

CIA's Mind Control & Behaviour Experiments

December 23, 2024 –

CIA Mind Control Experiments etc, brings together more than **1,200 essential records** on one of the most infamous and abusive programs in CIA history.

Under code names that included MKULTRA, BLUEBIRD and ARTICHOKE, the CIA conducted terrifying experiments using drugs, hypnosis, isolation, sensory deprivation, and other extreme techniques on human subjects, often U.S. citizens, who frequently had no idea what was being done to them or that they were part of a CIA test.

Today's announcement comes **50 years** after a *New York Times* investigation by Seymour Hersh touched off probes that would bring MKULTRA abuses to light. The new collection also comes **70 years** since U.S. pharmaceutical giant **Eli Lilly & Company** first developed a process to streamline the manufacture of LSD in late 1954, becoming the CIA's chief supplier of the newly discovered psychoactive chemical central to many of the Agency's behaviour control efforts.

Highlights of the new MKULTRA collection include:

- A DCI-approved plan in 1950 for the establishment of "interrogation teams" that would "utilize the polygraph, drugs, and hypnotism to attain the greatest results in interrogation techniques." (**Documents**)
- A 1951 memo that captures a meeting between CIA and foreign intelligence officials about mind control research and their shared interest in the concept of individual mind control. (**Documents**)
- A 1952 entry from the daily calendar of George White, a federal narcotics agent who ran a safe-house where the CIA tested drugs like LSD and performed other experiments on unwitting Americans. (**Documents**)
- A 1952 report on the "successful" use of ARTICHOKE interrogation methods that combined the use of "narcosis" and "hypnosis" to induce regression and later amnesia on "Russian agents suspected of being doubled." (**Documents**)
- A 1956 memo in which MKULTRA chief Sidney Gottlieb signs off a project that would "evaluate the effects of large doses of LSD-25 in normal human volunteers" on federal prisoners in Atlanta. (**Documents**)
- The 1963 report from the CIA's inspector general, which led CIA leadership to re-examine the use of unwitting Americans in their covert drug testing program. (**Documents**)
- The 1983 deposition of MKULTRA chief Sidney Gottlieb in a civil case brought by Velma "Val" Orlikow, a victim of CIA-sponsored projects conducted by Dr. Ewen Cameron at the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal. (**Documents**)

The challenges facing this documentation project were considerable, as CIA director Richard Helms and long-time MKULTRA chief Sidney Gottlieb destroyed most of the original project records in 1973.

It is a story about secrecy—perhaps the most infamous cover-up in the Agency's history. It is also a history marked by near-total impunity at the institutional and individual levels for countless abuses committed across decades—not during interrogations of enemy agents or in wartime situations, but during ordinary medical treatments, inside prison hospitals, addiction clinics, and juvenile detention facilities, and in many cases led by top figures in the field of the behavioural sciences.

Despite the Agency's efforts to erase this hidden history, the documents that survived this purge and that have been gathered together here (not sharing with you) present a compelling and unsettling narrative of the CIA's decades-long effort to discover and test ways to erase and re-program the human mind.

The bulk of these records were drawn from records compiled by John Marks, the former State Department official who filed the first Freedom of Information Act requests on the subject and whose book, **(I have a copy in my Library)** remains the single most important source on this episode. Marks later donated his FOIA documents and other research papers to the Many of the redactions in the documents have been effectively removed with the passage of time, as official investigations, civil depositions, and detailed histories have shed significant light on some of these episodes.

The legacy of MKULTRA goes far beyond the various “sub-projects” described in these documents and that were largely shut down by the mid-1970s. As author Stephen Kinzer points out, the CIA's behaviour control research programs “contributed decisively to the development of techniques that Americans and their allies used at detention centres in Vietnam, Latin America, Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, and secret prisons around the world.” MKULTRA techniques were cited in the CIA's 1963 **KUBARK interrogation manual** that was the basis for prisoner interrogations in Vietnam and later in anti-communist dictatorships in Latin America.

While many of the MKULTRA projects were conducted in hospitals, laboratories, or other institutional settings, others were carried out in clandestine CIA safe-houses staffed not by doctors or clinicians but by hard-nosed federal narcotics agents like George Hunter White. Under the direction of Gottlieb, White adopted the persona of a bohemian artist named “Morgan Hall” to lure unsuspecting victims to his “pad” where he and his CIA collaborators secretly experimented on them and recorded their behaviour. An OSS veteran who had worked on “truth drug” development for the Army in World War II, White surreptitiously dosed many of his victims with LSD, a drug that the CIA had in abundance thanks to Eli Lilly, which had developed the capacity to produce the drug in “tonnage quantities” and had agreed to become the Agency's supplier. Gottlieb, his deputy Robert Lashbrook, and CIA psychologist John Gittinger are among the CIA officials who frequently visited White's safe-houses.

Of particular interest is the mysterious 1953 death of Frank Olson, an Army chemist and aerosols specialist for the Special Operations Division (SOD) of the Army's Chemical Corps, the CIA's military partner in behaviour control research. Officially ruled a suicide, Olson's death from a 10-story fall in New York City came 10 days after Gottlieb and TSS staff spiked his cocktail with LSD during a CIA-SOD work retreat at Deep Creek Lake, Maryland. The drugging was later determined to have contributed to his death, but many, including members of his family, have questioned the conclusion that Olson—who was sharing a room with Lashbrook that night—threw himself out the window of the Statler Hotel.

At the centre of it all was Sidney Gottlieb, the head of the Technical Services Staff (TSS) of the CIA's Chemical Division and later director of the Technical Services Division (TSD). Gottlieb was "the CIA's chief poison maker," according to Kinzer, whose book, the definitive work on the mercurial chemistry (**I have a copy**)

From his position deep inside the CIA's secret corridors, Gottlieb led the Agency's decades-long effort to find ways to use drugs, hypnosis, and other extreme methods to control human behaviour and, it was hoped, turn them into usable tools for intelligence agencies and policymakers.

Stories about the CIA's involvement in unsuccessful efforts to assassinate Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of Congo and Cuban leader Fidel Castro, among others, are among the most legendary, if not the most successful, examples of the Agency's efforts to operationalize the tricks and tools assembled by Gottlieb's unit. Less well known is his role in drug experiments and "special interrogation" programs that left hundreds of people psychologically damaged and others "permanently shattered," according to Kinzer.

Although MKULTRA was approved at the highest levels, it operated with virtually no oversight. As Marks notes, the initial MKULTRA budget authorization "exempted the program from the normal CIA financial controls" and "allowed TSS to start up research projects 'without the signing of the usual contracts or other written agreements.'" With little accountability, boundless resources, and the backing of CIA covert operations chief Richard Helms, Gottlieb and his staff at TSS developed a series of bizarre experiments that they believed would enhance covert intelligence operations while at the same time improving the Agency's defences against the use of similar techniques by enemy forces.

By the time Gottlieb arrived at CIA in 1952, Project BLUEBIRD, which explored "the possibility of control of an individual by application of Special Interrogation techniques," was already well underway. Led by Office of Security chief Morse Allen, the early BLUEBIRD experiments were performed by teams that included polygraph experts and psychologists and were conducted on detainees and suspected informants at secret U.S. interrogation facilities in Japan and Germany.

The elevation of Allen Dulles to deputy director of central intelligence in 1951 led to an expansion of BLUEBIRD programs under a new name, ARTICHOKE, and under the direction of Gottlieb at TSS. The new program was to include, among other projects, the development of “gas guns” and “poisons,” and experiments to test whether “monotonous sounds,” “concussion,” “electroshock,” and “induced sleep” could be used as a means to gain “hypnotic control of an individual.”

It was under ARTICHOKE that the Agency first began to more systematically recruit the top researchers and court the most prestigious institutions to collaborate in its mind control research. One of the first to participate was the deputy director of Boston Psychopathic Hospital, Dr. Robert Hyde, who in 1949 was the first American to “trip” on LSD after the hospital acquired samples of the drug from Sandoz laboratory in Switzerland. In 1952, the CIA began to fund the hospital’s LSD research, under which Hyde used himself, his colleagues, student volunteers, and hospital patients as his subjects. Hyde would work on four MKULTRA sub-projects over the next decade.

Shortly after Dulles became DCI in 1953, he authorized MKULTRA, expanding the Agency’s behaviour control research and refocusing it on the development of “a capability in the covert use of biological and chemical materials” in “present and future clandestine operations.” Many of the 149 MKULTRA subprojects were carried out through well-regarded universities like Cornell, Georgetown, Rutgers, Illinois, and Oklahoma.

Dr. Carl Pfeiffer, the chairman of the Department of Pharmacology of Emory University, directed four MKULTRA subprojects, all of which involved the use of drugs, including LSD, to induce psychotic states. The horrifying series of experiments left many of his subjects—including prisoners at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary and juveniles housed at a detention facility in Bordentown, New Jersey—scarred for life.

Many other MKULTRA sub-projects were established through grants from false foundations funded by the CIA. One of these, the Geschickter Fund for Medical Research, run by Dr. Charles Geschickter, a professor of pathology at Georgetown University, steered millions of CIA dollars into research programs at Georgetown and other institutions. As part of the agreement, the CIA gained access to a medical safe-house at the newly constructed Gorman Annex of Georgetown University Hospital along with a ready supply of patients and students to use as subjects for MKULTRA experiments.

Another prominent MKULTRA “cut-out” foundation, the Human Ecology Society, was run by Cornell Medical Centre neurologist Dr. Harold Wolff, who wrote an early study of communist brainwashing techniques for Allen Dulles and later partnered with the CIA to develop a combination of drugs and sensory deprivation that could be used to erase the human mind. Among the most extreme MKULTRA projects funded through Wolff’s group were the infamous “de-patterning” experiments conducted by Dr. D. Ewen Cameron at the Allan Memorial Institute, a psychiatric hospital at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Cameron’s methods combined induced sleep, electroshocks, and

“psychic driving,” under which drugged subjects were psychologically tortured for weeks or months in an effort to reprogram their minds.

These records also shed light on an especially dark period in the history of the behavioural sciences in which some of the top physicians in the field conducted research and experiments usually associated with the Nazi doctors who were tried at Nuremberg. While some medical professionals engaged by the CIA apparently struggled with the ethical issues raised by conducting harmful tests on unwitting human subjects, others were eager to participate in a program in which, according to one 1953 memo, “no area of the human mind is to be left unexplored.”

Just as CIA psychologists later oversaw the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and at CIA “black sites,” during the first decades of the 21st century, many of the doctors and clinicians recruited for MKULTRA work were leaders in the field, whose participation boosted the prestige of the program and drew others into it. Scholars and researchers looking at the involvement of psychologists and other medical professionals in the horrific U.S. detention and interrogation programs that have been exposed in recent years will find parallels and historical antecedents throughout this collection.

The collection is also of great value to those interested in learning more about the early years of the CIA and some of its major personalities, such as Allen Dulles, Richard Helms, Richard Bissell, Franks Wisner, and others, who envisioned and created an intelligence agency that favoured bold, often covert, action and where controversial projects like MKULTRA could secretly take root and flourish.