's personal phy-

sician, Dr. Henri DeBayle, sat on the Board of Directors of Guy Banister's infamous Anti-Communist League of the Caribbean.<sup>27</sup>

Another patient was Juan Peron, the President (and dictator) of Argentina. Ochsner flew to Buenos Aires to treat Peron for a problem in one of his legs. Peron complimented Ochsner, saying that surgeons were "men of action."<sup>28</sup> Peron was on the mark. Ochsner prided himself in his action orientation, saying: "Once you know what needs to be done, there is no point waiting."

Following the lead of these dictators came the oligarchies of Latin American countries which had not developed their own health care systems. By the 1980s over 10,000 patients per year were coming from Latin America to the Ochsner Clinic for treatment. There were so many, that Ochsner built a hotel on the hospital grounds to house the Latin patients' relatives, and hired a staff of Spanish interpreters to tend to their needs.



On the American side, Ochsner accumulated many celebrities in his patient portfolio, from golf legend Ben Hogan to movie star Gary Cooper to the mega-wealthy Clint Murchison of the Texas oil family.



Murchison's involvement with Ochsner seems to me to have been as political as medical. Yes, he was a personal patient of Alton Ochsner and gave him a Cadillac as a "thank you" present, but he also donated \$750,000 to the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation as seed money for Ochsner's new hospital. Meanwhile, Murchison purchased 30,000 acres of Louisiana swamp land and prepared it for a real estate development now known as New Orleans East, which covers about one-third of the land in the city of New Orleans.<sup>29</sup> I have always heard that Murchison bought it from Lady Bird Johnson. When LBJ announced the construction of Interstate 10 through the middle of this newly drained tract of land, plus the construction of NASA's largest facility on the same site, property values rose as fast as any in American history. Murchison made a fortune.

Ochsner was personally active in Louisiana politics. He served as campaign manager for INCA board member



Dave Treen's successful bid for the U.S. House of Representatives and Lt. Governor Jimmy Fitzmorris' unsuccessful bid for Governor. Ochsner was always very close to Congressman F. Edward Hebert, with whom he shared an ultra-right, hard-line, anti-Communist sentiment. On the other hand, Ochsner had an off-and-on friendship with liberal Congressman Hale Boggs, whose photo appeared alongside Ochsner's on the back of INCA's phonograph album featuring the voice of Lee Harvey Oswald.

One of Ochsner's disputes with Boggs was the claim that in 1957 Boggs had assisted Ochsner in getting the multi-mil-

lion dollar Hill-Burton grant from the U.S. government to build his hospital. Ochsner claimed Boggs' influence was negligible.<sup>30</sup> Considering that Boggs was one of the most powerful people in the U.S. House of Representatives at the time, Ochsner must have had some pretty serious connections to think that Boggs' influence was negligible. Despite all his posturing as a conservative, Ochsner was called "the most aggressive seeker and recipient of so-called federal handouts in the Second District" (Boggs' district) by a Louisiana State Representative.<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting to note the comments of Admiral Stansfield Turner, who testified to Congress as the Director of the CIA about the extent of the CIA's domestic activities. One of the Congressional questions was whether the CIA conducted its own medical research here inside the United States, and if so, how were they funding it? Turner said that the CIA had funded 159 medical facilities around the country for the purpose of conducting covert medical research. The funding was done in conjunction with Congress' Hill-Burton Fund. The CIA supplied seed money through blind third parties, and then the facility received matching funds as a Hill-Burton grant. When the facility was completed, the agency had access to a portion of the hospital's bed space for its purposes.<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested to me that the Murchison donation might have been the seed money for the project, and that Congressman Hebert's influence on the CIA budget may have been the real force that provided the Hill-Burton funding. It is probable that Ochsner's hospital was one of the 159 covert research centers which the CIA has admitted to setting up.

The FBI maintained a file on Dr. Alton Ochsner which we now have access to through the Freedom of Information Act. It shows his long relationship with the U.S. military, the FBI and other U.S. government agencies.<sup>33</sup> These records show that in 1941 Ochsner received an "excepted appointment" from the Civil Service Commission, and in 1946 he

received a citation from the U.S. War Department recognizing the medical research he did for the government.<sup>34</sup> In 1955 he became a consultant to the U.S. Army, and in 1957 he became a consultant to the U.S. Air Force. Later, in 1957, the FBI cleared Ochsner for a “Sensitive Position” for the U.S. government, and J. Edgar Hoover personally approved him as an official contact for the Special Agent in Charge of the New Orleans FBI office, for whom Ochsner had already been performing discreet surgery at discounted rates.

In October of 1959, after two years of working in a “Sensitive Position,” presumably with the FBI, the FBI conducted yet another “Sensitive Position” investigation on Ochsner and forwarded their findings to an unnamed U.S. government agency. Several days later, on October 21, 1959, the FBI formally discontinued Ochsner’s relationship with the FBI, freeing him up to accept an assignment from the other undisclosed agency.

So what was happening in 1957 and 1959? What was this other agency? Why would they have needed the services of a doctor? And what did they need from *this* doctor that they could not get from the legions of other doctors already working for the U.S. government in one capacity or another? These are important questions.

By the late 1950s Alton Ochsner was at the pinnacle of his prestige. His clinic had grown enormously and was at its third location. His portfolio of celebrity patients and his new hospital made his name a household word. His social status in New Orleans could not have been higher. He had been King of Carnival and had won numerous civic awards.<sup>35</sup> In 1956 he stepped down as Tulane’s Chief of Surgery, and in 1961 Tulane’s Board of Directors terminated his teaching position, citing a conflict of interest with his clinic as the reason. If nothing else, it helped distance Tulane from Ochsner’s increasingly covert activities. He was sixty-five years old at the time.

Having achieved considerable financial success during his career, the Tulane termination meant that Ochsner was

now free to devote himself to his personal passion: politics. Basically, Ochsner was an arch-conservative with an antebellum, anti-welfare mentality. A quick glimpse of his political philosophy can be seen in the following quote from a letter he wrote in the early '60s to U.S. Senator Allen Ellender: "I sincerely hope that the Civil Rights Bill can also be defeated, because if it were passed, it would certainly mean virtual dictatorship by the President and the Attorney General, a thing I am sure they both want."<sup>36</sup>

One of the major news events of 1959 was Castro's revolution in Cuba. It threatened to spread to all of Latin America and to displace the nearly-free-labor economic system which American business had profited from for decades. Trade was New Orleans' biggest business, and seventy-five percent of it was with Latin America.<sup>37</sup> The entire New Orleans business community was threatened by this revolutionary trend. The reactionary sentiment in New Orleans centered around civic organizations which promoted trade with Latin America, like International House and the International Trade Mart. Ochsner himself was President of International House,<sup>38</sup> and he joined International Trade Mart's Clay Shaw on the Board of Directors of the Foreign Policy Association of New Orleans, which brought CIA Deputy Director Charles Cabell to New Orleans to discuss the Communist threat, a small favor for Congressman Hebert's district.

Ochsner saw the situation clearly. With revolutionaries in the capitals of Latin America, the displaced elite would no longer be able to jump on jets and fly to New Orleans for medical treatment. The medical empire he built was threatened. Ochsner did something about it. He became a fanatical anti-Communist.



In 1961, Ochsner institutionalized his anti-Communist crusade by founding an organization called INCA, the Information Council of the Americas. INCA's objective was to prevent Communist revolutions in Latin America by teaching the sordid truth about Communism to the Latin American masses. In brief, it was a right-wing propaganda mill, loosely modeled on Radio Free Europe. Ochsner served both as INCA's President and Chairman.

A typical INCA production interviewed Cuban exiles about the horrors of losing their sugar plantations or their mattress factories to Castro's forces. From these interviews, INCA produced and distributed tape recordings called "Truth Tapes" to 120 radio stations throughout Latin America. INCA's most ambitious project was a film about Castro called *Hitler in Havana*. The *New York Times* reviewed the film, calling it "the crudest form of propaganda" and a "tasteless affront to minimum journalistic standards."<sup>39</sup>

In a perceptive article about INCA, archivist Arthur Carpenter described anti-Communism as an ideology of convenience, which offered the ruling elite "a respectable way to discredit challenges to its power."<sup>40</sup> But Ochsner's conviction was deeper than that. Once I had the opportunity to ask someone who knew him personally about his political views, and got this reply: "He was like a fundamentalist preacher in the sense that the fight against Communism was the only subject that he would talk about, or even allow you to talk about, in his presence."

Financing for INCA is said to have come from Ochsner personally and from other doctors and business people in the New Orleans area. Ochsner and INCA Executive Director Ed Butler enlisted as many New Orleans business and political leaders as possible in their cause. Sears heirs Edgar and Edith Stern, owners of WDSU radio and television, were members of INCA.<sup>41</sup> Eustis Reily of the Reily Coffee Company personally donated thousands of dollars to INCA.<sup>42</sup> Of all the names on the INCA letterhead, the most interesting one is INCA's



“Chief of Security,” Robert R. Rainold, who was described as the “Past President of the National Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI.” One must wonder if Mr. Rainold was aware that the former head of the FBI’s Chicago office lived in New Orleans or that the Reily Coffee Company was managed by an ex-FBI man.

In the spring of 1963, Ochsner was quoted in a newspaper as saying, “As a surgeon, I know that in an emergency, sometimes you are forced to do things quickly or the patient will die ... We must spread the warning of the creeping sickness of Communism faster to Latin Americans, and to our own people, or Central and South America will be exposed to the same sickness as Cuba.”<sup>43</sup>

Later that summer INCA members descended upon Lee Harvey Oswald, filming his pro-Castro leafletting for television and ambushing him during a live radio broadcast with a newspaper clipping about his “defection” to the Soviet Union. The records of the Mexican consulate office in New Orleans show that when Oswald obtained his visa for his trip to Mexico, his name followed William Gaudet, who is known to have worked for the CIA and who edited an anti-Communist newsletter which Ochsner financed.<sup>44</sup> There is no doubt that INCA produced anti-Communist propaganda for Latin America, but one has to wonder what other activities it was involved in?



MARY SHERMAN’S MURDER happened the following summer, in July 1964. There is no mention of her in Ochsner’s biography, nor of the grief or shock Ochsner must have personally felt over her tragic death. On July 22, 1964, however, *the day after* Mary Sherman’s murder, Ochsner wrote a letter

to his largest financial contributor saying “our Government, our schools, our press, and our churches have become infiltrated with Communism.”<sup>45</sup> It appears the Communists must have forgotten to infiltrate “our hospitals.”

Ochsner’s own biographers cautioned that once Ochsner got out of his field of medical expertise, he exhibited an amazing naiveté, and even said things that could be termed as “ridiculous.”<sup>46</sup> The problem seemed to be that he saw the rest of the world with the same clarity that he saw medicine. For example, he cited the lack of anti-war demonstrations on college campuses during the 1970-71 school year to be the result of INCA’s influence.<sup>47</sup> In fact, this was linked to the cynical and movement-deflating initiation of a lottery system for draft eligibility, which would quickly reduce the number of college males facing potential induction by over seventy-five percent.

But none of Ochsner’s monomania hindered his ability to rub elbows in increasingly powerful and wealthy circles. During one visit to Central America as a guest of the Guatemalan government, he became friends with National Airline’s Chairman Dudley Swim of Carmel, California. Swim offered Ochsner a seat on National’s Board of Directors.<sup>48</sup> There he became friends with National’s largest stockholder, washing-machine baron Bud Maytag. Ochsner also sat on the Board of Directors of National Banks of Florida, courtesy of Edward W. Ball who managed the Alfred duPont Fund.<sup>49</sup> It was in these circles that Ochsner met William Frawley, an arch-conservative California industrialist, who headed Schick Electric and Technicolor. Frawley became INCA’s largest financial contributor, and put Ochsner on his Board of Directors. Among Frawley’s political friends was Richard Nixon, whom Frawley had helped in his early political career.

In the early 1960s, ex-Vice President Richard Nixon called on Ochsner in New Orleans, supposedly to discuss his future political plans. Nixon joined Ochsner and newspaper editor George Healy for a private luncheon at the ex-

clusive Boston Club across the street from Ochsner's INCA.<sup>50</sup> While Nixon and Ochsner shared many political sentiments, they also shared some important medical experiences. The ill-fated polio vaccine which NIH released during Nixon's Vice Presidency (1953-61) killed one of Ochsner's grandsons and temporarily crippled his granddaughter. The publicity about the bad vaccine outraged the public and caused a political debacle, toppling the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and routing the leadership of NIH. Entering the office of President in 1969, Nixon promptly declared "War on Cancer," quadrupled the budget of the National Cancer Institute,<sup>51</sup> converted the Army's biological warfare center to a cancer research laboratory, and financed NIH's "Viral Cancer Program."<sup>52</sup> Were these events somehow connected? Had Nixon discussed any of his plans for his War on Cancer with the former president of the American Cancer Society?

Ochsner's second wife, whom he met at a party at Frawley's house, was even closer to Nixon than Ochsner was. Her first husband, an attorney from Los Angeles, was one of the people who helped launch Nixon's political career.<sup>53</sup> When problems with her passport threatened to interfere with Mrs. Ochsner's honeymoon to Greece, she called the White House and asked to speak to "Dick" Nixon. Her problems with the State Department were promptly solved.<sup>54</sup>

**THIS IS THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL SUPPORT** that Alton Ochsner enjoyed when District Attorney Jim Garrison began his investigation into the murder of JFK. And when Garrison started looking into the activities of Lee Harvey Oswald, he discovered that INCA and Ochsner were close to those events. Garrison's original intention was to arrest "the whole gang down at INCA" and squeeze them until they talked. His staff, however, felt that strategy was too risky and might backfire.<sup>55</sup> Garrison compromised and arrested only Clay Shaw, in the hope that Shaw's association with Oswald would be more tangible and could be proved more easily in

a court of law. One has to wonder if Garrison was aware that Ochsner had been working in a “Sensitive Position” for the U.S. government.

In May 1967, as Garrison turned up the heat in his JFK investigation in New Orleans, Ochsner feared his own arrest.<sup>56</sup> In response, INCA’s corporate records were air expressed to California, where Ed Butler put them “under lock and key.”<sup>57</sup> Butler was in California working for one of Frawley’s companies.<sup>58</sup> Frawley had contributed significant amounts of money to the early political efforts of Ronald Reagan who, as California governor, refused all of Garrison’s extradition requests.

Needless to say, Ochsner did not take Garrison’s investigation lying down. He fought back in his own inimitable manner. First, he was very vocal about his opinion that Garrison’s probe was unpatriotic because it eroded public confidence and threatened the stability of the American government. (How could arresting the President’s assassins threaten the stability of the American government?) Secondly, Ochsner promoted the idea that Garrison was crazy. He even managed to get a copy of Garrison’s military medical records. These showed that Garrison, a frontline pilot, who flew behind enemy lines during the World War II invasion of Europe, had suffered from battle fatigue, was grounded temporarily due to mental exhaustion, and had received psychological counseling. As tenuous as it was, this could be used to assert that Garrison had some form of psychological problem at some point in his life. It was all part of the “he-must-be-crazy” tactic. Ochsner sent the file to a friend who was the publisher of the *Nashville Banner*.<sup>59</sup>

But that was mild compared to what came next. Garrison was being assisted by New York attorney Mark Lane, who had written *Rush to Judgement*, the first book to question the conclusions of the Warren Commission. To discredit Garrison, Ochsner attacked Lane, branding him an unscrupulous Communist and “a professional propagandist of the

lunatic left,” who was trying to create distrust and cause the U.S. to “crumble from within.”<sup>60</sup> Further, Ochsner instructed Congressman F. Edward Hebert (Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee) to tell Congressman Edwin E. Willis (Chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities) to dig up “whatever information you can” on Mark Lane.

Hebert sent Ochsner a report on Lane extracted from the confidential government files, which cited various “Communist fronts” with which Lane had been associated.<sup>61</sup> Ochsner also secured a questionable second report on Lane from an unknown source. The unsigned cover memo said its information was from “the files of the New York City Police, the FBI, and other security agencies,” and claimed that Lane was “a sadist and masochist, charged on numerous occasions with sodomy.” Armed with these materials and a photo of a man (supposed to be Lane) engaged in a sadomasochistic act with a prostitute, Ochsner personally campaigned against Lane and the District Attorney.<sup>62</sup> These actions may possibly explain why Dr. Alton Ochsner was occasionally referred to as “a right-wing crackpot.”<sup>63</sup>

And thus we have seen some of the many sides of Dr. Alton Ochsner (1896-1981), an influential doctor who helped shape the American medical system we have today, a highly-respected citizen of New Orleans who participated in civic institutions and who frequented elite social events, a businessman who promoted an enormously successful clinic and who sat on the boards of several large corporations, a crusader committed to fighting Communism in Latin America, a behind-the-scenes sponsor of Louisiana political figures, a patriot with a thirty-year history of classified assignments for the U.S. government, and, of course, Mary Sherman’s boss.

What was the “Sensitive Position” Dr. Alton Ochsner held for the U.S. government? And did it have anything to do with any cancer research Dr. Mary Sherman was conducting?

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- 1 A significant portion of the information in this chapter comes from John Wilds and Ira Harkey's "official" biography, *Alton Ochsner: Surgeon of the South* (Louisiana State University Press, 1990); AMA award: p. 195.
  - 2 FBI file, Edward William Alton Ochsner, Freedom of Information Act, FOIPA No. 329,965, September 18, 1992; on file at Loyola University Archives in New Orleans, Louisiana, 70118.
  - 3 Wilds and Harkey, *Alton Ochsner*, p. 151.
  - 4 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
  - 5 Keith, Don Lee. "Ochsner: the Surgeon, the Man, the Institution," *Times-Picayune*, June 3, 1973, s. 2, p. 8.
  - 6 *Ibid.*
  - 7 Wilds and Harkey, *Alton Ochsner*, p. 38.
  - 8 *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  - 11 DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed*, p. 216, photo.
  - 12 Wilds and Harkey, p. 84.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
  - 15 Keith, "Ochsner," s. 2, p. 9.
  - 16 Wilds and Harkey, p. 214.
  - 17 Keith, "Ochsner," s. 2, p. 8.
  - 18 Wilds and Harkey, p. 104.
  - 19 Pope, John, "Crusading pioneer Surgeon Alton Ochsner is dead at 85," *Times-Picayune/States-Item*, 9/25/81, s. 1, p. 1.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, s. 1, p. 4.
  - 21 Keith, "Ochsner," s. 2, p. 8.
  - 22 Wilds and Harkey, pp. 144-145.
  - 23 Pope, "Crusading Pioneer Surgeon," s. 1, p. 4.
  - 24 FBI file, Alton Ochsner, "Security Investigation Data for Sensitive Position," FBI ref. #77-60-528, October 30, 1959.
  - 25 Arthur Carpenter, "Social Origins of Anticommunism: The Information Council of the Americas," *Louisiana History*, Spring 1989, p. 127.
  - 26 *Bulletin of the Tulane Medical School*, Spring 1967.
  - 27 DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed*, p. 216.
  - 28 Wilds and Harkey, p. 215.
  - 29 Wilds and Harkey, p. 158.
  - 30 *Ibid.*, p. 198-199.
  - 31 *Ibid.*, p. 199.
  - 32 U.S. Congress, "Project MKULTRA, The CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification," Joint Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee of Human Resources, U.S. Senate, August 3, 1977 (Washington, 1977), especially letter from Stansfield Turner to Intelligence Committee Chairman Senator Daniel Inouye, Appendix B.
  - 33 FBI file, Alton Ochsner, "Security Investigation Data for Sensitive Position," October 30, 1959.
  - 34 FBI file, Alton Ochsner, Office Memorandum from Special Agent in Charge of FBI office

in New Orleans to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, Re: Alton Ochsner, June 5, 1948. Cites March 25, 1946 article in *New Orleans Item*, saying, "Dr. Ochsner had received a War Department citation for his patriotic service in connection with medical research."

- 35 Carpenter, p. 126.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 38 FBI file, Alton Ochsner, "Security Investigation Data for Sensitive Position," October 30, 1959.
- 39 Carpenter, p. 132.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 128-129.
- 43 "Dr. Ochsner Outlines anti-Red Tape Activity," *New Orleans States Item*, April 16, 1963, p. 33; clipping found in FBI file on Alton Ochsner.
- 44 Summers, Anthony and Robbyn, "The Ghosts of November," *Vanity Fair*, December 1994, p. 110.
- 45 Carpenter, p. 125; letter from Alton Ochsner to R.H. Crosby, July 22, 1964, Historic New Orleans Collection. The Crosby family donated \$300,000 to Ochsner Medical Foundation: Wilds and Harkey, p. 157.
- 46 Wilds and Harkey, p. 189.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 48 National Airlines was sold to Pan American Airways, which went broke after deregulation.
- 49 Wilds and Harkey, p. 203.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 199-200. Did Ochsner walk Nixon across the street to INCA?
- 51 Shorter, *Health Century*, p. 205.
- 52 These are well-known and widely-published facts, abundantly documented in NIH publications, such as *The Viral Cancer Program Progress Reports*, (National Institutes of Health, 1971-77 ); source: Richard Hatch, "Cancer Warfare," *Covert Action* pp. 14-17.
- 53 Wilds and Harkey, p. 231.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
- 55 Interview with Anne Benoit, former law clerk to Judge Jim Garrison, conducted by Jim DiEugenio, 1993. Benoit reviewed JFK-related literature for Garrison during the nine years he sat on the bench, and discussed both the assassination and his investigation with him frequently.
- 56 Carpenter, p. 136.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 I heard this "photo story" several times in both the 1960s and 1990s. I have not seen the photo which Ochsner showed around, but, while we were working on the *Frontline* piece, Gus Russo told me that he had. Therefore, I assume that the photo does or did exist, but I have always assumed that it was a fake. None of these "dirty tricks" should in any way be considered a true reflection of Mark Lane's character.
- 63 Comments personally heard by the author in New Orleans from the 1960s to the 1990s.





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