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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

18 March 2013

Mr. John Greenewald  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Reference: F-2013-00620 / DNI #DF-2009-00110

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

In the course of processing your 22 September 2009 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) for a copy of the Intellipedia entry for MKULTRA, the DNI located CIA material and referred it to us on 18 January 2013 for review and direct response to you.

We reviewed the material and determined that the document can be released in segregable form with deletions made on the basis of FOIA exemption (b)(3). Exemption (b)(3) pertains to information exempt from disclosure by statute. The relevant statute is the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 U.S.C. § 403, as amended, e.g., Section 6, which exempts from the disclosure requirement information pertaining to the organization, functions, including those related to the protection of intelligence sources and methods, names, official titles, salaries, and numbers of personnel employed by the Agency. A copy of the document and an explanation of exemptions are enclosed. As the CIA Information and Privacy Coordinator, I am the CIA official responsible for this determination. You have the right to appeal this response to the Agency Release Panel, in my care, within 45 days from the date of this letter. Please include the basis of your appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michele Meeks".

Michele Meeks  
Information and Privacy Coordinator

Enclosures

## Explanation of Exemptions

### Freedom of Information Act:

- (b)(1) exempts from disclosure information currently and properly classified, pursuant to an Executive Order;
- (b)(2) exempts from disclosure information, which pertains solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of the Agency;
- (b)(3) exempts from disclosure information that another federal statute protects, provided that the other federal statute either requires that the matters be withheld, or establishes particular criteria for withholding or refers to particular types of matters to be withheld. The (b)(3) statutes upon which the CIA relies include, but are not limited to, the CIA Act of 1949;
- (b)(4) exempts from disclosure trade secrets and commercial or financial information that is obtained from a person and that is privileged or confidential;
- (b)(5) exempts from disclosure inter-and intra-agency memoranda or letters that would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency;
- (b)(6) exempts from disclosure information from personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy;
- (b)(7) exempts from disclosure information compiled for law enforcement purposes to the extent that the production of the information (A) could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings; (B) would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication; (C) could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy; (D) could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source or, in the case of information compiled by a criminal law enforcement authority in the course of a criminal investigation or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source ; (E) would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law; or (F) could reasonably be expected to endanger any individual's life or physical safety;
- (b)(8) exempts from disclosure information contained in reports or related to examination, operating, or condition reports prepared by, or on behalf of, or for use of an agency responsible for regulating or supervising financial institutions; and
- (b)(9) exempts from disclosure geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells.

April 2012

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# (U) Project MK-ULTRA

(b)(3)

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From Intellipedia

(Redirected from MKULTRA Program)

See the Wikipedia article at  
 Project MKULTRA   
 (NSA-provided mirror of  
 Wikipedia)

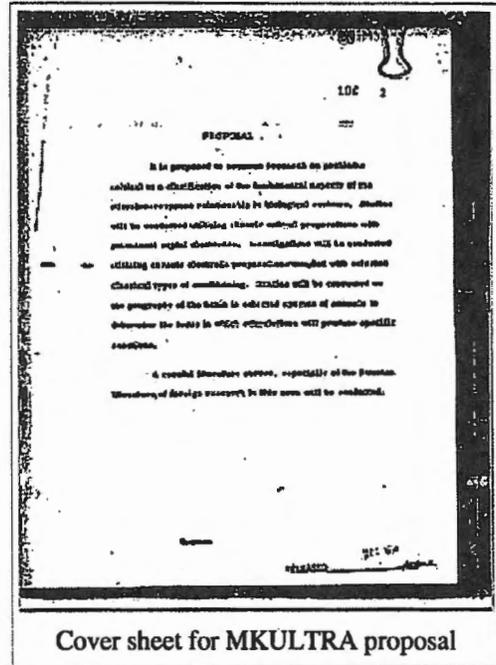
 (U) Be bold in modifying this Wikipedia import .

(U) Correct mistakes; remove bias; categorize; delete  
 superfluous links, templates, and passages; add classified  
 information and citations.

(U) When assimilation into Intellipedia is complete, remove this  
 template and add {{From Wikipedia}}.

**Project MK-ULTRA**, or **MKULTRA**, was the code name for a covert CIA mind-control and chemical interrogation research program, run by the Office of Scientific Intelligence. This official U.S. government program began in the early 1950s, continuing at least through the late 1960s, and it supposedly used United States citizens as unwitting test subjects.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> The published evidence indicates that Project MK-ULTRA involved the surreptitious use of many types of drugs, as well as other methods, to manipulate individual mental states and to alter brain function.

Project MK-ULTRA was first brought to wide public attention in 1975 by the U.S. Congress, through investigations by the Church Committee, and by a presidential commission known as the Rockefeller Commission. Investigative efforts were hampered by the fact that CIA Director Richard Helms ordered all MK-ULTRA files destroyed in 1973; the Church Committee and Rockefeller Commission investigations relied on the sworn testimony of direct participants and on the relatively small number of documents that survived Helms' destruction order.<sup>[4]</sup>



Cover sheet for MKULTRA proposal

Although the CIA insists that MK-ULTRA-type experiments have been abandoned, 14-year CIA veteran Victor Marchetti has stated in various interviews that the CIA routinely conducts disinformation campaigns and that CIA mind control research continued. In a 1977 interview, Marchetti specifically called the CIA claim that MK-ULTRA was abandoned a "cover story."<sup>[5][6]</sup>

(11)

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. Frank 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.<sup>[7]</sup>

To this day most specific information regarding Project MKULTRA remains highly classified.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Contents

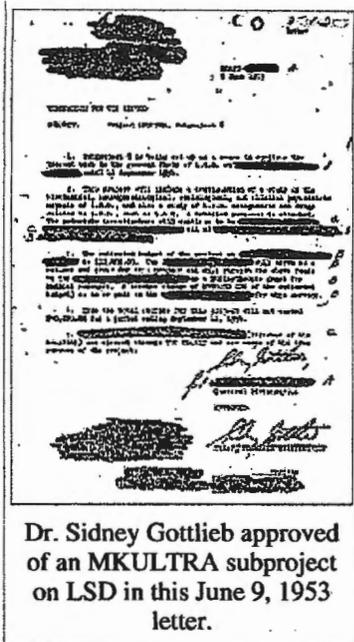
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## Title and origins

The project's intentionally oblique CIA cryptonym is made up of the digraph *MK*, meaning that the project was sponsored by the agency's Technical Services Division, followed by the word *ULTRA* (which had previously been used to designate the most secret classification of World War II intelligence). Other related cryptonyms include *MK-NAOMI* and *MK-DELTA*.

A precursor of the *MK-ULTRA* program began in 1945 when the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency was established and given direct responsibility for Operation Paperclip. Operation Paperclip was a program to recruit former Nazi scientists. Some of these scientists studied torture and brainwashing, and several had just been identified and prosecuted as war criminals during the Nuremberg Trials.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

Several secret U.S. government projects grew out of Operation Paperclip. These projects included Project *CHATTER* (established 1947), and Project *BLUEBIRD* (established 1950), which was later renamed to



Project ARTICHOKE in 1951. Their purpose was to study mind-control, interrogation, behavior modification and related topics.

Headed by Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the MK-ULTRA project was started on the order of CIA director Allen Dulles on April 13, 1953,<sup>[11]</sup> largely in response to Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean use of mind-control techniques on U.S. prisoners of war in Korea.<sup>[12]</sup> 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,<sup>[13]</sup> and would later invent several schemes to drug Fidel Castro.



Experiments were often conducted without the subjects' knowledge or consent.<sup>[14]</sup> In some cases, academic researchers being funded through grants from CIA front organizations were unaware that their work was being used for these purposes.<sup>[15]</sup>

In 1964, the project was renamed MK-SEARCH. 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.

Another MK-ULTRA effort, Subproject 54, was the Navy's top secret "Perfect Concussion" program, which used sub-aural frequency blasts to erase memory.<sup>[16]</sup>

Because most MK-ULTRA records were deliberately destroyed in 1973 by order of then CIA Director Richard Helms, it has been difficult, if not impossible, for investigators to gain a complete understanding of the more than 150 individually funded research sub-projects sponsored by MK-ULTRA and related CIA programs.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Goals

The Agency poured millions of dollars into studies probing dozens of methods of influencing and controlling the mind. One 1955 MK-ULTRA 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 described as follows:<sup>[18]</sup>

1. Substances which will promote illogical thinking and impulsiveness to the point where the recipient would be discredited in public.
2. Substances which increase the efficiency of mentation and perception.
3. Materials which will prevent or counteract the intoxicating effect of alcohol.
4. Materials which will promote the intoxicating effect of alcohol.
5. Materials which will produce the signs and symptoms of recognized diseases in a

- reversible way so that they may be used for malingering, etc.
6. Materials which will render the induction of hypnosis easier or otherwise enhance its usefulness.
  7. Substances which will enhance the ability of individuals to withstand privation, torture and coercion during interrogation and so-called "brain-washing".
  8. Materials and physical methods which will produce amnesia for events preceding and during their use.
  9. Physical methods of producing shock and confusion over extended periods of time and capable of surreptitious use.
  10. Substances which produce physical disablement such as paralysis of the legs, acute anemia, etc.
  11. Substances which will produce "pure" euphoria with no subsequent let-down.
  12. Substances which alter personality structure in such a way that the tendency of the recipient to become dependent upon another person is enhanced.
  13. A material which will cause mental confusion of such a type that the individual under its influence will find it difficult to maintain a fabrication under questioning.
  14. Substances which will lower the ambition and general working efficiency of men when administered in undetectable amounts.
  15. Substances which promote weakness or distortion of the eyesight or hearing faculties, preferably without permanent effects.
  16. A knockout pill which can surreptitiously be administered in drinks, food, cigarettes, as an aerosol, etc., which will be safe to use, provide a maximum of amnesia, and be suitable for use by agent types on an ad hoc basis.
  17. A material which can be surreptitiously administered by the above routes and which in very small amounts will make it impossible for a man to perform any physical activity whatsoever.

Historians have asserted that creating a "Manchurian Candidate" subject through "mind control" techniques was a goal of MK-ULTRA and related CIA projects.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Budget

A secretive arrangement granted the MK-ULTRA program a percentage of the CIA budget. The MK-ULTRA director was granted six percent of the CIA operating budget in 1953, without oversight or accounting.<sup>[20]</sup> An estimated US\$10m or more was spent.<sup>[21]</sup>

## Experiments

CIA documents suggest that "chemical, biological and radiological" means were investigated for the purpose of mind control as part of MK-ULTRA.<sup>[22]</sup>

## LSD

Early efforts focused on LSD, which later came to dominate many of MK-ULTRA'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 or informed consent, a violation of the Nuremberg Code that the U.S. agreed to follow after World War II.

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 October 6, 1966). 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, the brothels were equipped with one-way mirrors, and the sessions were filmed for later viewing and study.<sup>[23]</sup>

Some subjects' participation was consensual, and in many of these cases, the subjects appeared to be singled out for even more extreme experiments. In one case, volunteers were given LSD for 77 consecutive days.<sup>[24]</sup>

LSD was eventually dismissed by MK-ULTRA's researchers as too unpredictable in its results.<sup>[25]</sup> 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.

### Other drugs

Another technique investigated was connecting a barbiturate IV into one arm and an amphetamine IV into the other.<sup>[26]</sup> 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. Other experiments involved heroin, morphine, temazepam (used under code name MK-SEARCH), mescaline, psilocybin, scopolamine, marijuana, alcohol, sodium pentothal,<sup>[27]</sup> and ergine (in Subproject 22).

### Hypnosis and Magic

Declassified MK-ULTRA documents indicate hypnosis was studied in the early 1950s. Experimental goals included: the creation of "hypnotically induced anxieties," "hypnotically increasing ability to learn and recall complex written matter," studying hypnosis and polygraph examinations, "hypnotically increasing ability to observe and recall complex arrangements of physical objects," and studying "relationship of personality to susceptibility to hypnosis."<sup>[28]</sup>

In addition, the CIA used the services of American magician John Mulholland to write two manuals on sleight of hand and undercover communication techniques. In 1973, virtually all documents related to MKULTRA were destroyed. Mulholland's manuals were thought to be among them until a single surviving copy of each was discovered in the agency's archives around 2008-2009. Bob Wallace and H. Keith Melton published *"The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception"* to chronicle this research into the use of illusion for the agency's field agents.<sup>[29]</sup>

### Canadian experiments

The experiments were exported to Canada when the CIA recruited Scottish psychiatrist Donald Ewen Cameron, creator of the "psychic driving" concept, which the CIA found particularly interesting. Cameron had been hoping to correct schizophrenia by erasing existing memories and reprogramming the psyche. He commuted from Albany, New York to Montreal every week to work at the Allan Memorial Institute of McGill University and was paid \$69,000 from 1957 to 1964 to carry out MKULTRA experiments there. 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.<sup>[30]</sup> His treatments resulted in victims' incontinence, amnesia, forgetting how to talk, forgetting their parents, and thinking their interrogators were their parents.<sup>[31]</sup> His work was inspired and paralleled by the British psychiatrist Dr. William Sargant at St. Thomas' Hospital, London, and Belmont Hospital, Surrey, who was also involved in the Intelligence Services and who experimented extensively on his patients without their consent, causing similar long-term damage.<sup>[32]</sup> Dr. Cameron and Dr. Sargant are the only two identified Canadian experimenters, but the MKULTRA file makes reference to many other unnamed physicians who were recruited by the CIA. 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 in 1946-1947.<sup>[33]</sup>

## Revelation

In 1973, CIA Director Richard Helms ordered all MK-ULTRA files destroyed. Pursuant to this order, most CIA documents regarding the project were destroyed, making a full investigation of MK-ULTRA impossible.

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 the U.S. Congress, in the form of the Church Committee, and by a presidential commission known as the Rockefeller Commission that looked into domestic activities of the CIA, the FBI, and intelligence-related agencies of the military. In the summer of 1975, congressional Church Committee reports and the presidential Rockefeller Commission report revealed to the public for the first time that the CIA and the Department of Defense had conducted experiments on both unwitting and cognizant 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. Much of what the Church Committee and the Rockefeller Commission learned about MKULTRA was contained in a report, prepared by the Inspector General's office in 1963, that had survived the destruction of records ordered in 1973.<sup>[34]</sup> However, it contained little detail.

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."

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.

On the heels of the revelations about CIA experiments, similar stories surfaced regarding U.S. Army experiments. 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 a 1953 memorandum penned by then Secretary of Defense Charles Erwin Wilson. Documents show that the CIA participated in at least two of Department of Defense committees during 1952. These committee findings led to the issuance of the "Wilson Memo," which mandated—in accord with Nuremberg Code protocols—that only volunteers be used for experimental operations conducted in the U.S. armed forces. In response to the Inspector General's investigation, the Wilson Memo was declassified in August 1975.

With regard to drug testing within the Army, the Inspector General found that "the evidence clearly reflected that every possible medical consideration was observed by the professional investigators at the Medical Research Laboratories." However the Inspector General also found that the mandated requirements of Wilson's 1953 memorandum had been only partially adhered to; he 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."

Other branches of the U.S. armed forces, the Air Force for example, were found not to have adhered to Wilson Memo stipulations regarding voluntary drug testing.

In 1977, during a hearing held by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, to look further into MKULTRA, Admiral Stansfield Turner, then Director of Central Intelligence, revealed that the CIA had found a set of records, consisting of about 20,000 pages,<sup>[35]</sup> that had survived the 1973 destruction orders, due to having been stored at a records center not usually used for such documents.<sup>[34]</sup> These files dealt with the financing of MKULTRA projects, and as such contained few details of those projects, but much more was learned from them than from the Inspector General's 1963 report.

In Canada, the issue took much longer to surface, becoming widely known in 1984 on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 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. None of Dr. Cameron's personal records of his involvement with MKULTRA survive, since his family destroyed them after his death from a heart attack while mountain climbing in 1967.<sup>[36]</sup>

## 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 1950s and 1960s. 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...<sup>[37]</sup>

## 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.<sup>[38]</sup> 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 and dismissed the case in 2007.<sup>[39]</sup>

## Extent of participation

Forty-four American colleges or universities, fifteen research foundations or chemical or pharmaceutical companies and the like including Sandoz (currently Novartis) and Eli Lilly & Co., twelve hospitals or clinics (in addition to those associated with universities), and three prisons are known to have participated in MKULTRA.<sup>[40][41]</sup>

## Notable subjects

A considerable amount of credible circumstantial evidence suggests that Theodore Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, participated in CIA-sponsored MK-ULTRA experiments conducted at Harvard University from the fall of 1959 through the spring of 1962.<sup>[42]</sup> During World War II, Henry Murray, the lead researcher in the Harvard experiments, served with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which was a forerunner of the CIA. Murray applied for a grant funded by the United States Navy, and his Harvard stress experiments strongly resembled those run by the OSS.<sup>[42]</sup> Beginning at the age of sixteen, Kaczynski participated along with twenty-one other undergraduate students in the Harvard experiments, which have been described as "disturbing" and "ethically indefensible."<sup>[42][43]</sup>

Merry Prankster Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, volunteered for MK-ULTRA experiments while he was a student at Stanford University. Kesey's ingestion of LSD during these experiments led directly to his widespread promotion of the drug and the subsequent development of hippie culture.<sup>[44]</sup> Candy Jones, American fashion model and radio host, claimed to have been a victim of mind control in the '60s.<sup>[45]</sup>

Infamous Irish mob boss James "Whitey" Bulger volunteered for testing while in prison.<sup>[46]</sup>

Robert Hunter is an American lyricist, singer-songwriter, translator, and poet, best known for his association with Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead. Hunter was an early volunteer test subject for the MKULTRA program. He was paid to take LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline and report on his experiences, which were creatively formative for him:

Sit back picture yourself swooping up a shell of purple with foam crests of crystal drops soft nigh they fall unto the sea of morning creep-very-softly mist...and then sort of cascade tinkley-bell like (must I take you by the hand, every so slowly type) and then conglomerate suddenly into a peal of silver vibrant uncomprehendingly, blood singingly, joyously resoundingbells....By my faith if this be insanity, then for the love of God permit me to remain insane. (McNally 42-43)<sup>[47]</sup>

## Incidents

### Dr. Frank Olson Commits Suicide

(U) Early on 28 November 1953, Frank Olson, a US Army civilian

biochemist and biological weapons researcher, jumped to his death from a hotel room in New York City after suffering a severe reaction to LSD that he consumed as part of a CIA-led research program on the intelligence applications of drugs and other behavioral modification techniques. The program, codenamed MKULTRA, was disclosed in 1975 during the Rockefeller Commission and Church Committee investigations of dubious Agency activities and became one of the most notorious episodes publicized during CIA's "time of troubles" in the mid-1970s. Over the years, the revelations about Olson's death have generated many unfounded conspiracy tales that still circulate in publications and movies and on the Internet.<sup>[48]</sup>



Frank Olson

(U) US Government interest in the potential intelligence implications of pharmaceuticals dates to World War II, when the OSS's Research and Development Branch conducted research into their behavioral effects, as well as those of biological and chemical weapons. The US Army picked up on those efforts in the late 1940s. Reports at that time indicated that the Soviet Union was experimenting with mind-control substances, which heightened CIA's interest in the development of drugs and the investigation of "mind control" methods so it could develop defensive measures against them.<sup>[48]</sup>

(U) After the end of the Korean War in 1953 and the return of US POWs from China and North Korea, fears arose that the Communist had discovered ways to control minds through "brainwashing" techniques or the use of mind-altering drugs, such as LSD. The purported victims of such treatment would become unwitting pawns of the Communists, who could "program" them for nefarious purposes. Feeding this anxiety in the late 1940s and early 1950s were displays of disoriented or inexplicable behavior by prisoners in Communist "show trials" and persistent charges that Moscow had attempted to corner the world supply of LSD chemicals, then manufactured only in Switzerland.<sup>[48]</sup>

(S) Such concerns in the aftermath of several failed Agency operations in Eastern Europe, most notably in Albania, prompted the Agency's Office of Security under DCI Walter Bedell Smith to launch an investigation, Project BLUEBIRD, to determine whether the polygraph or hypnosis assisted by "truth serums" could detect "brainwashing" among government employees. Another project growing from BLUEBIRD, ARTICHOKE, conducted by CIA's Technical Services Staff (TSS), and officially launched on 29 October 1952, began research and experimentation with a variety of psychiatric and psychological methods—including the use of various narcotics—to see if these could alter attitudes and behaviors.<sup>[48]</sup>

(S) Under DCI Allen W. Dulles, who publicly declared that the Soviets were developing "brain perversion techniques" in a "sinister battle for men's minds," the behavioral programs significantly expanded in April 1953 on the suggestion of Richard Helms, head of CIA operations. The Agency soon joined its research efforts with Army programs under the cryptonym MKULTRA. Run by TSS chief Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the program came to include 149 separate animal and human behavior modification projects, some conducted by Agency and Army researchers, but most involving one of 80 participating American and Canadian universities, hospitals, and research institutions operating under contracts that did not reveal Agency funding or associations.<sup>[48]</sup>

(S) As part of these drug research efforts, on 18 November 1953 Gottlieb met with a group of CIA and Army researchers at a lodge in Deep Creek Lake, MD, to discuss work that included the use of LSD. During the meeting, eight of the ten men present—including Frank Olson—consumed a small dose of the hallucinogen in a liquor drink passed among them. According to Gottlieb, all present were witting of the

drugs in the beverage. However, the Agency's internal investigation concluded that while Gottlieb had conducted the experiment with Olson's knowledge, neither he nor the others in the group knew what drug they had ingested until some 20 minutes later. In the days that followed, according to Olson Family members and his colleagues, Olson began to act strangely and appeared depressed. Realizing that Olson may have a serious illness, Gottlieb referred him for psychiatric counseling in New York. Olson worsened, and his associates decided to send him to a sanatorium near Rockville, MD. On the night before their departure, Olson crashed through a closed hotel window and hurtled 10 stories to his death. His CIA companion woke in time to see the suicide but not prevent it.<sup>[48]</sup>

(S) Gottlieb reported the death to Dulles, who ordered the CIA inspector general, Lyman Kirkpatrick, to conduct an investigation. Kirkpatrick recommended a reprimand for Gottlieb, who he asserted had exercised poor judgment in conducting uncontrolled experiments that "could seriously affect the record and reputation of the Agency." Kirkpatrick further faulted Gottlieb for not knowing of Olson's prior bouts of depression, implying that the LSD experiment had acted as a triggering mechanism directly contributing to his death. Kirkpatrick and Lawrence Houston, the Agency's general counsel, expressed dismay with the casual manner in which TSS personnel conducted the experiments, and were outraged to learn that that Gottlieb had ingested LSD at least twelve times himself. They determined that TSS personnel assumed risks in a cavalier manner that lay well beyond the normal standards of the scientific process. However, Dulles overruled the IG, and Gottlieb received only an off-the-record admonition. MKULTRA continued, albeit with significant changes and additional oversight, until 1967; remnants of it continued under another project until 1973.<sup>[48]</sup>

(U) Olson's wife initially received word that her husband had died of a "classified illness" and only later learned how he had been killed. Not until 1975, with the Rockefeller Commission and Church Committee disclosures, did Olson's family hear more of the truth. They disputed much of what came out and claimed that the Agency or the Army had murdered Olson before he could go public with the details of the drug testing programs. In 1976, the family received a \$750,000 settlement from the US Government and formal apologies from President Gerald R. Ford and DCI William E. Colby.<sup>[48]</sup>

(U) The complete record of the case was hard to reconstruct because in 1973, at Helms's behest, Gottlieb had destroyed his office's records on MKULTRA. In 1977, thousands of pages of related material about the program turned up in budget records and, when released under the Freedom of Information Act, became the basis for an exposé book by former State Department officer John Marks called *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control*. Members of Olson's family continued pursuing allegations of Agency foul play for many years but in 2002 announced that they were dropping the matter. Journalist H.P. Albarelli resuscitated the Olson version of events in 2009 in a poorly sourced and unreliable book titled *A Terrible Mistake: The Murder of Frank Olson and the CIA's Secret Cold War Experiments*. Trustworthy accounts of the story are in John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (pp. 202-07, 755-58 notes 27-61) and Benjamin Fischer, *Fifty Years of Supporting Operations, 1951-2001: A History of CIA's Office of Technical Service* (pp. 101-06).<sup>[48]</sup>

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## See also

- "Tinker, tailor, soldier... illusionist? When the CIA tried its hand at magic," Tom Scocca, Boston Globe, 1 November 2009 (Media Highlights) 

## Web links

- U.S. Congress: The Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Foreign and Military Intelligence (Church Committee report), report no. 94-755, 94th Cong., 2d Sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), 394.
- U.S. Senate: Joint Hearing before The Select Committee on Intelligence and The Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources, 95th Cong., 1st Sess. August 3 1977.
- Short documentary about MKULTRA and the Frank Olson incident
- The Most Dangerous Game Downloadable 8 minute documentary by independent filmmakers GNN
- GIF scans of declassified MKULTRA Project Documents
- Interview of Alfred McCoy on CIA mind control research

- U.S. Supreme Court CIA v. SIMS, 471 U.S. 159 (1985) 471 U.S. 159
- U.S. Supreme Court UNITED STATES v. STANLEY, 483 U.S. 669 (1987) 483 U.S. 669

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