

parents, the World War II generation that now runs the country. Implicit in this fascinating study is the assumption that an impact even greater than the turmoil they caused in the '60s and early '70s will take place 10 or 20 years hence when the Vietnam generation succeeds to power in every sphere. Then we'll finally see what is the legacy of the Vietnam War. Whatever it turns out to

be, Baskir and Strauss have shown us from whence it came in one of the landmark studies of the war.

Richard J. Walton

Richard J. Walton is most recently the author of *Henry Wallace, Harry Truman, and the Cold War* (Viking) and *The Power of Oil* (Seabury).

for asylum. After three years of interrogation, the CIA buried the case, unable to disprove the claim that Oswald entered and left the Soviet Union on his own initiative and that the KGB considered him unemployable. To this day the defector hasn't recanted, yet Epstein insists he is a KGB plant, sent to the CIA with a cover story or "legend" exculpating the Soviets from Oswald's affairs. He spends a quarter of his book exposing the CIA's contortions over the case and detailing minor inconsistencies in the defector's report and the remainder of his script heaping as much doubt on Oswald's identity as the known facts of his life will support.

Skeptics are empiricists, and so Epstein submits Oswald's diary to a handwriting analysis (an obscure science he doesn't deign to discuss) and reports that Oswald's misspellings prove he was taking dictation. Thus attributed to KGB programming, Oswald's personality poses no more problems to Epstein as a writer. Oswald marches through *Legend* like a wind-up toy: his hair turns crinkly, his eyes go dead, his peregrinations make increasingly less sense. Epstein ascribes psychological impossibilities to both the

Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald

by Edward Jay Epstein

(Reader's Digest Press; \$12.95)

Marina and Lee

by Priscilla Johnson McMillan

(Harper & Row; \$15)

Lee Harvey Oswald may be one of the more magnetic men of our time, if the ever-growing body of superstition surrounding his brief and blighted existence is any report. Two more books can now be added to the Oswald literature. Designed for radically different purposes, the one is as mysterious as the other is lucid.

Financed by the Reader's Digest Press and released in the supermarkets last month, Edward Jay Epstein's *Legend* is an investigative squint at the CIA, packaged in a fanciful account of Oswald's career as a KGB puppet. Epstein won his stars in 1966 with *Inquest*, a rigorous scrutiny of the Warren Report, posing pertinent questions of the Warren Commission's cursory work. At the time Epstein was more interested in the nature of committedness than in assassination plots per se, but this distinction was lost on conspiracy theorists who have been using Epstein's ammunition ever since. Having provided such grounds for doubt, Epstein now agrees that there was only one gunman at the scene of the crime and that that gunman was Oswald. Like the Warren Report itself, Epstein's new book attempts no psychology and proposes no motive. Instead it creates a vague illusion that Oswald was on mission from Moscow, without troubling to explain what interest the Soviet Union could have had in wishing to see Kennedy dead.

Studded with references to beautiful, often nameless, foreign agents,

speculative footnotes and slight allegations, *Legend* stakes its hypothesis on a single disclosure. In 1964 a KGB officer defected to the US, offering information about Oswald in exchange



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Lee and Marina in a Dallas bus station photo booth (1962)

Courtesy of Harper & Row

assassin and his wife, associating Oswald with endless women and giving Marina the mind of a political theorist. The author does not ask himself where Oswald came from or how he survived, but ferrets about in the more exotic chapters of his life. Epstein travelled to Japan and California, collecting a wad of unanalyzed impressions from Oswald's army buddies. He did not go to the Soviet Union but paints Oswald's life there as important and glamorous. In 1977 one of the more unstable members of the White Russian community that tried to befriend the Oswalds in Dallas shot himself in the course of a four day interview with Epstein—yet another clue the author boasts but dares not interpret. *Legend*, which purports to tell secrets about Oswald, tells us only that Epstein has authored a highly marketable parody: a spy yarn cloaked as investigative reporting, an anti-Soviet slur, and a dulling, disingenuous thriller about an implausible robot. However Epstein does provide evidence of what a more conscientious writer has in mind when she despairs over her colleagues.

Priscilla McMillan does not think Oswald took dictation. She suggests he couldn't spell because he was dyslexic. McMillan is the author of *Marina and Lee*, a careful portrait of Oswald's marriage, exploring the forbidden question as to why Oswald shot Kennedy. Thirteen years in the writing, McMillan's book probes the pathology of a solo-artist minutely and frankly—too frankly, it seems. When McMillan's publishers sent her on tour this fall, she provoked an outrage in the media with remarks like "There's a bit of Lee Oswald in all of us." Television audiences phoned in, calling her a liar, and the book trade put out word that her 13 year opus was not to be trusted. As a result, McMillan is an unread author with a national reputation as a government agent paid to dupe the American public.

McMillan is a scholar and should have stayed off television. Interviewed at home, she notes that conspiracy theorists are not good researchers: no one has ever confronted her with the fact that she once held a 30 day contract with the State Department when she

was in Moscow, translating newspapers for the embassies and making her name as a foreign correspondent. Prior to that she had been a researcher for Senator Jack Kennedy, campaigned for Adlai Stevenson, and studied Russian in college. In Moscow she happened to interview Oswald when he signalled his defection to the American press. The next she heard from him was in Harvard Square on November 22, 1963, in the riptide from Dallas. Since then McMillan has become an assassination expert and writes psychoanalytically-minded articles on the subject for *The New York Times*.

As McMillan reads her Freud, conspiracy charges are more proof to her point. The knowledge that we are Oswalds is profoundly intolerable. Americans, she says, are a potentially pathological people who use conspiracies to wall out their individual truths. As a nation we are also regicidal. McMillan points to the past three presidencies: Johnson was booted out of a second term, Ford lost his election because he pardoned the man America wanted hanged. Chappaquiddick, too, was a "ritual killing." Faced with the headless corpse of American rulership, we can neither admit nor stop looking for the crime. Conspiracy cults are the way we participate, eyes averted, in the presidential slaying. This reflects in the polls, where 73 percent of the country is said to believe that Kennedy's death was a plot. It also reflects in the assassination field.

"You can see a historical progression in people who made their careers on the (Kennedy) assassination," she comments. "I think the first generation had a legitimate need; they couldn't bear the randomness of history. But these post-Watergate investigations are motivated by something else. The fascination is incredible; all this unresolved Oedipal material! Conspiracy theorists can go on elaborating their evidence forever. They have this tremendous need to look away from the assassin. Why do you suppose assassination research is such a male field?"

McMillan, let it be said, is a woman, and even she found Oswald difficult to face. If men need to insert a conspiracy between themselves and the assassin, McMillan sought refuge in Marina.

In 1964 she flew to Dallas and spent seven months with the assassin's widow, taking notes on everything she did and said and keeping her out of the headlines. McMillan comments: "Being a negative celebrity suits Marina fine.