

## Project MKUltra

Project MKUltra, or MK-Ultra, was a **covert, illegal<sup>[1]</sup> human research program into behavioral modification run by the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Office of Scientific Intelligence.** The program began in the early 1950s, was officially sanctioned in 1953, was reduced in scope in 1964, further curtailed in 1967 and finally halted in 1973.<sup>[2]</sup> The program used unwitting U.S. and Canadian citizens as its test subjects, which led to controversy regarding its legitimacy.<sup>[3][4][5][6]</sup> MKUltra involved the use of many methodologies to manipulate people's individual mental states and alter brain functions, including the surreptitious administration of drugs (especially LSD) and other **chemicals, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, isolation, verbal and sexual abuse, as well as various forms of torture.**<sup>[7]</sup>

The research was undertaken at 80 institutions, including 44 **colleges and universities**, as well as hospitals, prisons and **pharmaceutical companies.**<sup>[8]</sup> The CIA would operate through these institutions using **front organizations**, although sometimes top officials at these institutions would be aware of the CIA's involvement.<sup>[9]</sup> MKUltra was allocated 6 percent of total CIA funds.<sup>[10]</sup>

Project MKUltra 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 MKUltra 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>[11]</sup>

In 1977, a **Freedom of Information Act** request uncovered a cache of 20,000 documents relating to project MKUltra, which led to Senate hearings later that same year.<sup>[4]</sup> In July 2001 most surviving information regarding MKUltra was officially **declassified**.

### MKUltra

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 Staff**, 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 **Project MKNAOMI** and **Project MKDELTA**.

Headed by **Sidney Gottlieb**, the MKUltra project was started on the order of CIA director **Allen Welsh Dulles** on April 13, 1953.<sup>[14]</sup> Its remit was to develop **mind-controlling drugs for use against the Soviet bloc, largely in response to alleged Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean use of mind control techniques on U.S. prisoners of war in Korea.**<sup>[15]</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>[16]</sup> and would later invent several schemes to drug **Fidel Castro**. **Experiments were often conducted without the subjects' knowledge or consent.**<sup>[17]</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>[18]</sup>

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. Another MKUltra effort, Subproject 54, was the Navy's top secret "Perfect Concussion" program, which was supposed to use sub-aural frequency blasts to erase memory, however the program was never carried out.<sup>[19]</sup>

Because most MKUltra 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 MKUltra and related CIA programs.<sup>[20]</sup> A member of the CIA claims that not all of the records/chemicals were destroyed. Some were smuggled out and kept in private properties and organizations.<sup>[21]</sup>

The project began during a period of what Rupert Cornwell described as "paranoia" at the CIA, when America had lost its nuclear monopoly, and fear of Communism was at its height.<sup>[22]</sup> **James Jesus Angleton**, head of CIA counter-intelligence, believed that the organization had been penetrated by a mole at the highest levels.<sup>[22]</sup>

### **[edit]**Goals

The Agency poured **millions of dollars into studies examining methods of influencing and controlling the mind, and of enhancing their ability to extract information from resistant subjects during interrogation.**<sup>[23][24]</sup>

Some historians have asserted that creating a **"Manchurian Candidate"** subject through "mind control" techniques was a **goal of MKUltra** and related CIA projects.<sup>[25]</sup> Alfred McCoy has claimed that the CIA attempted to focus media attention on these sorts of "ridiculous" programs, so that the public would not look at the primary goal of the research, which was developing effective methods of torture and interrogation. Such authors cite as one example that the

CIA's [KUBARK](#) interrogation manual refers to "studies at McGill University", and that most of the techniques recommended in KUBARK are exactly those that researcher [Donald Ewen Cameron](#) used on his test subjects (sensory deprivation, drugs, isolation, etc.).<sup>[23]</sup>

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 described as follows:<sup>[26]</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 cause the victim to age faster/slower in maturity.
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 will cause temporary/permanent brain damage and loss of memory.
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 a chemical that can cause blisters.
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 person to perform physical activity.

## Experiments

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CIA documents suggest that "chemical, biological and radiological" means were investigated for the purpose of mind control as part of MKUltra.<sup>[27]</sup> A secretive arrangement granted the MKUltra program a percentage of the CIA budget. The MKUltra director was granted six percent of the CIA operating budget in 1953, without oversight or accounting.<sup>[28]</sup> An estimated \$10 million USD (\$80 million adjusted for [inflation](#)) or more was spent.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Drugs

## LSD

Early CIA efforts focused on LSD, which later came to dominate many of MKUltra's programs. Technical Services Staff officials understood that LSD distorted a person's sense of reality, and they felt compelled to learn whether it could alter someone's basic loyalties.<sup>[30]</sup> The CIA wanted to know if they could make Russian spies defect against their will and whether the Russians could do the same to their own operatives.<sup>[30]</sup>

Once Project MKUltra officially got underway in April, 1953, experiments included administering LSD to mental patients, prisoners, drug addicts and prostitutes, "people who could not fight back", as one agency officer put it.<sup>[31]</sup> In one case LSD was administered to a mental patient in Kentucky for 174 days.<sup>[31]</sup> LSD was also administered to CIA employees, military personnel, doctors, other government agents, 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. The aim of this was to find drugs which would irresistibly bring out deep confessions or wipe a subject's mind clean and program him or her as "a robot agent".<sup>[32]</sup>

In Operation Midnight Climax, the CIA set up several brothels in San Francisco, California 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>[33]</sup> In other experiments where people were given LSD without their knowledge, they were interrogated under bright lights with doctors in the background taking notes. The subjects were told that their "trips" would be extended indefinitely if they refused to reveal their secrets. The people being interrogated this way were CIA employees, U. S. military personnel, and agents suspected of working for the other side in the Cold War. Long-term debilitation and several deaths resulted from this.<sup>[32]</sup> Heroin addicts were bribed into taking LSD with offers of more heroin.<sup>[9]</sup>

The office of Security used LSD in interrogations but Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the chemist who directed MKUltra, had other ideas: he thought it could be used in covert operations. Since its effects were temporary, he believed it could be given to high officials and in this way affect the course of important meetings, speeches etc. Since he realized there was a difference in testing the drug in a laboratory and using it in clandestine operations, he initiated a series of experiments where LSD was given to people in "normal" settings without warning. At first, everyone in Technical Services tried it; a typical experiment involved two people in a room where they observed each other for hours and took notes. As the experimentation progressed, a point was reached where outsiders were drugged with no explanation whatsoever and surprise acid trips became something of an occupational hazard among CIA operatives. Adverse reactions often occurred, for example an operative who had received the drug in his morning coffee, became psychotic and ran across Washington, seeing a monster in every car that passed him. Incidents like that reaffirmed that LSD is a dangerous weapon but that only made them more enthusiastic. The experiments continued even after Dr. Frank Olson, an army scientist who had not taken LSD before, went into deep depression after a surprise trip and later fell from a thirteenth story window (it is unclear whether he committed suicide or was murdered before being thrown out of the window).<sup>[34]</sup>

Some subjects' participation was consensual, and in these cases they appeared to be singled out for even more extreme experiments. In one case, seven volunteers in Kentucky were given LSD for 77 consecutive days.<sup>[35]</sup>

LSD was eventually dismissed by MKUltra's researchers as too unpredictable in its results.<sup>[36]</sup> They had given up on the notion that LSD was "the secret that was going to unlock the universe" but it still had a place in the cloak-and-dagger arsenal. However, by 1962, the CIA and the army had developed a series of superhallucinogens such as the highly touted BZ, which was thought to hold greater promise as a mind control weapon. This resulted in the withdrawal of support for many academics and private researchers and LSD research became less of a priority altogether.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Other drugs

Another technique investigated was connecting a barbiturate IV into one arm and an amphetamine IV into the other.<sup>[37]</sup> The barbiturates were released into the person first, and as soon as the person began to fall asleep, the amphetamines were released. The person would then begin babbling incoherently, and it was sometimes possible to ask questions and get useful answers.

Other experiments involved drugs such as temazepam (used under code name MKSEARCH), heroin, morphine, MDMA, mescaline, psilocybin, scopolamine, marijuana, alcohol, sodium pentothal, and ergine (in Subproject 22).<sup>[38]</sup>

## Hypnosis

Declassified MKUltra 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>[39]</sup> Experiments

were conducted with drug induced hypnosis and with anterograde and retrograde amnesia while under the influence of such drugs.