Project MKULTRA

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Project MKULTRA (also known as MK-ULTRA) was the code name for a CIA mind-control research program that began in the 1950s.[1][2] There is much published evidence that the project involved the use of many types of drugs to manipulate peoples' mental state and to alter brain function.[3]

It was first brought to wide public attention by the U.S. Congress (in the form of the Church Committee) and a presidential commission (known as the Rockefeller Commission) (see Revelation below) and also to the U.S. Senate.

On the Senate floor in 1977, Senator Ted Kennedy said:

The Deputy Director of the CIA revealed that over thirty universities and institutions were involved in an 'extensive testing and experimentation' program which included covert drug tests on unwitting citizens 'at all social levels, high and low, native Americans and foreign.' Several of these tests involved the administration of LSD to 'unwitting subjects in social situations.' At least one death, that of Dr. Olson, resulted from these activities. The Agency itself acknowledged that these tests made little scientific sense. The agents doing the monitoring were not qualified scientific observers.[4]

14-year CIA veteran Victor Marchetti said in a 1977 interview that the mind control research continued, and that CIA claims to the contrary were a 'cover story' [5].
Origins

There had been a number of earlier secret U.S. governmental projects to study mind-control, interrogation, behavior modification and related topics; these earlier projects included Project CHATTER (established 1947), Project BLUEBIRD and Project ARTICHOKE (both established 1951).

Headed by Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, MKULTRA was started on the order of CIA director Allen Dulles on April 13, 1953, largely in response to alleged Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean use of mind-control techniques on U.S. prisoners of war in Korea. The CIA wanted to use similar methods on their own captives. The CIA was also interested in being able to manipulate foreign leaders with such techniques, and would later invent several schemes to drug Fidel Castro.
Experiments were often conducted without the subjects' knowledge or consent. [9]

In 1964, the project was renamed MKSEARCH. The project attempted to produce a perfect truth drug for use in interrogating suspected Soviet spies during the Cold War, and generally to explore any other possibilities of mind control.

Because most MKULTRA records were deliberately destroyed in 1973 by order of then CIA Director Richard Helms, it is difficult if not impossible to have a complete understanding of the more than 150 individually funded research sub-projects sponsored by MKULTRA and related CIA programs. [10]

Dr. Sidney Gottlieb approved of an MKULTRA subproject on LSD in this June 9, 1953 letter.

Aims

These studies weren't conducted merely to satisfy the CIA's scientific curiosity -- the Agency was looking for weapons that would give the United States the upper hand in the mind wars. Toward that objective, the Agency poured millions of dollars into studies probing literally dozens of methods of influencing and controlling the mind. One 1955 MKULTRA document gives an indication of the size and range of the effort; this document refers to the study of an assortment of mind-altering substances which would:

- "promote illogical thinking and impulsiveness to the point where the recipient would be discredited in public"
"increase the efficiency of mentation and perception"
"prevent or counteract the intoxicating effect of alcohol"
"promote the intoxicating effect of alcohol"
"produce the signs and symptoms of recognized diseases in a reversible way so that they may be used for malingering, etc."
"render the indication of hypnosis easier or otherwise enhance its usefulness"
"enhance the ability of individuals to withstand privation, torture and coercion during interrogation and so-called 'brainwashing'"
"produce amnesia for events preceding and during their use"
"produce shock and confusion over extended periods of time and capable of surreptitious use"
"produce physical disablement such as paralysis of the legs, acute anemia, etc."
"produce 'pure' euphoria with no subsequent let-down"
"alter personality structure in such a way that the tendency of the recipient to become dependent upon another person is enhanced"
"cause mental confusion of such a type that the individual under its influence will find it difficult to maintain a fabrication under questioning"
"lower the ambition and general working efficiency of men when administered in undetectable amounts"
"promote weakness or distortion of the eyesight or hearing faculties, preferably without permanent effects"[1]

**Experiments**

CIA documents suggest that radiation was investigated for the purpose of mind control as part of MKULTRA.[1] Other early efforts focused on LSD, which later came to dominate many of MKULTRA's programs.

Experiments included administering LSD to CIA employees, military personnel, doctors, other government agents, prostitutes, mentally ill patients, and members of the general public in order to study their reactions. LSD and other drugs were usually administered without the subject's knowledge and informed consent, a violation of the Nuremberg Code that the U.S. agreed to follow after WWII.

Efforts to "recruit" subjects were often illegal, even discounting the fact that drugs were being administered (though actual use of LSD, for example, was legal in the United States until 1967). In Operation Midnight Climax, the CIA set up several brothels to obtain a selection of men who would be too embarrassed to talk about the events. The men were dosed with LSD, and the brothels were equipped with one-way mirrors and the "sessions" were filmed for later viewing
Some subjects' participation was consensual, and in many of these cases, the subjects appeared to be singled out for even more horrific experiments. In one case\footnote{citation needed}, volunteers were given LSD for 77 days straight\footnote{[12]}. LSD was eventually dismissed by MKULTRA's researchers as too unpredictable in its effects.\footnote{[2]} Although useful information was sometimes obtained through questioning subjects on LSD, not uncommonly the most marked effect would be the subject's absolute and utter certainty that they were able to withstand any form of interrogation attempt, even physical torture.

Another technique investigated was connecting a barbiturate IV into one arm and an amphetamine IV into the other.\footnote{citation needed} The barbiturates were released into the subject first, and as soon as the subject began to fall asleep, the amphetamines were released. The subject would begin babbling incoherently at this point, and it was sometimes possible to ask questions and get useful answers. This treatment was discarded as it often resulted in the death of the patient from physical side effects of the drug combination, thus making further interrogation impossible.\footnote{citation needed}

Other experiments involved heroin, mescaline, psilocybin, scopolamine, marijuana, alcohol, and sodium pentothal.\footnote{citation needed}

There is no evidence\footnote{citation needed} that the CIA (or anyone else) has actually succeeded in controlling a person's actions through the "mind control" techniques that are known to have been attempted in the MKULTRA projects. However, historians\footnote{[13]} have learned that creating a "Manchurian Candidate"-style subject was undoubtedly a goal of MKULTRA and related CIA projects.

In 1973, CIA Director Richard Helms ordered all MKULTRA files destroyed, and it is believed that most CIA documents regarding the project were destroyed, making a full investigation of the project all but impossible.

**Budget**

A secretive arrangement granted a percentage of the CIA budget. The MKULTRA director was granted six percent of the CIA operating budget in 1953, without oversight or accounting.\footnote{[3]}
Canadian experiments

The experiments were even exported to Canada when the CIA recruited Albany, New York doctor D. Ewen Cameron, creator of the "psychic driving" concept which the CIA found particularly interesting. Cameron described his theory on correcting schizophrenia, which consisted of erasing existing memories and rebuilding the psyche completely. He commuted to Montreal every week to work at the Allan Memorial Institute and was paid $69,000 dollars from 1957 to 1964 to carry out MKULTRA experiments there. The CIA appears to have given him the potentially deadly experiments to carry out since they would be used on non-U.S. citizens.

In addition to LSD, Cameron also experimented with various paralytic drugs as well as electroconvulsive therapy at thirty to forty times the normal power. His "driving" experiments consisted of putting subjects into drug-induced coma for weeks at a time (up to three months in one case) while playing tape loops of noise or simple repetitive statements. His experiments were typically carried out on patients who had entered the institute for minor problems such as anxiety disorders and postpartum depression, many of whom suffered permanently from his actions.

It was during this era that Cameron became known worldwide as the first chairman of the World Psychiatric Association as well as president of the American and Canadian psychiatric associations. Cameron had also been a member of the Nuremberg medical tribunal only a decade earlier.

Revelation

In December 1974, The New York Times reported that the CIA had conducted illegal domestic activities, including experiments on U.S. citizens, during the 1960s. That report prompted investigations by both the U.S. Congress (in the form of the Church Committee) and a presidential commission (known as the Rockefeller Commission) into the domestic activities of the CIA, the FBI, and intelligence-related agencies of the military.

In the summer of 1975, congressional hearings and the Rockefeller Commission report revealed to the public for the first time that the CIA and the Department of Defense had conducted experiments on both cogniscent and unwitting human subjects as part of an extensive program to influence and control human behavior through the use of psychoactive drugs such as LSD and mescaline and other chemical, biological, and psychological means. They also revealed that at least one subject had died after administration of LSD.
Frank Olson, a United States Army biochemist and biological weapons researcher, was given LSD without his knowledge or consent in 1953 as part of a CIA experiment, and mysteriously committed suicide a week later following a severe psychotic episode. A CIA doctor assigned to monitor Olson's recovery claimed to be asleep in another bed in a New York City hotel room when Olson jumped through the window to fall ten stories to his death.

Olson's son disputes this version of events, and maintains that his father was murdered due to his knowledge of the often-lethal interrogation techniques employed by the CIA in Europe, used on Cold War prisoners. Frank Olson's body was exhumed in 1994, and cranial injuries indicated Olson had been knocked unconscious before exiting the window.

The CIA's own internal investigation, by contrast, claimed Gottlieb had conducted the experiment with Olson's prior knowledge, although neither Olson nor the other men taking part in the experiment were informed the exact nature of the drug until some 20 minutes after its ingestion. The report further suggested that Gottlieb was nonetheless due a reprimand, as he had failed to take into account suicidal tendencies Olson had been diagnosed as suffering from which might well have been exacerbated by the LSD.

Subsequent reports would show that another person, Harold Blauer, a professional tennis player in New York City, died as a result of a secret Army experiment involving MDA.

The congressional committee investigating the CIA research, chaired by Senator Frank Church, concluded that "[p]rior consent was obviously not obtained from any of the subjects". The committee noted that the "experiments sponsored by these researchers . . . call into question the decision by the agencies not to fix guidelines for experiments." (Documents show that the CIA participated in at least two of the DOD committees whose discussions, in 1952, led up to the issuance of the memorandum by Secretary of Defense Wilson which initiated the project.)

Following the recommendations of the Church Committee, President Gerald Ford in 1976 issued the first Executive Order on Intelligence Activities which, among other things, prohibited "experimentation with drugs on human subjects, except with the informed consent, in writing and witnessed by a disinterested party, of each such human subject" and in accordance with the guidelines issued by the National Commission. Subsequent orders by Presidents Carter and Reagan expanded the directive to apply to any human experimentation.

Following on the heels of the revelations about CIA experiments were similar stories about the Army. In response, in 1975 the Secretary of the Army instructed the Army Inspector General to conduct an investigation. Among the findings of the Inspector General was the existence of the then-still-classified 1953 Wilson memorandum.
In response to the Inspector General's investigation, the Wilson Memorandum was declassified in August 1975. The Inspector General also found that the requirements of the 1953 memorandum had, at least in regard to Army drug testing, been essentially followed as written. The Army used only "volunteers" for its drug-testing program, with one or two exceptions. However, the Inspector General concluded that the "volunteers were not fully informed, as required, prior to their participation; and the methods of procuring their services, in many cases, appeared not to have been in accord with the intent of Department of the Army policies governing use of volunteers in research." The Inspector General also noted that "the evidence clearly reflected that every possible medical consideration was observed by the professional investigators at the Medical Research Laboratories." This conclusion, if accurate, is in striking contrast to what took place at the CIA.

In Canada, the issue took much longer to surface, becoming widely known in 1984 on a CBC news show, The Fifth Estate. It was learned that not only had the CIA funded Dr. Cameron's efforts, but perhaps even more shockingly, the Canadian government was fully aware of this, and had later provided another $500,000 in funding to continue the experiments. This revelation largely derailed efforts by the victims to sue the CIA as their U.S. counterparts had, and the Canadian government eventually settled out of court for $100,000 to each of the 127 victims.

**U.S. General Accounting Office Report**

The U.S. General Accounting Office issued a report on September 28, 1994, which stated that between 1940 and 1974, DOD and other national security agencies studied thousands of human subjects in tests and experiments involving hazardous substances.

The quote from the study:

... Working with the CIA, the Department of Defense gave hallucinogenic drugs to thousands of "volunteer" soldiers in the 1950's and 1960's. In addition to LSD, the Army also tested quinuclidinyl benzilate, a hallucinogen code-named BZ. (Note 37) Many of these tests were conducted under the so-called MKULTRA program, established to counter perceived Soviet and Chinese advances in brainwashing techniques. Between 1953 and 1964, the program consisted of 149 projects involving drug testing and other studies on unwitting human subjects... [14]

**Legal issues involving informed consent**
The revelations about the CIA and the Army prompted a number of subjects or their survivors to file lawsuits against the federal government for conducting illegal experiments. Although the government aggressively, and sometimes successfully, sought to avoid legal liability, several plaintiffs did receive compensation through court order, out-of-court settlement, or acts of Congress. Frank Olson's family received $750,000 by a special act of Congress, and both President Ford and CIA director William Colby met with Olson's family to publicly apologize.

Previously, the CIA and the Army had actively and successfully sought to withhold incriminating information, even as they secretly provided compensation to the families. One subject of Army drug experimentation, James Stanley, an Army sergeant, brought an important, albeit unsuccessful, suit. The government argued that Stanley was barred from suing under a legal doctrine—known as the Feres doctrine, after a 1950 Supreme Court case, *Feres v. United States*—that prohibits members of the Armed Forces from suing the government for any harms that were inflicted "incident to service."

In 1987, the Supreme Court affirmed this defense in a 5–4 decision that dismissed Stanley's case (*483 U.S. 669*). The majority argued that "a test for liability that depends on the extent to which particular suits would call into question military discipline and decision making would itself require judicial inquiry into, and hence intrusion upon, military matters." In dissent, Justice William Brennan argued that the need to preserve military discipline should not protect the government from liability and punishment for serious violations of constitutional rights:

The medical trials at Nuremberg in 1947 deeply impressed upon the world that experimentation with unknowing human subjects is morally and legally unacceptable. The United States Military Tribunal established the *Nuremberg Code* as a standard against which to judge German scientists who experimented with human subjects. . . . [I]n defiance of this principle, military intelligence officials . . . began surreptitiously testing chemical and biological materials, including LSD.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, writing a separate dissent, stated:

No judicially crafted rule should insulate from liability the involuntary and unknowing human experimentation alleged to have occurred in this case. Indeed, as Justice Brennan observes, the United States played an instrumental role in the criminal prosecution of Nazi officials who experimented with human subjects during the Second World War, and the standards that the *Nuremberg Military Tribunals* developed to judge the behavior of the defendants stated that the 'voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential . . . to satisfy moral, ethical, and legal concepts.' If this principle is violated, the very least that society
can do is to see that the victims are compensated, as best they can be, by the perpetrators.

This is the only Supreme Court case to address the application of the Nuremberg Code to experimentation sponsored by the U.S. government. And while the suit was unsuccessful, dissenting opinions put the Army—and by association the entire government—on notice that use of individuals without their consent is unacceptable. The limited application of the Nuremberg Code in U.S. courts does not detract from the power of the principles it espouses, especially in light of stories of failure to follow these principles that appeared in the media and professional literature during the 1960s and 1970s and the policies eventually adopted in the mid-1970s.

In another law suit, Wayne Ritchie, a former United States Marshall, alleged the CIA laced his food or drink with LSD at a 1957 Christmas party. While the government admitted it was, at that time, drugging people without their consent, U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel found Ritchie could not prove he was one of the victims of MKULTRA. She dismissed the case in 2005. See Image:Ritchie.pdf.

Conspiracy theories

There are also conspiracy theories which claim that the MKULTRA project was also linked with the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. Some have argued that there is evidence that the assassin, Sirhan B. Sirhan, had been subjected to mind control, though such ideas are generally dismissed due to a lack of supporting evidence. Recently, these views have become more widespread after the evidence cited by Sirhan's most recent lawyer Lawrence Teeter, in the June 11th, 2003 Interview with Sirhan's attorney Lawrence Teeter on KPFA 94.1 / Guns & Butter show. Similarly, MKULTRA was also linked to the assassination of the Israeli prime minister Itzhak Rabin in 1995, where the person who committed the murder, Yigal Amir, had been employed in the security service, and his admission was gained only after 5-days of investigation, while the medical reports revealed that the bullet was shot from the front, in contrast to the official version.

After Leo Ryan was murdered at Jonestown, his children filed a lawsuit claiming that the CIA had been operating Jonestown as part of their MKULTRA program, and that Richard Dwyer, the Deputy Chief of Mission from the US Embassy who had organized the trip on Ryan's behalf, was a CIA agent. The lawsuit was dismissed for reasons that have never been made public, and the majority of U.S. government records concerning Jonestown remain sealed to this day.[15][16]

Popular culture
Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, volunteered for the experiments. MKULTRA is referenced in the plots of *The Ambler Warning* by Robert Ludlum, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe, *Firestarter* by Stephen King, *Just a Couple of Days* by Tony Vigorito, "Murder in the CIA" by Margaret Truman, and *The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon; the films *Conspiracy Theory*, *The Good Shepherd* and *Jacob's Ladder*; the television series *Angel* and *The X-Files*; the games *Conspiracy X* and *The Suffering: Prison is Hell*; the character Deathstroke the Terminator in the *Teen Titans* by DC Comics.

The bands mk Ultra and MK-ULTRA took their names from these projects. MKULTRA is also mentioned in songs or liner notes of such artists as Exit Clov, Fatboy Slim, Green Magnet School, Immortal Technique, The Manic Street Preachers, Muse, The Orb, Sirius Isness, and Lustmord side project Terror Against Terror.

MKULTRA also provides a name for a move by professional wrestler Sterling James Keenan and a strain of medical marijuana.

Bekkie MK Ultra is a name to a roller derby skater for the Steel City Derby Demons. Her origins claim to be one of the test subjects of project MKULTRA.

The 1998 Canadian television film *The Sleep Room* dramatized the project.

**MK ULTRA** is an electronic music show airing on Rice University radio.

**See also**

- Brainwashing
- CIA cryptonyms
- CIA operations
- Human radiation experiments
- Louis Jolyon West
- Majestic-12
- MKDELTA
- MKNAOMI

- Operation Paperclip
- Project ARTICHOKE
- Project BLUEBIRD
- Project CHATTER
- Sidney Gottlieb
- United States v. Stanley, US Supreme Court case

**Sources**

**References**

1. ^Chapter 3, part 4: Supreme Court Dissents Invoke the Nuremberg Code: CIA and DOD


"According to the CIA, the project [MKULTRA] was decreased significantly each budget year until its complete termination in the late 1960s."

3. ^ The referenced sentence was originally sourced from here; it is not obvious what the context of this reference was.

4. ^ This quote is from the Opening Remarks by Senator Ted Kennedy during the August 3, 1977 meeting of the U.S. Senate Select Committee On Intelligence, and Subcommittee On Health And Scientific Research of the Committee On Human Resources; online version from the Schaffer Library of Drug Policy, a unofficial website.


6. ^ Church Committee; p. 390 "MKULTRA was approved by the DCI[Director of Central Intelligence] on April 13, 1953"


8. ^ Church Committee; p. 391 "A special procedure, designated MKDELTA, was established to govern the use of MKULTRA materials abroad. Such materials were used on a number of occasions."

9. ^ ibid. "The congressional committee investigating the CIA research, chaired by Senator Frank Church, concluded that '[p]rior consent was obviously not obtained from any of the subjects.'"


14. Quote from "Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans Health? Lessons Spanning Half A Century", part F. HALLUCINOGENS 103rd Congress, 2nd Session-S. Prt. 103-97; Staff Report prepared for the committee on veterans' affairs December 8, 1994 John D. Rockefeller IV, West Virginia, Chairman. Online copy provided by gulfweb.org, which describes itself as "Serving the Gulf War Veteran Community Worldwide Since 1994". (The same document is available from many other (unofficial) sites, which may or may not be independent.)


**Government Documents**

  - A link to the first page on MKULTRA.
  - A link to the first page on Frank Olson.


- [8] Office of the Director of Central Intelligence (ODCI): Studies in Intelligence - Fifteen DCIs' First 100 Day

- Entire MKULTRA Document Archive

- Entire MKULTRA Document Archive in PDF format

**Articles**

*(sorted by date)*


[11] "Woman awarded $100,000 for CIA-funded electroshock" - CBC news, **10 June 2004**

[12] "Brainwash victims win cash claims" - Sunday Times, **October 17, 2004**

Books


External links

- The Frank Olson Project - a website created by Frank Olson's family to explore the issues surrounding his death.
- Declassified MKULTRA Documents at the Black Vault - the full 4-CD collection of MKULTRA (and related) FOIA documents, online.
- Declassified MKULTRA Project Documents
- The Most Dangerous Game Downloadable 8 minute documentary by independent filmmakers GNN
- MKULTRA & CIA Mind Control Multimedia - Archive of MKULTRA and other CIA Mind Control projects.
- Results of the 1973 Church Committee Hearings, on CIA misdeeds, and the 1984 Iran/Contra Hearings
- XXVII. Testing and Use of Chemical and Biological Agents by the Intelligence Community
- The WHY? Files - MKULTRA
- U.S. Research on Hypnosis and Mind Control Begins
- Amy Goodman Interviews Professor Alfred McCoy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. [14]

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