A PLAIN-ENGLISH FACT CHECK

UNWITTING

The Documented Record of CIA Mind Control, LSD and Population Control

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MKULTRA · LSD · COINTELPRO · POPULATION

What the Government's Own Records Show, and What They Don't

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Unwitting

The Documented Record of CIA Mind Control, LSD and Population Control

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A Fact Check Series Book

Unwitting: The Documented Record of CIA Mind Control, LSD and Population Control

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How to Read This Book

Most books about CIA mind control fall into one of two camps. One camp tells you it was all true, every rumor, every wild story, every name dropped on a late-night radio show. The other camp tells you it was a small, sad chapter that ended in the 1960s and that anybody still asking questions needs a hobby. Both camps have one thing in common. They want you to take their word for it.

I don't want you to take my word for anything. That's the whole point of the Fact Check Series. Every fact in this book has a note at the end of its chapter, and nearly every note points to something you can pull up yourself: a Senate hearing, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) document, a court ruling, a government audit, or, when nothing better exists, a named book or news report.

You might ask, "Why bother? Isn't MKULTRA already proven?" Parts of it are. The CIA ran a secret program that drugged people without their knowledge, and the government admitted it under oath in 1977. That isn't a theory. But a lot of what gets stacked on top of that true story has never been proven, and some of it falls apart the minute you check it. If you can't tell the solid parts from the shaky parts, you end up either believing too much or dismissing too much. Both are mistakes.

The Three Labels

Every important claim in this book falls into one of three groups. At the end of each chapter you'll find a Fact Check table that sorts the chapter's main claims into these groups.

Documented. The claim is shown by government records, court records, sworn testimony or official audits. You can pull the source and see it with your own eyes.

Alleged. The claim is serious and has some evidence behind it, but it isn't proven. I'll tell you what the evidence is and exactly where it runs out.

Unsupported or Debunked. The claim is popular, but it fails when you check it, or there is no record behind it so far. I'll tell you what I checked.

A Few Ground Rules

When two official sources give different numbers, I show you both and tell you which one I use and why. You'll see this more than once. Government records from the 1950s were messy, a lot of them were destroyed on purpose, and the people who testified in the 1970s didn't always agree with each other.

I quote a real person only when I can point to where they said it. If a quote has been passed around for years but I can't find where it came from, it doesn't go in.

I'm not going to tell you what to think about the people involved. Some of what you're about to read is ugly. The records are plenty strong enough on their own.

One more thing. In this book, "unwitting" means a person was given a drug or put through an experiment without knowing it. It's the word the CIA itself used. It's also the title of the book, because it describes most of the people in it.

Part I: The Programs

Chapter 1: The Brainwashing Scare (1950-1952)

To understand why the CIA started drugging people, you have to understand what scared it. In the early 1950s, American officials were convinced the Communists had found a way to take over a man's mind. They were wrong about that. But the fear was real, and the fear is what got the money flowing.

A New Word

In September 1950, an American journalist named Edward Hunter wrote an article for the Miami Daily News under the headline "Brain-washing Tactics Force Chinese Into Ranks of Communist Party."[1] Hunter is generally credited with bringing the word into English. Hunter took the idea from a Chinese phrase and later built a whole book around it.

The word caught on fast because it seemed to explain something that frightened people. Later reporting, including a Smithsonian Magazine history, describes Hunter as having worked for the CIA's propaganda side at the time he was popularizing the term.[1] I have not found a primary CIA record that confirms his role, so that part is labeled Alleged. Either way, the word did exactly what a propaganda word is supposed to do. It gave Americans a simple name for a frightening idea.

The Korean War Prisoners

Then came Korea. American prisoners of war started showing up in Communist broadcasts and statements confessing to things they had not done. By February 1953, captured Americans, including a Marine colonel named Frank Schwable, had signed false confessions saying the United States was using germ warfare against the Koreans.[1] According to the same Smithsonian history, roughly 5,000 of about 7,200 American prisoners either petitioned the U.S. government to end the war or signed confessions to alleged crimes.[1]

When the war ended, 21 American soldiers refused to come home.[1] To the public, that seemed impossible. How could American boys choose Communist China over home? "Brainwashing" was the easy answer.

The truth, as later studies showed, was less mysterious. Prisoners were starved, isolated, threatened and worn down over months. That is cruel, but it isn't magic. In 1950, though, nobody in Washington was willing to bet that it was only cruelty. They assumed the other side had a secret weapon, and they wanted one too.

Before BLUEBIRD: CHATTER and Harold Blauer

The CIA wasn't first. The Church Committee found that the Navy started its own drug-interrogation program, Project CHATTER, in the fall of 1947. It grew during the Korean War and ended in 1953.[7]

The Army was in the business too, and the first death on the record isn't Frank Olson's. The Church Committee reported that a man named Harold Blauer "died of circulatory collapse and heart failure" on January 8, 1953, after an intravenous injection given during tests by the New York State Psychiatric Institute. The tests were done under a U.S. Army Chemical Corps contract.[7] The material that accompanied the 1977 Senate hearing describes the injection as a mescaline derivative.[10] Blauer died ten months before Olson, and you'll hear his name far less often.

Project BLUEBIRD

On April 5, 1950, a memo went to CIA Director Roscoe Hillenkoetter laying out a new project called BLUEBIRD. It listed the goals, the training plan and a budget of $65,515. It also said knowledge of the project "should be restricted to the absolute minimum number of persons."[2]

The plan called for interrogation teams of three people: a doctor, a hypnotist and a polygraph technician.[2] The idea was to find out whether drugs, hypnosis and lie detectors together could pull information out of a person who didn't want to give it, and whether the same methods could protect American agents if they were captured.

Over the next year the memos got stranger. A February 2, 1951 memo asked for six "hypospray" devices, which are needle-free injectors, for covertly giving sedatives, and asked about modifying a tear gas pencil.[2] A September 18, 1951 memo described hypnosis over the telephone as "universally successful," while noting that testing along agency lines had not yet been approved.[2] I'd ask you to read that one twice. A CIA memo claimed hypnosis over a phone line worked every time. Nothing in the later record backs that up, and it tells you a lot about how much wishful thinking was in the room.

The Korean Prisoner Tests

For years, the only published account of BLUEBIRD tests on Korean prisoners came from John Marks's 1979 book, The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate." Marks reported that in October 1950, 25 unnamed North Korean prisoners were chosen as the first test subjects for "advanced" interrogation methods.[3]

In 2024 and 2025, the National Security Archive at George Washington University published a collection of more than 1,200 records, drawn mostly from material John Marks had gathered, titled "CIA and the Behavioral Sciences: Mind Control, Drug Experiments and MK-ULTRA."[2,11] In April 2026, The Intercept reported that these records confirm experiments on Korean prisoners. One CIA account of an August 8, 1951 meeting refers to a project in Japan and Korea where the Army used a polygraph operator and psychiatrists on Korean prisoners.[2]

Here is where you have to read carefully. The Intercept's first headline said the CIA ran these tests. On June 15, 2026, it corrected the story to say the experiments were run by the Army's Operations Research Office, not the CIA, even though the documents are CIA records.[2] That kind of detail matters. The records show the CIA knew about and was interested in these tests. They don't show the CIA ran them.

As for the 25 prisoners in October 1950, that number still rests on one author. I have not matched it to a primary record, so it stays Alleged.

BLUEBIRD Becomes ARTICHOKE

In August 1951, BLUEBIRD was renamed ARTICHOKE.[4] The next year, responsibility for it moved to the CIA's Inspection and Security Office.[4] The name changed. The questions didn't. Could a person be made to talk against his will? Could he be made to forget he'd talked? Could he be made to do something he would never normally do?

The CIA was also looking overseas for places to do work it couldn't do at home. The Senate's Church Committee later quoted an ARTICHOKE memo that said working with a foreign country's scientists "might be very advantageous" because that government "permitted certain activities which were not permitted by the United States government."[5] The Committee warned in its report that research abroad must never be used to get around American law.[5] Think about why that warning needed to be written at all.

In 1952, a memo to Allen Dulles, then the CIA's deputy director and soon to be its director, addressed the fact that there was no real proof the Soviets or Chinese had a mind-control breakthrough. The memo's answer was: "We cannot accept this lack of evidence as proof."[2] In plain words, the absence of evidence was treated as a reason to keep going. That attitude runs through the rest of this book.

ARTICHOKE in the Field

What did ARTICHOKE actually do? According to the Church Committee, its overseas interrogations combined sodium pentothal, a sedative, with hypnosis.[7] The CIA told the Committee that ARTICHOKE ended in 1956. The Committee wasn't convinced. It found evidence that the CIA's Office of Security and Office of Medical Services kept using "special interrogation" techniques for several years after that.[7]

Sidney Gottlieb's 1975 testimony to the Church Committee, released in full by the National Security Archive, adds detail on a set of interrogations in 1955 and 1956. In them, a drug referred to only by the code name P-1 was given to subjects held overseas. The transcript is a poor-quality scan, so I'll stick to the clearest passages.[9]

- A cable read to Gottlieb reported that 200 units of P-1 given to one subject caused a "severe classic paranoid reaction."[9]
- Another cable said that because of a suicide attempt, the writer doubted a prisoner was a "suitable candidate either Artichoke or P-1."[9]
- At least one candidate was under a death sentence. Gottlieb said he "didn't have a lot of experience" with a subject in that position.[9]
- Asked who approved the P-1 operations, Gottlieb said the approval went through the Deputy Director for Plans and "didn't involve the medical staff, and it didn't involve the Office of Security." He said Frank Wisner's name "comes up."[9]

- Asked about the fake medical setting used in one case, he said the subject's "unwitting" state might have been "the key thing."[9]
- And his overall view at the time: "I think our expectations were probably modest, and the success of these interrogations exceeded them."[9]

Gottlieb also told the Committee that he found BLUEBIRD and ARTICHOKE nearly the same thing and was "confused" about the difference between them, and that he was never present at an ARTICHOKE drug-and-hypnosis session himself.[8] Keep that in mind when you read confident claims about exactly what these programs did. The man in charge of the chemistry wasn't sure either.

The Fake Vaccine Memo

One ARTICHOKE document from this period has been passed around a lot lately, so let's look at it now. An April 24, 1952 CIA memo on "Special Research for Artichoke" talked about using fake vaccines as a way to give drugs to subjects during interrogations.[6] In February 2026, a British newspaper wrote about the memo, and it spread quickly online, often with the claim that real vaccines had been used for mind control.

The National Security Archive, which has studied these records for decades, says the memo contains no evidence that real vaccines were used for mind control.[6] What the memo shows is that CIA planners thought about disguising a drug as a shot. That's bad enough on its own. It is not the same thing as proof that public vaccine programs were used to control minds. We'll come back to this in Chapter 19.

What the CIA's Own Experts Concluded

At the start of this chapter, I said the brainwashing fear was wrong. That isn't only hindsight. During the 1975 questioning, a committee lawyer read Gottlieb a 1952 memo from the CIA's Chief of Medical Staff that said there was "ample evidence in the reports of innumerable interrogations" that the Communists used drugs and other coercive methods.[8] That was the belief at the time.

By 1977, the CIA's own psychologist told the Senate something different. John Gittinger, who spent 26 years at the CIA working on interrogation, testified that by 1962 or 1963 he was satisfied that "brainwashing, so called," did not depend on any special drugs.[10] In other words, the CIA spent more than a decade chasing a secret weapon, and its own expert concluded the other side never had one.

What Came Next

By early 1953, the CIA had a set of projects, a pile of memos and very little to show for them. It also had a new director. Allen Dulles took over in February 1953, and within two months he approved the program that would make all of this famous. That's Chapter 3. First, we need to look at where some of the expertise came from.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Edward Hunter used "brain-washing" in a September 1950 article	Documented	Miami Daily News article; note 1
Hunter worked for the CIA's propaganda side	Alleged	Reported by Smithsonian; no primary record found yet
21 American prisoners refused to come home after Korea	Documented	Note 1
Project BLUEBIRD began in 1950 with a $65,515 budget	Documented	April 5, 1950 memo; note 2
Hypnosis by phone was "universally successful"	Unsupported	A 1951 memo claimed it; no later record supports it
The Army tested interrogation methods on Korean prisoners	Documented	CIA records released 2024-2025; Army, not CIA, per The Intercept correction
25 North Korean prisoners were the first test subjects in October 1950	Alleged	One author (Marks, 1979); not yet matched to a primary record
BLUEBIRD was renamed ARTICHOKE in August 1951	Documented	Note 4
A 1952 memo discussed fake vaccines as a cover for drugging subjects	Documented	Note 6
Real vaccines were used for mind control	Unsupported	No evidence in the memo, per the National Security Archive
The Navy ran Project CHATTER from 1947 to 1953	Documented	Church Committee, p. 387
Harold Blauer died after an Army-contract drug injection on January 8, 1953	Documented	Church Committee, p. 386
ARTICHOKE-style interrogations continued after the CIA said it ended in 1956	Documented	Church Committee, p. 388
P-1 caused a "severe classic paranoid reaction" in a 1955-56 interrogation	Documented	Gottlieb testimony, October 17, 1975
By 1962-63 the CIA's psychologist concluded brainwashing did not depend on drugs	Documented	Gittinger testimony, 1977

Notes

1. "The True Story of Brainwashing and How It Shaped America," Smithsonian Magazine. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/true-story-brainwashing-and-how-it-shaped-america-180963400/

2. Garrett Kim, report on MK-ULTRA Korean War prisoner experiments, The Intercept, April 26, 2026, corrected June 15, 2026. https://theintercept.com/2026/04/26/mk-ultra-korean-war-prisoner-experiments/ The underlying records are in the National Security Archive collection "CIA and the Behavioral Sciences: Mind Control, Drug Experiments and MK-ULTRA" (released December 2024 to April 2025).

3. John Marks, The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control (New York: Times Books, 1979), as cited in note 2.

4. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 387-388: BLUEBIRD "was approved by the Director in 1950" and was renamed ARTICHOKE in August 1951; in 1952 responsibility for ARTICHOKE moved to the Inspection and Security Office. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

5. U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), Final Report, Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence (April 1976), p. 422. https://archive.org/details/ChurchCommittee_FullReport/_Book-I_Foreign-and-Military-Intelligence/page/73/mode/2up

6. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," Briefing Book, June 29, 2026. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets

7. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 386-388 (CHATTER, Blauer, ARTICHOKE methods and end date). https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

8. Sidney Gottlieb, testimony before the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, October 15, 1975, as released by the National Security Archive. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/DOC04-19751015.pdf

9. Sidney Gottlieb, testimony before the Senate Select Committee, October 17, 1975, as released by the National Security Archive. Scan quality is poor; page numbers are approximate. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/DOC05-19751017.pdf

10. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977, testimony of John Gittinger and Appendix A. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

11. National Security Archive, Briefing Book No. 880, announcing the collection "CIA and the Behavioral Sciences," December 23, 2024. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/node/4567

Chapter 2: Operation Paperclip

When World War II ended, the United States and the Soviet Union raced each other for something besides territory. They raced for German scientists. The American side of that race became known as Operation Paperclip, and it shows up in almost every book about CIA mind control. So the fair question is: what does the record actually connect it to?

What Paperclip Was

After the war, the U.S. government set up the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency (JIOA) to find, vet and bring over German and other foreign scientists, technicians and engineers. The JIOA ran from 1945 until it was disbanded in 1962.[1]

The National Archives holds the JIOA's Foreign Scientist Case Files, covering 1945 to 1958, in Record Group 330, the records of the Secretary of Defense. Those files contain personnel dossiers on "over 1,500" people brought to the United States under Paperclip and similar programs.[1] National Geographic, writing in 2025, uses the same rough figure of about 1,500 scientists from Germany and Austria.[2] You'll see 1,600 in other places. I use "over 1,500" because that is what the National Archives itself says about its own files.

According to National Geographic, Paperclip proper officially lasted until 1947, with similar programs continuing into the 1960s.[2] The name came from the paperclips officials attached to the dossiers of scientists they wanted waved through with only a light review.[2]

Who Came Over

The most famous name is Wernher von Braun, who built the V-2 rocket for Hitler and later helped put Americans on the Moon. He was an officer in the SS.[2] Kurt Debus, another former SS member, became the first director of the Kennedy Space Center.[2]

Others had worse records. Georg Rickhey managed the use of enslaved workers at the Mittelwerk underground rocket factory. He was sent back to West Germany in 1947 to face war crimes charges and was acquitted.[2] Arthur Rudolph, who worked under Rickhey at Mittelwerk, went on to help build the Saturn V rocket. In the early 1980s, the Justice Department pursued a war crimes case against him, and in 1984 he left the United States rather than face it.[2]

Hubertus Strughold is often called the father of space medicine. After his death, he came under scrutiny for his connection to medical experiments on concentration camp prisoners.[2] Historian Brian Crim, quoted by National Geographic, says most Paperclip scientists were Nazi Party members or belonged to banned organizations such as the SS.[2]

None of that is in dispute. The U.S. government knowingly brought over men with Nazi pasts because it wanted their skills, and it went easy on vetting to do it. That part is Documented.

The Mind-Control Link

Here's where the story usually goes further than the record. A lot of writing about MKULTRA says Paperclip scientists directly ran or designed CIA mind-control experiments, or that Nazi concentration camp research was the foundation of MKULTRA.

You might ask, "Isn't that obviously true? The timing lines up." The timing does line up. The same government that hired these men was, a few years later, drugging people without their consent. It's reasonable to ask whether the same attitude, and maybe some of the same people, carried over.

But reasonable questions aren't proof. For this edition of the book, I looked for a primary record, meaning a government document, testimony or court record, that names a specific Paperclip scientist as running or designing a specific MKULTRA, BLUEBIRD or ARTICHOKE project. I did not find one in the sources listed in this book. Stephen Kinzer, who has written the most detailed biography of the man who ran MKULTRA, did not raise a Paperclip link in his written testimony to Congress in June 2026.[3] National Geographic's 2025 history of Paperclip doesn't mention mind-control research at all.[2]

That doesn't mean there was no link. It means that, as of this writing, the claim that Paperclip scientists ran CIA mind-control experiments is Alleged, not Documented. If I find a primary record before the final edition, it goes in, with the source.

Why This Chapter Is Still Here

Paperclip matters to this story even without a proven direct link, for one simple reason. It shows how the U.S. government made decisions in the years right after the war. When officials believed national security was on the line, they were willing to look past things they would normally call unacceptable. They made that choice with rocket scientists in 1945. They made the same kind of choice with unwitting drug testing in 1953. That pattern is Documented, and it's the pattern you need to keep in mind for the rest of Part I.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
The JIOA ran from 1945 to 1962	Documented	National Archives; note 1
Over 1,500 foreign scientists' dossiers are in the Paperclip files	Documented	National Archives, Record Group 330
Many Paperclip scientists were Nazi Party or SS members	Documented	Von Braun and Debus were SS; note 2
Arthur Rudolph left the U.S. in 1984 to avoid a war crimes case	Documented	Note 2
Paperclip scientists directly ran or designed CIA mind-control experiments	Alleged	No primary record found for this edition
Nazi camp research was the foundation of MKULTRA	Alleged	Widely claimed; no primary record found for this edition

Notes

1. National Archives, Interagency Working Group, "Record Group 330: Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense," description of the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency Foreign Scientist Case Files, 1945-1958. https://www.archives.gov/iwg/declassified-records/rg-330-defense-secretary

2. "Operation Paperclip," National Geographic, May 12, 2025. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/operation-paperclip

3. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf

Chapter 3: MKULTRA Is Born (1953)

If you only remember one date from this book, make it April 13, 1953. That's the day the CIA's director signed off on MKULTRA.

The Approval

The Senate's Church Committee, which investigated the CIA in 1975 and 1976, put it in one plain sentence: "MKULTRA was approved by the DCI on April 13, 1953 along the lines proposed by ADDP Helms."[1] DCI means Director of Central Intelligence, which at the time was Allen Dulles. ADDP means Assistant Deputy Director for Plans, the job Richard Helms held then. Helms is the same man who, twenty years later as CIA director, would order the program's files destroyed.

The man put in charge was Sidney Gottlieb, a chemist the CIA had hired in 1951.[2] Gottlieb ran the chemical side of the CIA's Technical Services Division (TSD). Over the next decade, his name shows up on nearly every part of this story.

What Helms Proposed

The Church Committee quotes from the 1953 proposal itself. Helms wrote about building a "capability in the covert use of biological and chemical agent materials." He described a material that "causes a reversible non-toxic aberrant mental state," and he said such materials "could potentially aid in discrediting individuals, eliciting information" and other uses.[6] Read those words again. Discrediting people was one of the stated goals from day one.

The Committee also found something about how decisions were made that should bother anyone. It found "there is no evidence that either the executive branch or Congress were ever informed" of these testing programs.[6] At the 1977 hearing, a CIA official said that to his knowledge there was no presidential knowledge of the project at the time. Turner added that there were no records showing Congress knew through the budget process, and when he was asked whether the program had been kept from Congress, he said, "I have no way to prove that, sir."[4]

How It Was Set Up

What made MKULTRA different from BLUEBIRD and ARTICHOKE wasn't only its goals. It was how it was paid for. According to the Church Committee, the proposal let the CIA spend six percent of TSD's research and development budget without the formal contracts and paperwork the agency normally required.[1] In other words, it was built from day one to be hard to track.

Much of the money went out through outside organizations so researchers wouldn't know, or wouldn't have to admit, that the CIA was paying. When Gottlieb answered a letter from one researcher in 1953, he used the letterhead of a front company called "Chemrophyl Associates."[3]

Other money moved through foundations that looked independent but were not. We'll meet one of them, the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, in Chapter 7.

Controls Switched Off

The Committee found that "the CIA's normal administrative controls were waived for programs involving chemical and biological agents." The head of the CIA's own Audit Branch said that produced "gross administrative failures."[6] Even the CIA's Inspector General had warned, in a 1957 survey, that "the knowledge that the Agency is engaging in unethical and illicit activities would have serious repercussions."[6]

The 1963 Inspector General survey listed four reasons the program was so sensitive. One was that public disclosure "could induce serious adverse reaction in U.S. public opinion." The same survey said research on controlling behavior was considered "professionally unethical" by many in medicine.[6] So the CIA's own internal reviewers knew. They wrote it down. The program kept going.

Even the Director of Central Intelligence wasn't always told. John McCone, who ran the CIA from late 1961, wasn't briefed on the unwitting LSD program until 1963.[6]

How Big It Was

Most of what we know about MKULTRA's size comes from a joint Senate hearing held on August 3, 1977, by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research.[4] Here are the numbers the CIA gave the senators:

- 149 MKULTRA subprojects, plus 33 more subprojects on other intelligence work that had been funded under MKULTRA.[4]
- 80 institutions, including 44 colleges or universities, 15 research foundations or chemical and drug companies, 12 hospitals or clinics, and 3 prisons.[4]
- 185 researchers and assistants who did not work for the government.[4]

At the same hearing, Senator Edward Kennedy cited "eighty-six universities or institutions."[4] So you will see both 80 and 86 in books and articles. I use 80 because that is the figure in the CIA's own breakdown given to the committee, and it's the one that adds up category by category. I mention 86 so you know where the other number comes from.

How many of those 149 subprojects involved testing drugs on people who didn't know it? CIA Director Stansfield Turner told the senators that six of them had enough evidence of unwitting testing to say so.[4] When he was asked how many people had been tested in total, his answer was two words: "No idea."[4]

What the 149 Subprojects Covered

Turner's 1977 statement broke the 149 subprojects into categories. This is the most detailed public picture of what MKULTRA actually paid for, so here it is, in Turner's groupings:[4]

- Drugs and alcohol: 17 probably didn't involve people, 14 definitely used human volunteers, 19 probably used people who may not have known, and 6 involved unwitting subjects.
- Hypnosis: 8 subprojects, 2 of them combining hypnosis with drugs.
- Getting chemicals and drugs: 7.
- "Magicians' arts," meaning tricks for slipping someone a drug, distracting them or passing a message: 4.
- Human behavior, sleep research and psychotherapy: 9.
- Library searches and conferences: 6.
- Motivation studies, studies of defectors, personality assessment and training: 23.
- Polygraph research: 3.
- Funding pass-throughs to outside organizations: 3.
- Drugs, toxins and biological materials in human tissue, and exotic disease agents: 6.
- Work that can't be determined from the records: 3.
- Work with the Army's Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick, linked to MKNAOMI: 3 subprojects, about $11,000 from 1953 to 1960.
- Single subprojects on electroshock, harassment techniques, analysis of extrasensory perception (ESP) and aerosols, and four on sabotaging crops and materials.
- One or two subprojects each on blood grouping, animal control, energy storage in living systems and stimulus-response in biological systems.
- Three canceled before work began, including one on brain concussion.

Not all of it was sinister. Senator Malcolm Wallop made that point at the hearing, and Turner agreed.[4] Personality assessment and library searches aren't human experiments. But you don't need all 149 to be sinister. You need six unwitting-testing subprojects, and the CIA admitted to those.

What It Was Looking For

The subprojects ran all over the map. Some tested LSD and other drugs. Some studied hypnosis, as we'll see with Dr. Louis Jolyon West in Chapter 12. Some funded research on drugs that cause sleep or memory loss. A CIA note added to the 1977 hearing record says that Dr. Charles Geschickter "continued his research for sleep- and amnesia-producing drugs under Project MKSEARCH through July 1967."[4] MKSEARCH was the name given to the program that followed MKULTRA in the mid-1960s.

The CIA also set up a procedure called MKDELTA to control how MKULTRA materials were used overseas. The Church Committee found that use abroad began in 1953, and possibly as early as 1950.[5]

Alongside MKULTRA, the CIA ran a separate program with the Army called MKNAOMI. It was paired with Army work at Fort Detrick, Maryland, and focused on biological agents and ways to deliver them. The Church Committee found it "contemplated a first use of biological weapons by

the CIA."[5] After President Nixon ordered biological weapons stockpiles destroyed in 1969, the Committee found the CIA kept "approximately 11 grams" of a shellfish toxin anyway, in violation of that order.[5] The Committee also found that Fort Detrick's Special Operations Division developed poison darts and pills for the program, along with a dart gun for knocking out guard dogs, and that MKNAOMI kept no written records of transfers of agents such as anthrax and shellfish toxin, so the CIA couldn't say what it actually had.[6]

The Hospital Wing

One of the strangest items in the 1977 record is Subproject 35. Through a cut-out, the CIA put $375,000 toward a building fund for a new wing at a private medical institution. Because it looked like a private donation, it was matched with federal hospital construction money. The institution didn't know where the money really came from.[4] Senator Richard Schweiker put the total effect at more than $1 million in matching federal funds and read from the agreement: "One-sixth of the total space in the new hospital wing will be available to the Chemical Division of TSS."[4] Turner said the money "was used to build the hospital," and a CIA official said the record shows only planning for that space, not what happened afterward.[4]

The supplementary material to the hearing names Georgetown for Subproject 45, which ran from 1955 to 1963, and says Dr. Charles Geschickter's work continued under MKSEARCH through July 1967.[4] It also says it's impossible to determine whether the Gorman Annex at that hospital was involved.[4]

Cancer Patients and "Knockout" Drugs

The 1977 documents show research on a "knockout" drug, sometimes called the "K" drug, running alongside painkiller research for cancer patients.[4] A 1955 expense authorization under Subproject 23 paid hospital expenses for "certain persons suffering from incurable cancer" so their reactions could be studied during their terminal illness. The amount was $658.05.[4] Another proposal described studying "methods for the administration of drugs without the knowledge of the patient" and writing a manual on it, with $1,000 set aside.[4]

Gottlieb's Own LSD Use

Gottlieb told the Church Committee he had taken LSD himself, knowingly, "three or four times." He said the reason CIA employees were exposed to it was so that people who "might someday be covertly attacked by it" would know what it felt like. He also listed the drugs his staff studied: LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, tetrahydrocannabinol (the active ingredient in marijuana) and a drug called Meretran.[7]

After MKULTRA: MKSEARCH, OFTEN and CHICKWIT

MKULTRA's financial files list what came after it. MKSEARCH was funded from fiscal year 1966 through fiscal year 1972. A project called OFTEN tested drugs on animals and humans at Edgewood Arsenal. CHICKWIT collected information on drugs from Europe and Asia.[4] Turner

told the Senate that the CHICKWIT files were intact and that he had ordered that no one touch them without his permission.[4]

Turner also called MKULTRA "merely a funding mechanism."[4] That's a useful way to think about it. MKULTRA wasn't one experiment. It was a pipeline for money, built to avoid paperwork, and the money went wherever Gottlieb's office decided it should go.

Did It Work?

The short answer is no, not in the way its planners hoped. Stephen Kinzer, who wrote the biography of Sidney Gottlieb titled Poisoner in Chief, told Congress in June 2026 that by 1963 Gottlieb had concluded the program failed, and that "there is no such thing as mind control."[2] Keep in mind that's Kinzer's account of Gottlieb's conclusion, not a recording of Gottlieb himself.

You might ask, "If it didn't work, why does it matter?" It matters because of what was done to people while the CIA was finding out. A program doesn't have to succeed to hurt people. The next three chapters are about those people.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
MKULTRA was approved April 13, 1953	Documented	Church Committee, Book I; note 1
Sidney Gottlieb ran MKULTRA	Documented	Note 1 and note 2
MKULTRA could spend 6% of TSD research money without normal contracts	Documented	Church Committee; note 1
149 subprojects, 80 institutions, 185 outside researchers	Documented	1977 Senate hearing; note 4
86 institutions	Documented as said, but not used	Senator Kennedy's figure at the same hearing
Six subprojects showed unwitting testing	Documented	Turner's testimony, 1977
The CIA kept about 11 grams of shellfish toxin after the 1969 order	Documented	Church Committee; note 5
Gottlieb concluded "there is no such thing as mind control"	Alleged	Kinzer's account to Congress; not a direct record of Gottlieb's words
Helms's 1953 proposal listed "discrediting individuals" as a possible use	Documented	Church Committee, p. 399
No evidence the President or Congress was told about the testing	Documented	Church Committee, p. 385
Turner broke the 149 subprojects into categories, including 6 with unwitting subjects	Documented	1977 hearing
The CIA secretly put $375,000 toward a hospital wing that drew federal matching funds	Documented	Subproject 35, 1977 hearing
MKULTRA paid hospital costs to study terminally	Documented	Subproject 23, 1977 hearing

Claim	Label	Notes
ill cancer patients		
MKSEARCH ran from fiscal 1966 to fiscal 1972	Documented	1977 hearing documents
MKNAOMI kept no written records of transfers of anthrax or shellfish toxin	Documented	Church Committee, pp. 405-406

Notes

1. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), p. 390 (approval) and p. 405 (budget). Archive.org text of Book I. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

2. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf See also Stephen Kinzer, Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control (2019). https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781250140432

3. Tom O'Neill and Dan Piepenbring, "Inside the Archive of an LSD Researcher With Ties to the CIA's MKUltra Mind Control Project," The Intercept, November 24, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/11/24/cia-mkultra-louis-jolyon-west/

4. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources, 95th Congress, 1st Session, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

5. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I, pp. 361-363 (MKNAOMI and shellfish toxin) and p. 391 (MKDELTA). https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

6. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 385-392, 399 and 405-406 (Helms proposal, waived controls, 1957 and 1963 Inspector General surveys, McCone, MKNAOMI records). https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

7. Sidney Gottlieb, testimony before the Senate Select Committee, October 15, 1975, as released by the National Security Archive. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/DOC04-19751015.pdf

Chapter 4: The Death of Frank Olson (1953)

Seven months after MKULTRA was approved, a man died. His name was Frank Olson, and for twenty-two years his family didn't know the real reason why.

Who He Was

Frank Olson was a civilian scientist who worked for the Army at Fort Detrick, Maryland, the center of the Army's biological warfare research.[1] He was not a test subject in any formal sense. He was a colleague. That's what makes his story so hard to read.

What Happened

In November 1953, Olson attended a meeting called by the CIA. During that meeting, according to the Church Committee, he was given LSD in a glass of Cointreau without being told.[2] The 1977 Senate hearing record puts it this way: about a week after he unwittingly took the drug, he "leaped to his death from a hotel room window in New York City."[1]

The Church Committee says he fell from a tenth-floor window of the Statler Hotel in New York.[2] A federal judge writing in 2013 described the fall as thirteen stories.[3] I can't tell you from these records which number is right. Both come from official sources, so I show you both.

He died in the early morning hours of November 28, 1953.[4] The Church Committee's report gives the date of death as November 27 in one place and describes the fall as happening early on November 28 in another.[2] Most sources use November 28.

The Week in Detail

The Church Committee's report walks through that week hour by hour, and it's worth reading in its own words.

In November 1953, CIA and Army scientists met for a conference at Deep Creek Lake, Maryland.[10] On November 19, Olson received about 70 micrograms of LSD without knowing it.[2] Gottlieb told the Committee it was a "very small dose" put into a bottle of Cointreau, and that his deputy, Robert Lashbrook, put it there. Gottlieb recalled that "the drug had a definite effect on the group."[2]

Olson didn't bounce back. An Army colleague named Ruwet recalled that at breakfast in the following days Olson "appeared to be agitated."[2] Lashbrook told Ruwet that "Dr. Olson was in serious trouble and needed immediate professional attention."[2] They took him to New York to see Dr. Harold Abramson, a doctor whose LSD research, the Committee found, was indirectly funded by the CIA.[2]

In the early morning of November 28, in a room he was sharing with Lashbrook at the Statler Hotel, Olson went through the window. Lashbrook reported that Olson "had crashed through

the closed window blind" and "fell to his death from the window of our room on the 10th floor." The time was about 2:30 a.m. Gottlieb was told at about 2:45.[2]

Who Approved It

The Committee found that neither the head of the Technical Services Staff nor the Deputy Director for Plans specifically approved the experiment Olson was part of. Gottlieb went ahead with the approval of his immediate supervisor.[2]

On February 12, 1954, CIA Director Allen Dulles criticized the head of the Technical Services Staff for "poor judgment ... in authorizing the use of this drug on such an unwitting basis."[2] But a note from the Deputy Director made sure nobody took it too hard: "These are not reprimands and no personnel file notation are being made."[2]

And the program didn't stop. At the 1977 hearing, Senator Daniel Inouye pointed out that Subproject 3, the safehouse program you'll read about in Chapter 5, kept running for years after Olson died. Turner said he couldn't explain that, and that he found no evidence anyone involved had ever been disciplined.[11]

When President Ford's Rockefeller Commission described the case in 1975, without naming Olson, it said LSD "was administered to an employee of the Department of the Army without his knowledge" and that "several days later, he jumped from a tenth floor window of his room and died as a result."[12] Notice the word "jumped." Twenty-two years later, that was still the official version.

The Twenty-Two-Year Silence

For two decades, Olson's family believed he had taken his own life, with no idea a drug was involved. That changed in 1975, when President Ford's Rockefeller Commission reported on CIA activities inside the United States and mentioned an Army scientist who had been given LSD and later died.[5] The family recognized the story as their own.

On July 21, 1975, President Ford met with the Olson family at the White House.[6] The following year, Congress passed a private relief bill, S. 3035, to compensate them. The bill as first introduced in the Senate proposed $312,000 each. The version that passed paid $187,500 each to Frank Olson's widow, Alice, and his three children, Lisa, Eric and Nils, for a total of $750,000.[6] President Ford signed it into law on October 12, 1976.[6]

You'll see some sources say the family was paid in 1975. The Ford Library's own file on the bill shows the signing in October 1976, so that's the date I use.

Suicide or Murder?

Here's where the record splits. The government's position, then and since, is that Olson's death followed a bad reaction to LSD. His sons came to believe something different: that their father was killed.

Stephen Kinzer told Congress in June 2026 that Olson planned to quit and that the evidence suggests his death may not have been a suicide.[7] In 1994, the family had his body exhumed and a new autopsy done. According to the court's later summary, it raised doubts about suicide.[8]

On November 28, 2012, exactly 59 years after their father died, Eric and Nils Olson sued the United States. Their case was Olson v. United States in federal court in Washington, D.C.[3,8] Judge James Boasberg dismissed it on July 17, 2013. He did not rule on whether the CIA killed Frank Olson. He ruled on whether the sons could still sue. He found that the 1976 settlement, in which the family accepted payment and gave up their claims, barred one claim, and that the rest were too late under the statute of limitations or outside what the government allows itself to be sued for.[9]

What makes the ruling worth reading is what the judge said along the way. He opened his opinion this way: "In 1953, CIA employees slipped LSD into a scientist's drink. The acid trip turned fatal when the scientist, while under the CIA's care, fell thirteen stories from a hotel window. Or so the CIA would have us believe."[3] He also wrote that "the public record supports many of the allegations that follow, farfetched as they may sound."[9]

A federal judge saying a claim is supported by the public record is not the same as a judge finding it proven. He threw out the case on procedural grounds. So the murder theory stays Alleged. But it is an allegation that a federal judge took seriously enough to say so in writing.

Why Olson Matters

Frank Olson is the best-known victim of MKULTRA because his case was the first one the government had to admit. It also shows the pattern we'll see again: a secret experiment, a cover story, decades of silence, and an apology only after outsiders forced the truth into the open.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Olson was given LSD without his knowledge at a CIA meeting in November 1953	Documented	1977 Senate hearing; Church Committee
He died after falling from a New York hotel window about a week later	Documented	Floor given as tenth (Church Committee) or thirteen stories (2013 court opinion)
The family learned the truth in 1975	Documented	Rockefeller Commission; note 5
Congress paid the family $750,000; signed October 12, 1976	Documented	Ford Library bill file; note 6
Olson was murdered	Alleged	Family's position; judge said the public record supports many allegations but dismissed on procedure
The sons' 2012 lawsuit was dismissed in 2013	Documented	Olson v. United States; notes 3 and 9
Olson received about 70 micrograms of LSD in Cointreau on November 19, 1953	Documented	Church Committee, p. 395-396

Claim	Label	Notes
Neither the TSS chief nor the Deputy Director for Plans approved the experiment	Documented	Church Committee, p. 396
Dulles criticized "poor judgment," but a note said "These are not reprimands"	Documented	Church Committee, pp. 399-400
No one was disciplined, and the testing continued	Documented	1977 hearing
A 1994 exhumation raised doubts about suicide	Documented (as summarized by the court)	Olson v. United States

Notes

1. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf
2. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 395-399. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt
3. Olson v. United States, 953 F. Supp. 2d 223 (D.D.C. 2013), Civil Action No. 12-1924 (JEB), Memorandum Opinion, July 17, 2013. https://leagle.com/decision/inadvfdco140317000255
4. "Nov. 28, 1953: LSD and the death of a CIA scientist," ABA Journal. https://abajournal.com/magazine/article/nov-28-1953-lsd-and-the-death-of-a-cia-scientist
5. Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02330017
6. Gerald R. Ford Library, White House Records Office, file on S. 3035, "Relief of Alice W. Olson," 94th Congress, including Senate Report 94-827 and the White House press release of October 12, 1976. https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0055/1669605.pdf
7. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf
8. Summary of Olson v. United States, 953 F. Supp. 2d 223 (D.D.C. 2013), describing the 1994 exhumation, the 1976 settlement under Private Law 94-126, the November 28, 2012 filing date and the court's holdings. https://app.midpage.ai/case/olson-v-united-states-2660361
9. Courthouse News Service, report on the dismissal of the Olson family's lawsuit. https://www.courthousenews.com/cia-murder-claims-are-credible-but-too-late/
10. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977, Appendix A (reprint of Church Committee pages), p. 395. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf
11. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977, questioning by Senator Inouye. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf
12. Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975, p. 227. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/36326NCJRS.pdf

Chapter 5: Safehouses and Operation Midnight Climax

Frank Olson was dosed by people he knew. Most of MKULTRA's unwitting subjects were dosed by people they had never met, in apartments the CIA rented for that purpose. This chapter is about those apartments.

What a Safehouse Was

In spy language, a safehouse is a private apartment or house used for secret meetings. The CIA used some of them for something else. The Church Committee described how it worked: people were invited to a safehouse, given a drug in a drink or in their food without being told, and watched by CIA staff through a one-way mirror.[1]

At the 1977 Senate hearing, CIA Director Stansfield Turner confirmed that some of the unwitting drug testing "was carried out in what is known in the intelligence trade as safe houses," in San Francisco and New York City.[2] When Senator Kennedy asked about "the two locations on the east coast and the west coast which were known as safe houses," Turner answered, "To the best of our knowledge, there were only two locations."[2] Turner also told the senators that three people had now been identified as involved, up from the one person previously reported.[2]

Who Ran Them

The safehouses were run by George Hunter White, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics who also worked as a CIA consultant. As you'll see below, the name "Morgan Hall" came up under oath at the 1977 hearing as the person CIA money was paid to.[2]

San Francisco historian Gary Kamiya, writing in the San Francisco Chronicle, describes the operation that came to be called Midnight Climax as running from 1955 to 1965 in an apartment at 225 Chestnut Street on Telegraph Hill. White was transferred to San Francisco in 1955. Prostitutes brought men from North Beach bars to the apartment, where the men were dosed with LSD while White watched through a two-way mirror. Some of the women were paid partly in favors, such as help getting out of jail.[3]

I want to be straight with you about the sourcing here. Turner's testimony confirms the safehouses existed in San Francisco and New York and were used for unwitting testing. The "Morgan Hall" name is in the Senate record. The street address, the dates and the use of prostitutes come from Kamiya's column, which draws mainly on John Marks's 1979 book and on interviews quoted there.[3] They're consistent with the official record, and Senator Kennedy's description at the hearing of two-way mirrors and bedroom decorations in San Francisco matches them.[2] But because they rest on reporting rather than a government document, the Fact Check table labels them separately.

Subproject 3

The safehouse testing had a number: MKULTRA Subproject 3. The 1963 Inspector General report, as quoted in the Senate record, described its purpose as "to observe the behavior of unwitting persons being questioned after having been given a drug."[2]

How were people picked? The Church Committee, working from the Inspector General's report, says subjects were chosen at random in bars, with no consent beforehand, no medical screening and no follow-up afterward.[1] Here's a wrinkle. At the 1977 hearing, a CIA official told Senator Schweiker that the surviving record doesn't show the contacts were made in bars.[2] So the Church Committee and the 1977 CIA witnesses don't fully agree on how subjects were found. I give you both. Either way, the people who were dosed didn't know it.

The Inspector General also found that subjects sometimes "became ill for hours or days," and that one had to be hospitalized.[1]

The Narcotics Connection

The men running the apartments weren't CIA officers. They were agents of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, which the Church Committee says served as a "cut-out" for the CIA.[5] The Inspector General put it bluntly: "the handling of test subjects in the last analysis rests with the [Bureau of Narcotics] agent working alone."[5]

Did the head of that bureau know? Gottlieb told the Church Committee, "I remember meeting Mr. Anslinger and had the general feeling that he was aware."[6] Harry Anslinger ran the Bureau of Narcotics for more than thirty years.

President Ford's Rockefeller Commission said the testing of unsuspecting people "in normal social situations" began in 1955 under an informal arrangement with a federal drug agency.[7] Its conclusion was one sentence: "It was clearly illegal to test potentially dangerous drugs on unsuspecting United States citizens."[7]

"Morgan Hall" in the Senate Record

At the 1977 hearing, the alias "Morgan Hall" came up under oath. Philip Goldman, a former CIA project officer, testified that he "was in charge of disbursing the moneys to Morgan Hall." He first said he didn't know about a San Francisco safehouse, then acknowledged approving money for New York, which he said went to a Bureau of Narcotics apartment. He said he couldn't remember what the program was actually doing.[2]

John Gittinger, the CIA psychologist, testified that he met Morgan Hall at a safehouse "four or five times" between about 1956 and 1961, to interview informants about their sexual habits. He said he knew about the LSD tests but had "no direct knowledge" of how drugs were given. Asked about the decor, he said, "I didn't see the red curtains."[2]

Senator Kennedy summed up what the documents showed: safehouses on both coasts used over "8 or 9 years," $100 cash slips, two-way mirrors and bedroom decorations in San Francisco. He said Gottlieb's name was on "just about every one" of the documents.[2]

The paperwork also shows the program kept being renewed. Subproject 16 continued the testing facilities at an estimated $7,740 a year because costs had been underestimated under Subproject 3. A later Subproject 42 memo, a draft dated January 30, 1961, estimated $5,000 for six more months of covert field trials.[2]

The Inspector General Steps In

In 1963, the CIA's own Inspector General reviewed MKULTRA. Published accounts name him as John Earman.[3] His report did not mince words about the people running the safehouse tests. The Church Committee quotes it: "The [individuals conducting the test] are not qualified scientific observers."[1] He recommended ending unwitting testing, and after his report the program was suspended.[1]

Not everyone agreed. On December 17, 1963, Richard Helms, then the CIA's Deputy Director for Plans, wrote a memo defending unwitting testing as "the only realistic method of maintaining the capability."[1] Read that slowly. A senior CIA official argued in writing that the only realistic way to keep the program going was to keep drugging people who didn't know it.

The CIA later told investigators the program was fully ended in the late 1960s.[1] Kamiya dates the closing of the Chestnut Street apartment to 1965.[3]

"The Illusion of a Capability"

After the Inspector General's 1963 report, the program was suspended, but not everyone wanted it dead. A handwritten note by Acting Director Marshall Carter in June 1964 said that "unwitting testing will be subject to a separate decision."[1] And a 1964 memo admitted the agency was living with "the illusion of a capability which is becoming minimal."[2]

In November 1964, Helms pushed again. He argued that suspending the tests was eroding the CIA's operational capability and asked for a decision one way or the other. The Church Committee found that no formal action followed.[1]

The Committee also looked at who outside the CIA knew. It found that accounts differ on how much the Bureau of Narcotics commissioners, Harry Anslinger and his successor Henry Giordano, understood. Giordano reportedly wanted only a general briefing. The Committee concluded the Commissioner may have given general approval without understanding the project.[1] Inside the CIA, the agency's own General Counsel didn't learn about the unwitting testing until the 1970s.[1]

That phrase says a lot. After more than a decade of drugging strangers, the people running the program weren't defending what it had produced. They were defending the idea that they ought to be able to do it.

What Was Learned

The Church Committee's judgment on the unwitting testing was harsh. It found the testing was marked by "a complete lack of screening, medical supervision," and follow-up of the people who were dosed.[4] It also found that the Inspector General's claim that MKULTRA testing was "conducted under accepted scientific procedures" was clearly not true for this project.[4]

So how many people were dosed in these apartments? Nobody knows. When Senator Kennedy pressed Turner, the CIA director said he had "no idea."[2] Most of the records that might have answered the question were destroyed in 1973. That's Chapter 9.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
CIA safehouses in San Francisco and New York were used for unwitting drug tests	Documented	Turner testimony, 1977; Church Committee
Subjects were watched through a one-way mirror	Documented	Church Committee, p. 401
George Hunter White ran the safehouses under the alias "Morgan Hall"	Documented	"Morgan Hall" named under oath in 1977; White's identity from published accounts
225 Chestnut Street address, 1955-1965 dates, use of prostitutes	Documented in published accounts	San Francisco Chronicle, drawing on Marks (1979)
The 1963 Inspector General called the testers "not qualified scientific observers"	Documented	Church Committee quoting the report
Helms called unwitting testing "the only realistic method" in December 1963	Documented	Church Committee, p. 403
Total number of people dosed	Unknown	CIA director said "No idea" in 1977
Subproject 3 was the safehouse program for unwitting subjects	Documented	1963 Inspector General report, quoted in 1977 record
Subjects were picked at random in bars	Disputed	Church Committee says yes; 1977 CIA witness said the record doesn't show it
Bureau of Narcotics agents were the CIA's "cut-out"	Documented	Church Committee, p. 422
The Rockefeller Commission called the testing "clearly illegal"	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, p. 228
A 1964 memo spoke of "the illusion of a capability"	Documented	1977 hearing record

Notes

1. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 401-409. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

2. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

3. Gary Kamiya, "When the CIA ran a LSD sex-house in San Francisco," Portals of the Past column, San Francisco Chronicle, drawing on John Marks, The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate" (1979). https://preview-

prod.w.sfchronicle.com/chronicle_vault/article/When-the-CIA-ran-a-LSD-sex-house-in-San-Francisco-7223346.php

4. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I, p. 423. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

5. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I, p. 422. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

6. Sidney Gottlieb, testimony before the Senate Select Committee, 1975, as released by the National Security Archive, and Church Committee, Book I, p. 408. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/DOC04-19751015.pdf

7. Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975, pp. 227-228. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/36326NCJRS.pdf

Chapter 6: Prisons and Hospitals

The safehouses tested strangers. Prisons and hospitals tested people who couldn't easily say no.

The Institutions

The CIA's own count, given to the Senate in 1977, listed 3 prisons and 12 hospitals or clinics among the 80 institutions that took MKULTRA money.[1] Those numbers don't tell you who the subjects were, but they tell you where to look.

Lexington, Kentucky

One place that shows up in both the Senate hearing and the Church Committee report is the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital for drug addicts in Lexington, Kentucky. A report printed in the 1977 hearing record notes that "subjects received large doses of barbiturates over a period of months" in studies at Lexington.[1]

The Church Committee described something worse. It found that narcotics addicts sent to Lexington were rewarded with the drug they were addicted to in exchange for taking part in LSD experiments.[2] Think about what that means. The people running the study paid addicts in the very drug that was ruining their lives. You might ask whether a person in that position can really give free consent. The Church Committee clearly didn't think so.

The research unit there was the National Institute of Mental Health's Addiction Research Center at Lexington. The Church Committee describes the subjects as "volunteer prisoners" who were tested with hallucinogens and given the drugs they were addicted to as a reward.[7] Senator Kennedy put it more plainly at the 1977 hearing: heroin addicts were enticed into LSD experiments with heroin as the payment.[1]

At the same hearing, Senator Walter Huddleston asked about Dr. Harris Isbell, who ran research at the Lexington hospital, and about letters to a CIA contact identified only as "Ray." Turner said the CIA hadn't identified "Ray" but suspected a former employee with that first name.[1]

The State Hospital

Turner's 1977 statement disclosed something new: some of the unwitting testing involved "criminal sexual psychopaths confined at a State hospital."[1] A 1958 proposal in the hearing documents describes a state hospital with 1,135 beds, with research subjects drawn from 142 patients classified as "criminal-sexual psychopaths."[1] The hospital and state aren't named in the released record.

Were Prisoners Given a Choice?

Turner was asked that question directly in 1977. He said some of the prison cases were unclear on whether the prisoner had a choice. Asked about one, he answered, "I don't positively know that he was."[1]

James "Whitey" Bulger

The most famous person who says he was an MKULTRA subject is James "Whitey" Bulger, the Boston gangster who later became one of the FBI's most wanted fugitives.

Bulger's account comes from his own letters. While in prison late in life, he wrote more than 70 letters to Janet Uhlar, who had served as a juror at his 2013 murder trial. The Associated Press reviewed those letters.[3] In them, Bulger said that during his first stretch in federal prison in the late 1950s, at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, he was given LSD more than 50 times. He said he and other inmates were told it was research into schizophrenia and were offered reduced time for taking part. He named the supervising physician as Dr. Carl Pfeiffer of Emory University, and he dated his lasting symptoms to 1957, writing "since '57."[3]

Here's how I label that. That Bulger wrote these things is Documented, because the AP saw the letters. That he was actually given LSD in a CIA-funded program is his account. It fits the official record, which lists three prisons among MKULTRA institutions, and the CIA's online reading room lists a file titled "PFEIFFER, CARL CURT (DR.)."[4] The reading room didn't load for me, so I can only tell you the file exists, not what it says. But for this edition I have not matched Bulger to a specific MKULTRA subproject record. Until I do, his participation is labeled Alleged, with a note that it is a strong allegation.

After reading Bulger's letters, Uhlar told the AP she regretted voting to convict him.[3] That's her view, not a finding about the case.

What Gottlieb Told the Senate

When Sidney Gottlieb testified to the Church Committee in October 1975, he was asked whether experiments took place in prisons or mental hospitals. According to the National Security Archive, which has published his testimony, he first said no, then changed his answer the next day.[6] On the same days he described why a fake medical setting mattered in the ARTICHOKE work: the subject's "unwitting and total lack of awareness" might have been the key.[6]

Think about that for a minute. The man who ran the program had to correct himself overnight about whether prisoners and patients were used. If the man in charge couldn't keep it straight under oath, it tells you how much of this was never written down, or was written down and later destroyed.

Gottlieb on Consent

In the October 15, 1975 session, Gottlieb was asked about a 1953 ARTICHOKE conference memo that talked about using facilities "as testing grounds" with criminals and the criminally insane. He said, "I don't remember anything like that."[8]

Asked about consent at the institutions doing the research, he said "the institutions where this kind of work was going on had a system for doing this," and that his office assumed those places had their own procedures. He said of the research his office funded, "These were not unwitting tests," and "They were all supposedly witting tests." Asked whether anyone checked what the subjects were told, he said, "I can't remember that."[8]

At one point a committee lawyer put something on the record that applies to a lot of this book. When a witness says he doesn't remember, the lawyer said, that "should not be inferred by the staff or the Committee to mean that that didn't happen." The Committee's own counsel agreed: "I don't think that is a logical inference to draw."[8]

The "Expendables"

One more claim needs a careful label. In his June 2026 testimony to Congress, Stephen Kinzer said that CIA officers could ask local CIA stations abroad, especially in countries under U.S. occupation, for "expendables," meaning people whose disappearance would go unnoticed, and that the number of victims, including those killed, is unknown.[5]

Kinzer is a serious researcher, and his book draws on the declassified record. But his testimony is a summary of his conclusions, not the underlying documents. For this edition, the "expendables" claim is labeled Alleged until I can cite the specific records he relies on. If it's in the record, it goes in at full strength.

Who Gave Consent?

The pattern in this chapter is simple. Prisoners, addicts and patients were chosen because they were easy to get and hard to hear. Some were offered something they badly wanted in exchange for taking part. Some, according to their own accounts, were never told what was really going on. The Church Committee's verdict on the testing as a whole was that it showed "a complete lack of screening, medical supervision," and follow-up.[2] That applies here as much as anywhere.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
MKULTRA money went to 3 prisons and 12 hospitals or clinics	Documented	1977 Senate hearing
Addicts at Lexington were paid in their drug of addiction to take part in LSD tests	Documented	Church Committee, p. 423
Bulger wrote that he was dosed with LSD more than 50 times in Atlanta	Documented	AP review of his letters

Claim	Label	Notes
Gottlieb first denied prison and hospital testing in 1975, then changed his answer	Documented	National Security Archive
Bulger was actually an MKULTRA subject	Alleged (strong)	His account; consistent with the record; not yet matched to a subproject
CIA officers used "expendables" abroad	Alleged	Kinzer's testimony; underlying records not yet cited for this edition
Lexington subjects were "volunteer prisoners" paid in their drug of addiction	Documented	Church Committee, p. 391
Unwitting testing included "criminal sexual psychopaths" at a state hospital	Documented	Turner, 1977
Turner could not say whether some prisoners had a choice	Documented	1977 hearing
Gottlieb said research at institutions used "supposedly witting" subjects	Documented	Gottlieb testimony, October 15, 1975

Notes

1. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977, including the drug-interrogation report printed in the record (p. 32). https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

2. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), p. 423. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

3. Associated Press, "After learning of Whitey Bulger LSD tests, juror has regrets," as published by PBS NewsHour, February 2020. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/after-learning-of-whitey-bulger-lsd-tests-juror-has-regrets

4. CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, file listed as "PFEIFFER, CARL CURT (DR.)." https://cia.gov/readingroom/docs/PFEIFFER%2C%20CARL%20CURT%20%28DR.%29%5B10425092%5D.pdf Listed in the reading room index; contents not reviewed.

5. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf

6. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," June 29, 2026, including Gottlieb's Church Committee testimony of October 15 and 17, 1975. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets

7. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), p. 391. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

8. Sidney Gottlieb, testimony before the Senate Select Committee, October 15, 1975, as released by the National Security Archive. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/DOC04-19751015.pdf

Chapter 7: Montreal and Dr. Ewen Cameron

Some of the worst damage done with MKULTRA money wasn't done in the United States at all. It was done in a psychiatric hospital in Montreal, to Canadian patients who came in for help with ordinary problems.

The Doctor

Dr. Donald Ewen Cameron ran the Allan Memorial Institute, the psychiatric hospital connected to McGill University and the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. He was one of the best-known psychiatrists of his day. The class action now before Quebec's courts covers experiments at the Allan Memorial from 1948 to 1964.[1]

What He Did

Cameron believed that mental illness could be wiped out by breaking down a patient's existing patterns of thought and then rebuilding them. He called the first part "depatterning." According to CBC reporting, his methods included:[2]

- Massive electroshock treatments, far beyond normal practice.
- Drug-induced sleep, keeping patients unconscious for weeks at a time.
- "Psychic driving," in which taped messages were played to patients over and over.
- Experimental drugs, including LSD.

Where the CIA Comes In

Cameron's work was funded as MKULTRA Subproject 68. The CIA's online reading room lists the subproject's own files under titles including "MKULTRA SUBPROJECT 68," "CONTINUATION OF MKULTRA, SUBPROJECT 68" and "SUPPLEMENT - MKULTRA, SUBPROJECT 68."[3] According to The Canadian Encyclopedia, the CIA paid for the work from 1957 to 1964 through the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, a front group.[8]

Did Cameron know the money came from the CIA? That hasn't been established. In the mid-1980s, the Allan Memorial's directors said "there was no evidence Cameron was aware the CIA was funding his experiments."[8] You'll see a dollar figure of about $69,000 in many places. I couldn't confirm it in a source I could read, so I leave it out.

The Front Organization

The Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology came up under oath in 1977. John Gittinger, the CIA psychologist, testified that the CIA "provided the money" but "did not direct the projects." He estimated it funded somewhere between 10 and 30 projects with a budget of roughly $150,000 a year, though he said he wasn't sure of the figures. He said it was phased out in 1965 and that the researchers it paid "had no knowledge that they were getting CIA money."[7]

The CIA's own files trace the Society's roots to a 1954 project on Chinese Communist brainwashing called QKHILLTOP, which was folded into MKULTRA and linked to Cornell's Human Ecology Study Programs.[7] That's the same brainwashing fear from Chapter 1, now with a respectable-sounding foundation in front of it.

If the researchers didn't know, the patients certainly didn't. That's the whole point of a front.

The First Lawsuit: Orlikow v. United States

In 1980, nine former patients sued the U.S. government. The case is known as Orlikow v. United States, after Velma Orlikow, one of the plaintiffs. Their lawyers were Joseph Rauh, a well-known civil liberties attorney, and his partner Jim Turner.[4]

One plaintiff was disqualified on a technicality, leaving eight. In January 1988, the U.S. government agreed to pay $750,000, divided among the eight. Canada added $20,000, which brought the total to about $100,000 per person.[4] The U.S. government did not admit liability and did not apologize.[4]

Canada's Payments

In 1992, Canada's Justice Minister, Kim Campbell, announced payments of $100,000 to former patients, again without admitting legal liability.[2] How many people were paid? CBC estimates about 70. Hundreds of other applicants were turned down because officials decided they hadn't been "de-patterned" enough to qualify.[2] The Canadian Encyclopedia gives 77 people compensated, with more than 250 of over 300 claimants turned down.[8] The two figures are close, and I use "about 70 to 77."

Notice that phrase for a moment. People who went through Cameron's treatments were rejected because they hadn't been damaged in exactly the right way.

The lawsuits didn't stop there. A woman named Alison Steel sued the Canadian government in September 2015 and, according to CBC, received a settlement reported at $100,000.[2]

The Class Action

In July 2025, the Superior Court of Quebec authorized a class action against the Government of Canada, the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University on behalf of former patients, their immediate families and their estates.[1,5] Authorization means the case can go forward. It does not mean the court has found anyone at fault. That will be decided at trial.[1]

What about the United States? Earlier in this litigation, the question of whether the U.S. government could be sued in a Canadian court went to Quebec's Court of Appeal, and the court ruled that the United States has immunity in Canada.[6] So the country that paid for Subproject 68 is not a defendant in the Canadian case.

Why This Chapter Matters

The Montreal story is one of the clearest cases in this book. The CIA funded the work. The patients didn't know. The patients and their families say the damage was severe and lasting, and both governments paid compensation. And neither government admitted it did anything wrong. Seventy years later, the families are still in court.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Cameron ran experiments at the Allan Memorial Institute, 1948-1964	Documented	Class action filings as reported; note 1
His methods included depatterning, massive electroshock, weeks of drug-induced sleep and psychic driving	Documented	CBC; note 2
The work was funded as MKULTRA Subproject 68 through a CIA front	Documented	Note 3
Cameron knew the CIA was paying	Unknown	Hospital directors said in the 1980s there was no evidence he knew
Orlikow plaintiffs settled in January 1988 for $750,000	Documented	WBUR; note 4
Canada paid $100,000 each starting in 1992 to about 70 to 77 patients	Documented, figures differ slightly	CBC and Canadian Encyclopedia
Quebec court authorized a class action in July 2025	Documented	Notes 1 and 5
The United States has immunity from suit in Canada over these experiments	Documented	Quebec Court of Appeal, as reported; note 6
The Human Ecology society was CIA-funded and its grantees didn't know	Documented	Gittinger testimony, 1977

Notes

1. Educaloi, "A Class Action for Victims of the MKULTRA Program" (2025). https://educaloi.qc.ca/en/legal-news/a-class-action-for-victims-of-the-mkultra-program/
2. CBC News, reporting on the Allan Memorial experiments, the 1992 compensation program and the Alison Steel settlement. https://www.cbc.ca/1.4373590
3. CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, Subproject 68 file listings, including "MKULTRA SUBPROJECT 68" (https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/node/2078060) and "CONTINUATION OF MKULTRA, SUBPROJECT 68" (https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/node/2078117). Listed in the reading room index; contents not reviewed.
4. WBUR, Endless Thread, "Madness, Part 4: Pursuit of Justice," May 15, 2020. https://www.wbur.org/endlessthread/2020/05/15/madness-part-4-pursuit-of-justice
5. CTV News, "MK-ULTRA mind control class action authorized by Quebec Superior Court," July 31, 2025. https://www.ctvnews.ca/montreal/article/mk-ultra-mind-control-class-action-authorized-by-quebec-superior-court/
6. CTV News, "MK-ULTRA mind-control experiments: Quebec high court says U.S. has immunity in Canada." https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/mk-ultra-mind-control-experiments-quebec-high-court-says-u-s-has-immunity-in-canada-1.6587001

7. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977, testimony of John Gittinger and documents on QKHILLTOP. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

8. Taylor C. Noakes, "MKULTRA," The Canadian Encyclopedia, published December 14, 2021, last edited April 17, 2026. https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mkultra

Chapter 8: The Army's Parallel Program at Edgewood

The CIA wasn't the only part of the government testing mind-altering drugs on Americans. The Army ran its own program, mostly on its own soldiers, at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. It was bigger than most people realize, and it lasted twenty years.

The Volunteer Program

According to the Department of Defense's health agency, the Army ran a Medical Research Volunteer Program from 1955 to 1975. About 7,000 people took part.[1] The agents tested included:

- Nerve agents and the drugs used to treat nerve agent poisoning.
- Psychochemicals, meaning hallucinogenic and mind-altering drugs.
- Irritants and blistering agents.

Separate testing outside that program ran from 1951 to 1972, mostly in 1959, and covered nerve agents, irritants and hallucinogens.[1]

The Army called these people volunteers, and many of them did sign up. Some received only placebos, and some took part in stress or performance tests with no chemical exposure at all.[1] The veterans' later lawsuit, which we'll get to in a minute, argued that signing up isn't the same as knowing what you were signing up for.

LSD in the Field

Edgewood wasn't only a lab program. The Army also took LSD into the field. The Church Committee found that the first Army program to use LSD on soldiers at "field stations" was authorized in May 1955. The Secretary of the Army never put the authorization in writing, and there is no evidence he reviewed or approved the plan. The Army Chief of Staff authorized the tests less than a month later.[2]

Later the Army moved to using LSD in actual interrogations. Two programs, called THIRD CHANCE and DERBY HAT, got verbal approval from the Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence on December 7, 1960, with written approval following in January 1961.[2] THIRD CHANCE tested LSD in interrogations in Europe. The Army told the CIA about it in confidence, and the CIA then tried to learn the details.[3]

After a briefing on April 10, 1963, a general ordered that no more field testing be done. The Church Committee found the field program effectively ended when the Army adopted a rule requiring approval before drugs could be used in intelligence operations, and a September 1963 memo suggests it was suspended by then.[2]

What the Church Committee Found About the Army

The Church Committee's numbers fill in the picture:[6]

- Between 1955 and 1958, LSD was given to "more than 1,000 American volunteers."
- A program called Material Testing Program EA 1729 involved 95 volunteers.
- THIRD CHANCE, in Europe in 1961, involved "eleven separate interrogations of ten subjects," and none of them were volunteers.
- DERBY HAT, in the Far East in 1962, involved seven foreign subjects.

In one DERBY HAT case, a subject was given "6 micrograms of LSD per kilogram of bodyweight" and became semicomatose.[6] The Committee described the field program as showing "a basic disregard for the fundamental human rights of the subjects."[6]

There's another detail that tells you how these agencies worked with each other. The Committee found that the Army tried to hide its overseas testing program, including its secret use of LSD, from the CIA.[6] Two agencies were doing the same kind of work and keeping secrets from each other while doing it.

The Veterans Go to Court

In 2009, the Vietnam Veterans of America and individual veterans sued the CIA, the Army and other agencies in federal court in Northern California. The case is Vietnam Veterans of America v. Central Intelligence Agency.[4]

In 2015, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on two key questions. First, it upheld an order requiring the Army to keep giving former test subjects any newly available information about their health risks. That duty comes from Army Regulation 70-25 and doesn't end.[5] Second, it reversed a lower court ruling that had gone against the veterans on medical care, holding that a court can't simply refuse to help former test subjects who need medical care, because some of them may be entitled to care from a different government agency.[5]

That's a mixed result, and it's worth being precise about it. The veterans won the right to keep getting health information. The fight over who pays for their medical care went back to the lower court.

What the Court Record Shows

The district court's summary judgment order in the veterans' case lays out the scale as the government itself admitted it:[4]

- By the end of World War II, "over 60,000 U.S. servicemen had been used as human subjects" in chemical defense research.
- The Department of Defense admitted using about 7,800 service members at Edgewood Arsenal. (The Defense Health Agency's own page, in note 1, says about 7,000. I show you both.)

- About 2,300 conscientious objectors were used in biological agent tests at Fort Detrick from 1954 to 1973.
- The Defense Department later identified 16,645 Cold War-era test subjects.
- The Defense Department admitted giving 250 to 400 different chemical and biological agents at Edgewood.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs sent notice letters to about 3,300 Cold War-era test subjects, but the letters didn't say which agents each person received.
- Veterans were released from their secrecy oaths in 1993 for chemical weapons testing before 1968, and again in 2011.

The district court held that the Army has an ongoing duty under Army Regulation 70-25 to warn former test subjects, and ordered it to provide newly learned health information "now and in the future as it becomes available."[4] That's the ruling the Ninth Circuit upheld in 2015.

Why the Army Matters to This Story

People who study MKULTRA sometimes treat Edgewood as a side note. It isn't. It shows that drug testing on people who didn't fully understand the risks was not one rogue CIA office. It was happening in more than one part of the government at the same time, under the same Cold War fears.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
About 7,000 people took part in Army chemical tests, 1955-1975	Documented	Defense Health Agency; note 1
Tests included nerve agents and hallucinogens	Documented	Note 1
Army LSD field testing on soldiers was authorized in May 1955 with no written approval from the Secretary of the Army	Documented	Church Committee, p. 419
THIRD CHANCE and DERBY HAT used LSD in interrogations, approved December 1960 and January 1961	Documented	Church Committee, p. 420
Field testing stopped in 1963	Documented	Church Committee, p. 420
The Ninth Circuit (2015) required the Army to keep giving test subjects new health information	Documented	Note 5
More than 1,000 soldiers got LSD from 1955 to 1958; THIRD CHANCE used 10 non-volunteers	Documented	Church Committee, pp. 392, 412-413
The Army hid its overseas LSD testing from the CIA	Documented	Church Committee, p. 386
Edgewood test subjects: about 7,000 or 7,800	Documented, figures differ	Defense Health Agency vs. court record
The government identified 16,645 Cold War-era test subjects	Documented	District court order

Claim	Label	Notes
Veterans were released from secrecy oaths in 1993 and 2011	Documented	District court order

Notes

1. Defense Health Agency, "Edgewood Arsenal Chemical Agent Exposure Studies." https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2015/05/08/Edgewood-Arsenal-Chemical-Agent-Exposure-Studies

2. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 419-420. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

3. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I, p. 421. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

4. Vietnam Veterans of America v. Central Intelligence Agency, No. C 09-0037 CW (N.D. Cal.), Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Cross-Motions for Summary Judgment. https://cases.justia.com/federal/district-courts/california/candce/4:2009cv00037/210290/537/0.pdf

5. Vietnam Veterans of America v. CIA (9th Cir. 2015), summary of opinion. https://caselaw.findlaw.com/summary/opinion/us-9th-circuit/2015/06/30/273931.html

6. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 386, 392 and 412-416. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

Chapter 9: Cover-Up and Exposure (1973-1977)

Everything you've read so far, we know because the cover-up failed. Not because the CIA came clean, but because it missed some boxes.

January 1973: The Shredding

In early 1973, MKULTRA's files were destroyed. The Church Committee found that the records were destroyed in January 1973 on the verbal orders of Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, who was acting on instructions from then-CIA Director Richard Helms.[1] Senator Kennedy said the same at the 1977 hearing: the records were "destroyed in January 1973, at the instruction of then CIA Director Richard Helms."[2]

You might ask, "Was that legal?" Stephen Kinzer told Congress in 2026 that it was illegal.[3] Representative Anna Paulina Luna, who chaired the 2026 hearing, noted that no one was ever criminally charged.[4] Both of those statements can be true at the same time.

Whose idea was it? Helms told the Church Committee that Gottlieb suggested it, because "the program was over and finished and done with."[1] To do it, the CIA set aside its own rule on keeping records, an internal regulation known as CSI 70-10 that governs the "retirement of inactive records."[10] The Rockefeller Commission put a number on what was lost: "All the records concerning the program were ordered destroyed in 1973, including a total of 152 separate files."[11]

There's a reason the destroyed files might not have been complete even before 1973. The 1963 Inspector General report, quoted in Turner's 1977 statement, said: "Present practice is to maintain no records of the planning and approval of test programs."[2] A program designed not to keep records, followed by the destruction of the records it did keep. You can see why so many questions are still open.

The Church Committee spelled out the cost. It found that the destruction kept it from fully reconstructing the program, and from finding test subjects who might need medical help.[1] Think about that one. The files that could have told a person what had been done to them were the files that were shredded.

Late 1974: The Story Breaks

In late 1974, reporter Seymour Hersh published a front-page story in The New York Times on the CIA spying on Americans inside the United States.[5] It didn't break the MKULTRA story by itself, but it set off the investigations that did.

1975: Two Investigations

President Ford responded by creating a commission led by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller to look at CIA activities inside the United States. Its report came out in June 1975.[6] That's the report that let the Olson family learn the truth about Frank's death, as we saw in Chapter 4.

The Senate went further. On January 27, 1975, it created the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, with eleven senators and Senator Frank Church of Idaho as chairman.[5] Everyone calls it the Church Committee. It took testimony from Sidney Gottlieb in October 1975, and the National Security Archive has published that testimony, nearly 200 pages over two days.[7] The Committee issued its final report on April 29, 1976.[5] Book I of that report, on foreign and military intelligence, contains the chapter on drug testing that I've quoted throughout Part I.

On February 18, 1976, President Ford also signed Executive Order 11905 on intelligence activities. Section 5(d) says: "Foreign intelligence agencies shall not engage in experimentation with drugs on human subjects, except with the informed consent, in writing and witnessed by a disinterested third party, of each such human subject and in accordance with the guidelines issued by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects for Biomedical and Behavioral Research."[8]

1977: The Missing Boxes

The 1973 destruction should have been the end of it. It wasn't. In late March 1977, the CIA found seven boxes of MKULTRA documents at its Retired Records Center that had been missed in the shredding.[2] Most of what survived were financial records.[7]

Director Stansfield Turner reported the find to the Senate in a letter dated July 15, 1977.[2] On August 3, 1977, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research held a joint public hearing titled "Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification."[2] That hearing is the source for most of the numbers in Chapter 3.

How many pages were found? This is one of those spots where the sources don't match:

- At the hearing, the estimate was about 5,000 pages, later revised to "closer to 8,000 pages."[2]
- The National Security Archive describes the collection released through journalist John Marks's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request as roughly 16,000 pages.[7]

You'll also see 20,000 pages quoted in many places. I couldn't trace that figure to a primary source, so I leave it out. My best reading is that the hearing figures were early estimates of the seven boxes, and the larger total includes material released through FOIA afterward. I use "thousands of pages."

And here's a wrinkle worth knowing. The National Security Archive says seven boxes of MKULTRA research files were destroyed in 1973.[7] The 1977 hearing says seven boxes of financial files were found. Same number, different boxes. Don't let anyone tell you they're the same seven.

Why the Boxes Survived

Turner explained in 1977 how the surviving files got missed. They had been sent to the Retired Records Center outside Washington in 1970 by the Budget and Fiscal Section of the CIA's

technical office. Why they were sent there, he said, is "not known." When the CIA searched for MKULTRA records in 1975 for the Church Committee, it didn't look in that section's retired files.[2] The recovered papers were "finance folders," mostly approvals of funds, vouchers and accountings.[2]

What finally led to them? Freedom of Information Act requests. A CIA officer named Frank Laubinger searched the Retired Records Center while handling those requests.[2] One of them came from journalist John Marks. An internal CIA memo dated June 22, 1977, called the failure to search those files earlier "a serious error," and recommended telling the Senate committee before Marks's lawyers found out.[2]

The timeline from there, as the CIA gave it to the Senate: boxes found in late March, shipped to headquarters in early April, first estimated at 5,000 pages, then about 8,000. In early June, the staff flagged two sensitive items. Word moved up the chain starting June 13. Turner learned on July 7 and wrote to Congress on July 15.[2] Senator Kennedy complained that Congress wasn't told until July. Asked about the delay, Laubinger said, "I really don't attribute it, Senator, to diligence so much as thoroughness."[2]

Promises Made in 1977

Turner made several commitments at the hearing:[2]

- He said the CIA "is in no way engaged in either witting or unwitting testing of drugs today."
- He said, "it is totally abhorrent to me to think of using a human being as a guinea pig."
- He said he was working with the Attorney General and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to figure out whether victims could be identified, while noting, "No such names are part of these records."
- He gave the committees the names of the institutions and researchers on a classified basis, but refused to make them public, citing a moral obligation to protect them from "unjustified embarrassment" and the Privacy Act.

Senator Inouye asked for a report within three months on finding and helping victims. Senator Barry Goldwater asked for a list of the people involved, whether they knew, and what happened to them.[2] Senator Kennedy pushed for the universities to be told. Turner said he had notified one institution and would consult university presidents about the rest.[2] Kennedy also pressed a bill, with Senators Schweiker and Jacob Javits, to extend federal human-subjects protections to the Defense Department and the CIA. Turner said, "The CIA certainly has no objection to that proposed legislation."[2]

How did those promises turn out? A December 23, 1977 letter from the CIA's legislative counsel, printed in the record, said records showed that "no such actions were taken" regarding firing anyone connected to Subproject 3.[2] As for finding and paying the unwitting victims, Tom O'Neill told Congress in 2026 that it never happened.[12]

What the Investigators Recommended

The Rockefeller Commission's Recommendation 27 was short: "the CIA should not again engage in the testing of drugs on unsuspecting persons."[11]

The Church Committee went further and blamed Congress itself. It found that "Congress has failed to provide the necessary statutory guidelines" for intelligence agencies, and its first recommendation was that "The National Security Act should be recast by omnibus legislation."[10]

What Was Still Missing

When Senator Kennedy asked who could fill in the gaps left by the destroyed files, his answer was short: "Gottlieb knows."[2] By 1977 Gottlieb had left the CIA.[2] Much of the full story of what was done in his program went with the shredded files.

That's where the official record stood for almost fifty years, until Congress opened the file again in 2026. We'll get to that in the final chapter. First, Part II looks at how all this collided with the 1960s.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
MKULTRA records were destroyed in January 1973 on Helms's instructions	Documented	Church Committee, p. 404; 1977 hearing
No one was criminally charged	Documented	Statement at 2026 hearing; no charges in the record
Hersh's 1974 New York Times story led to the investigations	Documented	Senate Historical Office
The Church Committee was created January 27, 1975, and reported April 29, 1976	Documented	Note 5
Seven boxes of financial records were found in March 1977	Documented	1977 hearing
Total pages found	Figures differ	About 8,000 (1977 hearing estimate) vs. about 16,000 (National Security Archive)
Ford's 1976 executive order barred drug experiments without written, witnessed informed consent	Documented	Executive Order 11905, Section 5(d)
152 separate files were ordered destroyed in 1973	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, p. 226
The surviving boxes were missed because the 1975 search skipped the finance office's retired files	Documented	Turner, 1977
The CIA promised in 1977 to try to identify victims	Documented	Turner, 1977
No one was fired over Subproject 3	Documented	CIA legislative counsel letter, December 23, 1977
Rockefeller Commission: CIA "should not again"	Documented	Recommendation 27

Claim	Label	Notes
test drugs on unsuspecting people		

Notes

1. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), p. 404. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

2. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

3. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf

4. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Luna Opens Hearing on MKULTRA Project Transparency," June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/release/luna-opens-hearing-on-mkultra-project-transparency/

5. U.S. Senate Historical Office, "Church Committee." https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/church-committee.htm

6. Gerald R. Ford Library, "Rockefeller Commission Report, June 1975." https://fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/intelligence/rcreport.asp

7. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," June 29, 2026, including Gottlieb's Church Committee testimony of October 15 and 17, 1975. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets

8. Executive Order 11905, "United States Foreign Intelligence Activities," signed February 18, 1976, 41 FR 7703 (February 19, 1976); superseded by Executive Order 12036 in 1978. National Archives, Executive Orders Disposition Tables, 1976. https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1976 Text: The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11905-united-states-foreign-intelligence-activities

10. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 405 and 425-426. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

11. Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975, pp. 226-229. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/36326NCJRS.pdf

12. Tom O'Neill, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/ONeill-Written-Testimony.pdf

Part II: The Counterculture

Chapter 10: The CIA, LSD and the Universities

By now you've seen that MKULTRA wasn't just a few agents in a basement. It reached deep into American universities and hospitals. That's the bridge to Part II, because the same campuses and hospitals that took CIA money in the 1950s became the places where a lot of young Americans first heard about LSD in the early 1960s.

The Campus Connection

Remember the CIA's own count from Chapter 3: 44 colleges and universities took part in MKULTRA.[1] Most of the researchers involved were respected scientists doing work that looked like ordinary academic research. Many of them didn't know the CIA was paying, because the money came through front organizations such as the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, the same front that paid for the Montreal experiments in Chapter 7.

That arrangement mattered for two reasons. It meant the CIA could fund research without its name on it. And it meant drugs like LSD were being handed out in university labs and hospital wards to students, patients and volunteers who had no idea who was behind the study.

Ken Kesey

The best-known person to come out of those labs and into popular culture is Ken Kesey. In 1961, while he was studying writing at Stanford, Kesey signed up for a hallucinogenic drug experiment run by Stanford scientists at the Veterans Administration hospital in Menlo Park, California. Stanford Magazine describes the study as Army-sponsored, and it paid him $75 a session.[2] One of the drugs was LSD.

Kesey also worked as a night aide on the psychiatric ward at the same hospital. What he saw there, combined with his own drug experiences, became the basis for One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, published in 1962.[2] Two years later, Kesey and his friends, the Merry Pranksters, drove a painted school bus across the country, a trip Tom Wolfe made famous in The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.[2]

You'll read in many places that Kesey's drug trials were paid for by the CIA as part of MKULTRA. I looked for a record that ties the Menlo Park study to the CIA, and I couldn't find one. The source I can cite says the Army sponsored it. So "Kesey was dosed in a CIA experiment" is labeled Alleged. "Kesey was paid to take LSD in a government-sponsored study" is Documented.

Did the CIA Create the Sixties?

This is the big question that runs under all of Part II. Some writers argue that the CIA, by funding LSD research, accidentally lit the fuse for the psychedelic movement. Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain made the most influential version of this case in their 1985 book Acid Dreams.

You might ask, "Is that true?" Here's how I'd break it down.

It's Documented that the CIA funded LSD research at dozens of universities and hospitals in the 1950s and early 1960s. It's Documented that some of the people who later spread LSD into the wider culture first took it in research settings. So the CIA's money helped put the drug into circulation. That much is fair to say.

It's a much bigger claim that the CIA planned the counterculture, wanted it, or steered it. I haven't found a record showing that. The CIA's own records, as the Senate found them in 1977, show an agency trying to use LSD as a weapon and an interrogation tool, not trying to start a youth movement.[1] So the "accidental spark" version is reasonable. The "deliberate plan" version is labeled Unsupported until someone produces a document.

The next three chapters look at three people who sit right at that intersection: Timothy Leary, Dr. Louis Jolyon West and Charles Manson.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
44 colleges and universities took MKULTRA money	Documented	1977 Senate hearing
Kesey was paid $75 a session in a 1961 Army-sponsored drug study at the Menlo Park VA	Documented	Stanford Magazine
Kesey's study was CIA-funded	Alleged	Widely claimed; no record found
CIA-funded research helped put LSD into circulation	Documented in part	Funding is documented; spread into the culture is a fair reading
The CIA deliberately created the counterculture	Unsupported	No record found

Notes

1. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

2. Stanford Magazine, "What a Trip" (on Ken Kesey). https://stanfordmag.org/contents/what-a-trip

Chapter 11: Timothy Leary

If you've heard one name connected to LSD in the 1960s, it's probably Timothy Leary. "Turn on, tune in, drop out." Harvard professor turned psychedelic preacher. And depending on who you ask, either a free spirit the government hounded for years or a CIA asset sent to spread drugs among the young. Let's see what the record supports.

The Harvard Psilocybin Project

Leary tried psilocybin, the active ingredient in "magic mushrooms," in Mexico in the summer of 1960 and came back to Harvard convinced it could teach researchers about mental illness. That year he and Richard Alpert, an assistant professor, started the Harvard Psilocybin Project with support from Harvard's Center for Research in Personality.[1] Its studies included whether the drug could bring on religious experiences in seminary students and whether it could change the criminal behavior of prisoners.[1]

Other faculty grew worried. On March 14, 1962, members of the Center for Research in Personality held a 90-minute open meeting on whether the two could keep giving psilocybin to graduate students. Herbert Kelman, a lecturer on social psychology, led the criticism. He charged a "non-chalant attitude" toward experimental controls and said the participants had formed an "insider" sect. Alpert and Leary defended the work, and the meeting's chairman, David McClelland, supported the project while voicing concern about possible lasting effects.[7]

By late May 1962, Harvard's health services had taken possession of most of the pills, a faculty committee was being formed to oversee the research, and state public health officials agreed to let it continue only if "a physician be present to administer the drug."[8]

Fired

On May 27, 1963, Harvard President Nathan Pusey announced on behalf of the Harvard Corporation that Alpert's appointment had been terminated because he gave a hallucinogenic drug to an undergraduate in violation of an agreement with the university.[2] The Crimson called it the first dismissal in Pusey's ten years at Harvard.[2] Leary was relieved of his teaching duties and his salary was stopped because he had been absent from the university without permission.[2] A 2012 Crimson history puts it more simply: his contract wasn't renewed because he didn't show up for his lectures, though Leary later said Pusey fired him.[1]

So when you read that Harvard "fired Leary for LSD," that's not quite what the record says. Alpert was fired over giving a drug to a student. Leary was cut loose for being gone without permission.

Prison, Escape and the FBI

Leary's legal troubles grew through the late 1960s. By 1970 he was serving a ten-year sentence for marijuana possession. That year he escaped from custody in San Luis Obispo, California, with help from members of the Weather Underground, a radical left-wing group.[3]

Here's the part that surprised a lot of his fans. In 1999, The Smoking Gun website published pages from Leary's FBI file, and the FBI confirmed they were real. According to the site's editor, the FBI released 585 pages in all.[3] A transcript of FBI interviews from May 1974 shows Leary offering to cooperate with law enforcement. He told agents, "I want to get out of prison as quickly as I can."[3] He identified members of the Weather Underground who had helped him escape. Their names were blacked out in the released files.[3]

Douglas Rushkoff, Leary's literary agent and friend, said nothing Leary told the FBI led to criminal charges.[3] Todd Gitlin, a New York University professor, called the news "surprising but not shocking," and said of Leary, "He was not a man of political principles."[3]

That's an important distinction for this book. Leary cooperating with the FBI in 1974 is Documented. It's a fact about a man trying to get out of prison. It is not evidence that he was a CIA agent in the 1960s.

Was Leary CIA?

This claim is everywhere online. Here's what I checked:

- The 1977 Senate hearing on MKULTRA: Leary is not named as a researcher or subject in the parts of the record I reviewed.[4]
- The Church Committee's chapter on drug testing: no mention of Leary in the pages I reviewed.[5]
- The FBI file as reported in 1999: it shows cooperation with the FBI in 1974, not the CIA, and nothing from the 1960s about an agency role.[3]

There is one documented thread worth mentioning. Leary's Harvard work was based in the university's Center for Research in Personality.[1] One of Harvard's best-known psychologists at the time was Henry Murray, who had assessed agents for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's World War II predecessor.[6] Murray will come back in Chapter 14. A Psychology Today article says Murray "is said to have supervised" psychedelic experiments including Leary's, but gives no source for that.[6] So it's a thread, not a tie.

Bottom line: I found no record that Leary worked for, was paid by or was directed by the CIA. That claim is labeled Unsupported. If a document turns up, it goes in.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Leary and Alpert ran the Harvard Psilocybin Project starting in 1960	Documented	Note 1

Claim	Label	Notes
Alpert was fired May 27, 1963, for giving a drug to an undergraduate	Documented	Harvard Crimson
Leary lost his duties and salary for being absent without permission	Documented	Harvard Crimson
Leary escaped prison in 1970 with Weather Underground help	Documented	Note 3
Leary cooperated with the FBI in 1974	Documented	FBI file pages published 1999
Henry Murray supervised Leary's experiments	Alleged	One article says "is said to"; no source given
Leary was a CIA agent or asset	Unsupported	No record found in the hearing, Church report or FBI file

Notes

1. The Harvard Crimson, history of the Harvard Psilocybin Project, May 21, 2012. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2012/5/21/harvard-lsd-project-leary/

2. The Harvard Crimson, "Psilocybin, Senate Race Highlight Harvard Year," July 9, 1963. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1963/7/9/psilocybin-senate-race-highlight-harvard-year/

3. "LSD guru Timothy Leary cooperated with FBI," The Seattle Times, July 1, 1999. https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/19990701/2969482/16s-lsd-guru-timothy-leary-cooperated-with-fbi

4. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

5. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 385-422. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

6. Jonathan D. Moreno, "Harvard's Experiment on the Unabomber, Class of '62," Psychology Today, May 25, 2012. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/impromptu-man/201205/harvards-experiment-on-the-unabomber-class-of-62

7. The Harvard Crimson, report on the March 14 Center for Research in Personality meeting, March 15, 1962. https://thecrimson.com/article/1962/3/15/psychologists-disagree-on-psilocybin-research-pmembers

8. The Harvard Crimson, report on the faculty group to oversee psilocybin research, May 28, 1962. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1962/5/28/faculty-group-to-oversee-research-with/

Chapter 12: Dr. Louis Jolyon "Jolly" West

If there's one person who ties MKULTRA to the 1960s counterculture through documents rather than rumor, it's a psychiatrist named Louis Jolyon West. Everyone called him Jolly. His story is the bridge between the CIA's labs and the Haight-Ashbury, and it's also where the Manson story in the next chapter begins.

Who He Was

West was chief of psychiatric services at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas in the early 1950s. He later chaired the psychiatry department at the University of Oklahoma, and in 1969 he became chairman of the psychiatry department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).[1]

After the Korean War, the Army brought in scientists to help "deprogram" American prisoners of war who had come home, and West was one of them. He later said he studied 83 prisoners of war, 56 of whom had been forced to make false confessions.[2]

The 1953 Letters

Here's the core documented link. On June 11, 1953, two months after MKULTRA was approved, West wrote a letter to Sidney Gottlieb.[2] He proposed experiments that combined drugs and hypnosis. The topics included how much information could be pulled out of unwilling subjects and how to plant false information in a person's mind. He even proposed creating "couriers" who would carry "a long and complex message" hidden in their minds, and he asked for "some sort of carte blanche."[2]

He listed possible subjects as basic airmen, volunteers, patients and "others, possibly including prisoners in the local stockade."[2] He also wrote that the experiments "must eventually be put to test in practical trials in the field."[1]

O'Neill says West's first letter was addressed to "Grifford," a name used for Gottlieb, and that financial records show West kept receiving funding through at least the mid-1960s.[1]

Gottlieb wrote back on letterhead from "Chemrophyl Associates," a front company he used to write to MKULTRA researchers. He told West: "We have gained quite an asset in the relationship we are developing with you." West wrote back that he was happy to be considered "an asset."[2]

These letters were found by journalist Tom O'Neill in West's own archive, and O'Neill has offered to give Congress copies.[1] I'm labeling the letters Documented because they've been published and O'Neill entered his description of them into the record of a congressional hearing. I have not yet seen the original letters myself.

The 1956 Report and What Congress Was Shown

In 1956, West wrote a 14-page report called "The Psychophysiological Studies of Hypnosis and Suggestibility." In it he claimed he could replace a person's true memory of an event with a false one.[2]

When the CIA gave a version of West's work to Senators Kennedy and Inouye in 1977, it was about five pages long. The false-memory claim was gone. In its place was a line saying the effects of LSD "has never been studied." O'Neill and The Intercept say that line was false.[2] O'Neill says he holds the original 14-page report, and that the facsimile of the 1977 version, which he found at the National Security Archive, contained "a four-page summary that did not exist in the original."[1]

That's one of the most important findings in this whole book, so let me say it plainly. According to documents found in West's archive, the summary Congress received in 1977 left out the most alarming part of what a CIA-funded researcher had reported. That is labeled Documented as described by O'Neill, pending a review of the originals.

West himself was named in a 1977 New York Times report about MKULTRA. O'Neill says the story named West among seven researchers who had worked under CIA subcontracts. West told reporters he "never conducted experiments for the CIA" and had used LSD only on animals.[1] O'Neill says the documents prove West lied about that.[1]

The Jimmy Shaver Case

On July 3, 1954, an Air Force sergeant named Jimmy Shaver abducted and killed a three-year-old girl. West served as the court's psychiatric examiner. Shaver had been a patient at the base hospital where West worked. West hypnotized him and interviewed him under sodium pentothal, a so-called "truth serum."[1,2] Shaver was executed in 1958, still saying he had no memory of the crime.[1]

O'Neill raises the question of whether Shaver had been a subject in West's experiments. I haven't seen a record that answers that, so it stays an open question, not an allegation I'm making.

Jack Ruby

In 1964, West examined Jack Ruby, the man who shot Lee Harvey Oswald, and declared him insane. O'Neill says West kept treating Ruby until 1967.[1] O'Neill points out that Allen Dulles sat on the Warren Commission investigating President Kennedy's murder and that Richard Helms worked with it, and that neither told the commission about West's CIA ties.[1] That's O'Neill's argument. The JFK case is its own book in this series, so I'll leave it there.

The Haight-Ashbury Project

In June 1967, at the start of the "Summer of Love," West opened what he called a "laboratory disguised as a hippie crash pad" on Frederick Street in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury

neighborhood. He staffed it with six graduate students who were told to "dress like hippies."[2] He called it "The Haight Ashbury Project" and came to the neighborhood's free medical clinic to find subjects.[1]

According to West's files, the project was funded by the Foundations Fund for Research in Psychiatry, Inc. A former department chair at the University of Oklahoma told O'Neill he had found papers suggesting that fund was a CIA front.[2] That claim is labeled Alleged. One person's account of papers he saw is not the same as the papers themselves.

The graduate students' diaries suggest the project's purpose was unclear even to the people working in it, and that West was often away.[2]

Why West Matters

West is not a rumor. His CIA connection is in his own letters. His 1956 report says what it says. And he was in the Haight-Ashbury in the summer of 1967 running a study on young drug users. That's the setting for the next chapter, because Charles Manson was there too.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
West wrote to Gottlieb on June 11, 1953, proposing drug and hypnosis experiments	Documented (as published)	O'Neill's archive research; Intercept; House testimony
Gottlieb called West "quite an asset"	Documented (as published)	Same
West's 1956 report claimed false memories could be implanted	Documented (as published)	Same
The 1977 version given to Congress dropped that claim	Documented (as published)	Same
West denied CIA work in 1977	Documented	1977 New York Times, as cited by O'Neill
West opened a Haight-Ashbury research house in June 1967	Documented	West's files as reported
The fund paying for that house was a CIA front	Alleged	One person's account
Jimmy Shaver was a subject of West's experiments	Open question	No record found either way

Notes

1. Tom O'Neill, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/ONeill-Written-Testimony.pdf

2. Tom O'Neill and Dan Piepenbring, "Inside the Archive of an LSD Researcher With Ties to the CIA's MKUltra Mind Control Project," The Intercept, November 24, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/11/24/cia-mkultra-louis-jolyon-west/

Chapter 13: Charles Manson

This is the chapter a lot of readers will flip to first, so I'll give you the bottom line up front. There is no record showing the CIA created, controlled or directed Charles Manson or the murders his followers committed. There are real, documented oddities in how Manson was handled in 1967 to 1969, and there is a documented CIA-connected psychiatrist working in the same neighborhood at the same time. Whether those two facts connect is still an open question. Even the journalist who has done the most work on it says he couldn't prove it.

The Basic Facts

Manson was released from federal prison on March 21, 1967. Rolling Stone's timeline says he was released from McNeil Island prison in Washington state.[1] He went to the San Francisco Bay Area. He met Mary Brunner, one of his first followers, in Berkeley in April 1967, and he met Susan Atkins in the Haight-Ashbury that summer.[1] In the fall of 1967 he moved to Los Angeles, and by the summer of 1968 he and his followers were living at Spahn Ranch.[1]

On August 9, 1969, Manson's followers murdered actress Sharon Tate and four others at a house on Cielo Drive. The next night, August 10, they murdered Leno and Rosemary LaBianca on Waverly Drive.[1] In October 1969, police raided Spahn Ranch and arrested 27 people on car-theft charges, including Manson.[1] On January 25, 1971, a jury found Manson and three of his followers guilty on all counts.[1] They were sentenced to death in April 1971. The sentences were later changed to life in prison.[1]

The Official Story: Helter Skelter

Prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi's 1974 book Helter Skelter became the standard account. It described Manson as a charismatic ex-convict who wanted to start a race war and believed the Beatles' music was sending him messages. He named his plan after a song on the White Album.[2]

Tom O'Neill's Investigation

Journalist Tom O'Neill spent about twenty years investigating the Manson case. The result was a 2019 book, Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties, written with Dan Piepenbring.[3]

O'Neill's book makes two kinds of arguments, and it's important to keep them apart.

The first kind is about the official story. O'Neill argues that Bugliosi's account was built to win a conviction and sell books, that evidence was hidden and that some witnesses were pressured.[2] He points to an early-1970s interview in which Bugliosi said he didn't think Manson really believed in the race-war motive.[2] He also reports that after Susan Atkins bragged about the murders to cellmates, her court-appointed lawyer was replaced on November 26, 1969, by a former prosecutor. O'Neill's view: "From that point on, I think the whole trial shouldn't be trusted, because the well was poisoned."[2] These are serious claims about how one case was

prosecuted. They are O'Neill's claims, and Bugliosi, who died in 2015, isn't here to answer them. I label them Alleged.

The second kind is about the government. This is where the CIA comes in, and it's where O'Neill himself is most careful.

The Parole Officer

Manson's parole officer in San Francisco was Roger Smith. Smith was a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Criminology, researching drug use and gang violence.[2] He was part of a study called "The San Francisco Project" that looked at how the number of cases a parole officer handles affects whether parolees commit new crimes. According to O'Neill, Smith started with about 40 cases and ended the year with only one: Charles Manson.[2]

O'Neill also argues that Manson and his followers kept getting out of trouble in ways that ordinary parolees didn't, and he calls it "curious leniency" and "special privileges."[2] That pattern is a real question. But "a parolee got lucky more than once" is not evidence of a CIA operation, and O'Neill doesn't claim it is.

The Free Clinic

In the summer of 1967, Manson and his followers used the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic for free medical care.[4] The clinic was founded by Dr. David Smith (no relation to Roger Smith).[2] O'Neill says a 1970 article by David Smith studied a "group marriage commune" that O'Neill identifies as the Manson Family.[2]

That same summer, Dr. Louis Jolyon West, whose CIA correspondence you read about in Chapter 12, came to the same clinic looking for subjects for his Haight Ashbury Project.[4] West had also written, years earlier, about the possibility of violent "LSD cults."[5]

So here is the documented picture. A CIA-connected psychiatrist was recruiting young drug users at a free clinic. Manson and his followers were patients at that clinic during the same summer. That's real. It's also the end of what the record shows.

What O'Neill Says He Couldn't Prove

In his written testimony to Congress on June 30, 2026, O'Neill said this: "I was never able to put Jolly West in the same room as Manson that pivotal summer, despite my best efforts."[4]

He has been just as direct elsewhere. Rolling Stone reported that O'Neill describes the second part of his book as "entirely speculative," and that he says he "couldn't come to a conclusive resolution." In his words: "It sounds lazy, and maybe like a cop out, but I'd rather let the readers see everything."[2]

I respect that. It's more honest than most of what's been written about this subject, on either side.

Where That Leaves Us

- Manson was in the Haight in 1967 and used the free clinic: Documented.
- Jolly West had CIA ties and was recruiting subjects at that clinic that summer: Documented.
- Manson's parole was handled in unusual ways: Alleged, based on O'Neill's research.
- West met, studied or influenced Manson: Alleged, and O'Neill says he couldn't prove it.
- The CIA created or directed Manson or the murders: Unsupported. No record shows it, and O'Neill doesn't claim to have one.

If the CIA or any other agency ever releases files that show more, this chapter will change.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Manson was released March 21, 1967, and spent the summer in the Haight-Ashbury	Documented	Rolling Stone timeline
Manson and followers used the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic in 1967	Documented	O'Neill testimony
Jolly West recruited at the same clinic in 1967	Documented	O'Neill testimony
Manson's parole officer ended the year with only Manson on his caseload	Alleged	O'Neill's research as reported
Bugliosi's prosecution was compromised	Alleged	O'Neill's argument
West met or influenced Manson	Alleged	O'Neill: "never able to put Jolly West in the same room as Manson"
The CIA created or directed Manson or the murders	Unsupported	No record found

Notes

1. Rolling Stone, "Heart of Darkness: A Charles Manson Timeline." https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/heart-of-darkness-a-charles-manson-timeline-59292/

2. Rolling Stone, article on Tom O'Neill's Chaos (2019). https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/manson-murders-chaos-book-helter-skelter-869860/

3. Tom O'Neill with Dan Piepenbring, Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties (New York: Little, Brown, 2019). https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/tom-oneill/chaos/9780316477574/?lens=little-brown

4. Tom O'Neill, written testimony to the House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/ONeill-Written-Testimony.pdf

5. Tom O'Neill and Dan Piepenbring, "Inside the Archive of an LSD Researcher With Ties to the CIA's MKUltra Mind Control Project," The Intercept, November 24, 2019. https://theintercept.com/2019/11/24/cia-mkultra-louis-jolyon-west/

Chapter 14: Ted Kaczynski and the Harvard Stress Study

Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, carried out a mail-bombing campaign that killed three people before his arrest in 1996. He died in prison in 2023. Ever since his arrest, people have asked whether a psychology experiment he went through at Harvard as a teenager helped make him what he became, and whether the CIA paid for it.

The Study

In 1959, his sophomore year at Harvard, Kaczynski was recruited into a psychological study run by Henry A. Murray, one of the best-known psychologists of his day. The study lasted three years.[1] According to Jonathan Moreno, a bioethicist writing in Psychology Today, it was designed around humiliating undergraduates as a form of "psychic deconstruction."[1]

That part isn't in dispute. Kaczynski was a subject, and the study was harsh. Writer Alston Chase investigated it at length in his book Harvard and the Unabomber.[1]

Murray's Background

Here's why people connect the study to the CIA. During World War II, Murray helped the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, assess its agents.[1] Moreno writes that before the war the U.S. government asked Murray to put together a psychological profile of Hitler.[1] Moreno also quotes Chase describing Murray as the OSS chief psychologist who had monitored military experiments on brainwashing and sodium amytal interrogation.[1]

So Murray had real ties to the American intelligence world. That's Documented.

One more detail worth knowing: Moreno discloses that Murray was a close friend and colleague of his own father, and that they "knew nothing of this experiment."[1] I mention it because it's honest of him to say so, and because it tells you how quietly this kind of research was done.

Was It MKULTRA?

Here's what I looked for: any record that the Murray study was an MKULTRA subproject, or that it was paid for by the CIA or a CIA front.

- Moreno's article makes no claim that the CIA or MKULTRA funded the study and offers no evidence of it.[1]
- I did not find Murray's study named in the 1977 Senate hearing record or the Church Committee's drug-testing chapter.[2,3]

That means the claim "Kaczynski was an MKULTRA test subject" is labeled Unsupported for now. The study was real, it was cruel by modern standards, and the man running it had intelligence ties. None of that is the same as the CIA paying for it.

You might ask, "Does it matter whether the CIA paid, if the study happened anyway?" It does for this book. The whole point is to separate what was done from what's been claimed. A university can run a harmful study without the CIA's help. Blaming the CIA when the record doesn't show it lets everyone else off the hook.

Did the Study Create the Unabomber?

That's a question for psychologists and for Kaczynski's own writings, not for government records. No document can settle it, so I'll leave it there.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Kaczynski was a subject in Henry Murray's Harvard study, 1959-1962	Documented	Psychology Today; Chase
The study used deliberate humiliation of students	Documented	Note 1
Murray assessed OSS agents in World War II	Documented	Note 1
The study was an MKULTRA subproject or CIA-funded	Unsupported	No record found
The study caused Kaczynski's later crimes	Not a records question	Opinion and psychology, not documents

Notes

1. Jonathan D. Moreno, "Harvard's Experiment on the Unabomber, Class of '62," Psychology Today, May 25, 2012, citing Alston Chase, Harvard and the Unabomber. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/impromptu-man/201205/harvards-experiment-on-the-unabomber-class-of-62

2. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

3. Church Committee, Final Report, Book I (April 1976), pp. 385-422. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt

Part III: Watching Americans

Chapter 15: Operation CHAOS and COINTELPRO

Mind control is about getting inside a person's head. This chapter is about something more ordinary and, in some ways, more far-reaching: the government watching what Americans said and did, and in the FBI's case, trying to disrupt it. These programs aren't mind control. They belong in this book because they come from the same era, were exposed by the same investigations, and are often blended into the same stories.

Operation CHAOS

The CIA is a foreign intelligence agency. By law, it isn't supposed to police Americans at home. In August 1967, it set up a Special Operations Group inside its Counterintelligence Staff anyway.[1] On August 15, 1967, Deputy Director for Plans Thomas Karamessines issued the directive, passing along instructions from CIA Director Richard Helms.[1]

Why? Helms testified that he was responding to "continuing, substantial pressure from the President," meaning Lyndon Johnson.[1] The pressure didn't stop when Richard Nixon took office. On June 20, 1969, Nixon's staff assistant Tom Charles Huston wrote to the CIA that the President wanted a report on foreign Communist support for American protest movements.[1] The Rockefeller Commission summed it up: "Two Presidents and their staffs made continuing and insistent requests."[1]

The stated goal was to find foreign contacts with American dissidents. In practice, the files covered antiwar groups, student groups, the "New Left," Black power groups and other radical organizations, including the Black Panther Party, Students for a Democratic Society and the Nation of Islam.[1]

How Big It Got

The Rockefeller Commission's numbers are worth reading slowly:[1]

- Some 13,000 files over six years, including files on about 7,200 American citizens.
- A computer index of more than 300,000 people and organizations.
- Nearly 1,000 files on organizations.
- A staff that peaked at 86 in mid-1969 and later dropped to 52.
- Fewer than 30 agents.

CHAOS also worked hand in glove with the FBI. More than 3,000 memos based on CHAOS information went to the FBI, nearly 65 percent of the files were opened to handle FBI information or FBI requests, and about half of the potential agents were referred by the FBI.[1]

How It Ended

The CIA terminated Operation CHAOS on March 15, 1974.[1] The Rockefeller Commission's conclusion: "Some domestic activities of Operation CHAOS unlawfully exceeded the CIA's statutory authority."[1]

Notice the word "unlawfully." That's not a critic talking. That's a commission appointed by the President, led by the Vice President.

COINTELPRO

The FBI ran its own program, and it went further than watching. According to the FBI's own description, the Counterintelligence Program, known as COINTELPRO, began in 1956 to disrupt the Communist Party of the United States and expanded in the 1960s. Its targets included the Communist Party, the Ku Klux Klan, the Socialist Workers Party and the Black Panther Party.[2] The FBI says all COINTELPRO operations ended in 1971.[2]

The FBI's own page also notes that it was later criticized by Congress and the public for violating First Amendment rights, and that it made up about 0.2 percent of the FBI's workload over 15 years.[2] Small slice or not, the Church Committee devoted a full volume, Book III, to the FBI's domestic intelligence programs, including COINTELPRO.[3]

What the Church Committee Found

The Church Committee's staff report on COINTELPRO describes it as FBI programs that went beyond collecting intelligence to "secret action designed to 'disrupt' and 'neutralize'" the groups it targeted.[5] It identifies five separate programs:[5]

- Communist Party, USA: 1956 to 1971, formally started in August 1956.
- Socialist Workers Party: 1961 to 1969, started October 12, 1961.
- White hate groups, including the Ku Klux Klan: 1964 to 1971, begun in July 1964.
- "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups": 1967 to 1971, launched by a letter dated August 25, 1967.
- The "New Left": 1968 to 1971, started October 28, 1968.

The methods are listed in the report itself. They included "mailing anonymous letters to a member's spouse accusing the target of infidelity," using informants "to raise controversial issues at meetings in order to cause dissent," falsely labeling a member as an informant so the group would turn on him, and "contacting an employer to get a target fired."[5] About 18 percent of approved actions were aimed at stopping people from speaking, teaching, writing, publishing or meeting.[5] The report also says the FBI targeted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in part over fear he might abandon nonviolence, and named him as a potential "messiah" the Black Nationalist program wanted to prevent.[5]

How many actions? The report says more than 2,000, and a footnote gives 2,370. One page says 8,370, which appears to be a typo, since it doesn't match the report's other figures.[5] I use "more than 2,000."

The Committee's judgment was blunt. It called COINTELPRO "a sophisticated vigilante operation" and said the FBI "took the law into its own hands."[5] It quoted a former FBI official, William Sullivan, describing the work as "rough, tough, dirty business."[5]

The programs were officially ended "for security reasons" on April 27, 1971, with a letter to field offices dated the next day. The trigger was the Media break-in described below, followed by a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit by NBC reporter Carl Stern. Even then, the report says COINTELPRO-type activity continued in at least three instances after it was supposedly ended.[5]

The Black Panther Party

The Church Committee wrote a separate staff report on what the FBI did to the Black Panther Party, and it's one of the hardest documents in this book to read.

The Panthers weren't an original target of the "Black Nationalist" program, but by July 1969 they were its main focus. Of 293 authorized actions in that program, 233 were aimed at the Panthers.[6] In September 1968, J. Edgar Hoover called the Panthers "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."[6]

The FBI said its goal was to prevent violence. The Committee found that many of its tactics were "clearly intended to foster violence" or "could reasonably have been expected to cause violence."[6] In Southern California, the FBI sent anonymous letters and insulting cartoons designed to inflame the feud between the Panthers and a rival group called United Slaves. Four Panthers were killed by members of that group. The Committee could not trace any single killing directly to an FBI action, but it found that "high officials of the FBI desired to promote violent confrontations." After one round of cartoons, the FBI's San Diego office boasted that they were "really shaking up the BPP," and it later called the violence a "positive development" it hoped to "capitalize" on.[6]

In Chicago, the FBI proposed an anonymous letter to Jeff Fort, leader of the Blackstone Rangers street gang, falsely telling him the Panthers had "a hit out" on him. Hoover approved it on January 30, 1969. The Committee found no proof the letter led to violence, but said "the Bureau's intent was clear." The FBI's own Chicago office had noted the Rangers were more "violence prone" than the Panthers.[6]

The program went after the Panthers' supporters too. The FBI sent anonymous letters to businesses that donated to the Panthers' free breakfast program for children, including Safeway, Mayfair Markets and Jack-In-The-Box. It reported a Catholic priest, Father Frank Curran, to his bishop for letting his church host the breakfasts. After he was transferred, the FBI wrote that he had been "completely neutralized."[6]

The Committee's verdict: the FBI "engaged in lawless tactics and responded to deep-seated social problems by fomenting violence and unrest," and "It is deplorable that officials of the United States Government should engage in the activities described."[6]

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The Committee's case study on Dr. King is just as direct. From December 1963 until his death in 1968, it found, King was the target of an FBI campaign to "neutralize" him as an effective civil rights leader.[7]

Here's what the record shows:[7]

- The FBI opened its investigation in October 1962, based on claims that two of King's advisers were Communists. The Committee could not verify those claims and found no evidence that King himself was a Communist.
- Attorney General Robert Kennedy at first turned down wiretaps on King in July 1963, then approved coverage of King's home and two Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) offices in October 1963. The home wiretap ran until mid-1965.
- The FBI admitted to 16 occasions when it hid microphones in King's hotel and motel rooms.
- Hoover wrote "King is no good" on a 1962 memo. When Time magazine named King its Man of the Year, Hoover commented that "they had to dig deep in the garbage."
- The FBI tried to stop Marquette University and Springfield College from honoring him, tried to block his audience with the Pope, and told church leaders about King's "personal conduct" to cut off his funding.
- On November 18, 1964, Hoover told a group of reporters that King was the "most notorious liar" in the country.
- Around November 21, 1964, the FBI mailed King a tape made from its hotel-room recordings, along with an anonymous letter. A former FBI official testified that Hoover wanted the tape sent to Coretta King "to precipitate their separation." The letter said, "there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is." King's associates read it as urging him to take his own life, and the same former FBI official conceded it "could be interpreted as an invitation to suicide."

It didn't stop. After King's April 4, 1967 speech against the Vietnam War, the FBI called his position a "direct parallel of the communist position on Vietnam" and sent a revised report on him to the White House and the Justice Department. In early 1968, it expanded the Black Nationalist program to name King explicitly and planted stories meant to cut off donations to his planned Washington campaign for the poor.[7] The Committee found no evidence that the FBI had anything to do with King's move to the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, where he was killed on April 4, 1968.[7]

Even after his death, the FBI kept at it. In March 1969, when Congress was considering a national holiday for King's birthday, an FBI division proposed briefing members of Congress

who could block the bill if "they realize King was a scoundrel." Hoover agreed the matter "must be handled very cautiously."[7]

Congressman Andrew Young, one of King's closest aides, told the Committee the FBI's rumors "chilled contributions" to King's organization, and that King wasn't stopped by the campaign but was personally weighed down by it.[7]

The Committee found "no evidence" that the campaign against King was authorized outside the FBI, but it faulted the officials who should have stopped it: "The evidence reveals a disturbing attitude of unconcern by responsible officials."[7] A current FBI official told the Committee, "I see no statutory basis or no basis of justification for the activity."[7]

I include King here for the same reason as the rest of this chapter. When people say the government was capable of anything in the 1960s, this is a large part of what they mean, and it's documented in the government's own words.

How the Public Found Out

COINTELPRO came to light because of a burglary. On March 8, 1971, a group of antiwar activists calling themselves the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI broke into the FBI's office in Media, Pennsylvania, and took files showing FBI surveillance of antiwar and civil rights groups.[4] Among them was a document telling agents to increase paranoia among the people they were watching.[4] Betty Medsger, a reporter at The Washington Post, received the documents anonymously and published the story.[4]

The FBI never identified the burglars. It built profiles of seven prime suspects and got nearly all of them wrong. The statute of limitations ran out after five years. The group stayed silent until decades later, when some of them, including Bonnie and John Raines and Keith Forsyth, told their story to Medsger for her book The Burglary.[4]

Why These Programs Belong Here

Neither CHAOS nor COINTELPRO involved drugs or hypnosis. But they show the same pattern as MKULTRA: secret programs, outside the law, aimed at Americans, justified by Cold War fear, and exposed only because outsiders forced the issue. If you're trying to understand why so many Americans came to believe the government was capable of anything, this is a big part of the answer. The government really was watching them.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
The CIA set up the CHAOS group in August 1967 under presidential pressure	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, pp. 130-132
CHAOS held files on about 7,200 Americans and indexed over 300,000 names	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, pp. 130, 144
CHAOS ended March 15, 1974	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, p. 148

Claim	Label	Notes
The Commission found CHAOS "unlawfully exceeded" CIA authority	Documented	Rockefeller Commission, p. 149
COINTELPRO ran from 1956 to 1971	Documented	FBI's own description
COINTELPRO was exposed by the 1971 Media, Pennsylvania burglary	Documented	NPR; Medsger
COINTELPRO had five programs targeting groups from the Communist Party to the Klan to the New Left	Documented	Church Committee, Book III
The FBI approved more than 2,000 COINTELPRO actions	Documented	Book III; one page's 8,370 appears to be a typo
The Committee called COINTELPRO "a sophisticated vigilante operation"	Documented	Book III, p. 3
COINTELPRO-type actions continued after the April 1971 shutdown	Documented	Book III, p. 13
233 of 293 "Black Nationalist" COINTELPRO actions targeted the Black Panthers	Documented	Church Committee, Book III, p. 188
FBI officials "desired to promote violent confrontations" between the Panthers and rivals	Documented	Book III, p. 189
The FBI campaigned to "neutralize" Dr. King from 1963 to 1968	Documented	Book III, p. 81
The FBI hid microphones in King's rooms on 16 occasions	Documented	Book III, p. 81
The FBI mailed King a tape and a letter he and his associates read as urging suicide	Documented	Book III, pp. 159-161
After King's death, the FBI proposed briefing Congress against a King holiday	Documented	Book III, p. 184

Notes

1. Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975, Chapter 11, "Special Operations Group - Operation CHAOS," pp. 130-149. https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/intelligence/RockComm_Chap11_CHAOS.pdf

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Records: The Vault, "COINTELPRO." https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro

3. Church Committee, Final Report, Book III: Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans (April 1976). https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/sites-default-files-94755-iii.pdf

4. NPR, "The Secret Burglary That Exposed J. Edgar Hoover's FBI," January 7, 2014 (transcript). https://www.npr.org/transcripts/260302289

5. Church Committee, Final Report, Book III, "COINTELPRO: FBI Covert Action Against American Citizens" (April 1976), pp. 3-28, as reproduced by the Assassination Archives and Research Center. https://aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/book3/pdf/ChurchB3_1_COINTELPRO.pdf

6. Church Committee, Final Report, Book III, "FBI Covert Action Against the Black Panther Party" (April 1976), pp. 187-219. https://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/book3/pdf/ChurchB3_3_BlackPanthers.pdf

7. Church Committee, Final Report, Book III, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Case Study" (April 1976), pp. 81-175. Archive.org text of Book III. https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel03unit/finalreportofsel03unit_djvu.txt

Chapter 16: Psychics for Spies - STAR GATE

Of all the programs in this book, this is the one people are most likely to think is made up. It isn't. For more than twenty years, U.S. intelligence agencies paid for research into whether psychics could "see" distant places with their minds. They called it remote viewing.

How It Started

Between 1969 and 1971, U.S. intelligence concluded that the Soviet Union was researching what it called "psychotronic" topics.[1] As with brainwashing in Chapter 1, the fear that the other side might have something was enough to start a program. In 1970, the CIA began funding the first research program, called SCANATE.[1] In 1972, remote viewing research began at SRI, a research institute in Menlo Park, California, led by physicists Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff.[1]

A Program With Many Names

The program changed names and owners several times:[1]

- 1977: GONDOLA WISH, an Army effort to evaluate how an enemy might use remote viewing.
- Mid-1978: GRILL FLAME, an Army operational collection project at Fort Meade, Maryland. SRI's research was folded into it in early 1979.
- 1983: renamed the INSCOM CENTER LANE Project.
- Late 1985: Army funding ended. The unit was renamed SUN STREAK and moved to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).
- 1991: moved to a contractor, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), and renamed STAR GATE under DIA.

In April 1984, newspaper columnist Jack Anderson revealed the program publicly. That same year, a National Research Council review done for the Army was unfavorable.[1] The program kept going anyway.

What It Cost

About $20 million over more than two decades, including $11 million budgeted from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s.[1]

The 1995 Review

In the 1995 defense budget, Congress directed that the program be transferred to the CIA. The CIA had the American Institutes for Research (AIR) evaluate it. AIR's final report is dated September 29, 1995, and was released to the public on November 28, 1995.[1]

The review brought in two experts who disagreed. Statistician Jessica Utts found a statistically significant effect in the lab results. Psychologist Ray Hyman, a skeptic, disagreed.[1] AIR recommended ending the program. The bottom line, as recorded in the program history: "CIA

concluded that there was no case in which ESP had provided data used to guide intelligence operations."[1]

You might ask, "If a statistician found an effect, isn't that proof?" Not quite. A small statistical effect in a lab isn't the same as information a spy agency can use, and that second question is the one the CIA was paying to answer. The answer, after twenty years and $20 million, was no.

Why It's in This Book

STAR GATE shows the same thing as BLUEBIRD and MKULTRA. Fear of what the Soviets might be doing pushed U.S. agencies into research that didn't pan out, and once a secret program has a budget, it can run for a very long time before anyone shuts it down.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
U.S. intelligence funded remote viewing research starting in 1970	Documented	Program history; note 1
The program ran under several names and moved from Army to DIA	Documented	Note 1
Total cost was about $20 million	Documented	Note 1
The 1995 AIR review recommended ending it	Documented	Report dated September 29, 1995
Remote viewing produced usable intelligence	Unsupported	CIA concluded no case guided operations

Notes

1. Federation of American Scientists, Intelligence Resource Program, "STAR GATE [Controlled Remote Viewing]." https://irp.fas.org/program/collect/stargate.htm The AIR evaluation itself is in the CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/node/304501

Part IV: Population Control

Chapter 17: Eugenics at Home

When people put "population control" in the same breath as MKULTRA, they usually mean one of two things. Either the government has secretly tried to decide who gets to have children, or it has secretly experimented on people it considered less valuable. I'll be blunt: both of those have happened in the United States, on the record, for decades. But the record shows it was done mostly by state governments, public health agencies and other parts of the federal government, not by the CIA. That's the distinction this chapter keeps.

Buck v. Bell

On May 2, 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8 to 1 that Virginia could forcibly sterilize a young woman named Carrie Buck.[1] Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. wrote the opinion, which includes one of the most infamous lines in American law: "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."[1] Justice Pierce Butler dissented without writing an opinion.[1]

Who was Carrie Buck? She was born in Charlottesville in 1906 and raised by foster parents from the age of three. In 1923 she became pregnant, which she said was the result of rape by a member of her foster family. Officials treated the pregnancy as proof that she was promiscuous and "feebleminded," and in 1924 she was committed to the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded.[1]

Historians have since found evidence that neither Carrie Buck nor her daughter, Vivian, had any mental disability, and that the sterilization rested on a false diagnosis.[1] Vivian was on the honor roll at her elementary school in 1931. She died in 1932 at age eight.[1]

How Far It Went

About 8,300 Virginians were sterilized by the state between 1927 and 1972.[1] Nationally, almost 28,000 Americans were sterilized in the ten years after Buck v. Bell, compared with 8,515 in the twenty years before it.[1] Total estimates for the whole country across the whole century run from about 60,000 to 70,000, depending on the source. I give you the range rather than pick a number, because I haven't found an official national count.

Virginia repealed its sterilization law in 1974. On May 2, 2002, exactly 75 years after the decision, Governor Mark Warner apologized, calling it "a shameful effort in which state government never should have been involved."[1]

Here's a fact that surprises most people: Buck v. Bell has never been overturned. In 1942, in Skinner v. Oklahoma, the Court barred sterilization as a punishment for crime, but it never reversed Buck.[1] And at the Nuremberg trials after World War II, several Nazi defendants cited Buck v. Bell in their own defense.[1]

The Indian Health Service

In the 1970s, complaints surfaced that American Indian women were being sterilized by the federal Indian Health Service (IHS) without proper consent. The General Accounting Office, now the Government Accountability Office (GAO), investigated.

GAO's report, released November 4, 1976, reviewed four IHS areas: Aberdeen, Albuquerque, Oklahoma City and Phoenix. It found those areas were "generally not in compliance with IHS regulations." Consent forms were in the medical files, but most did not meet IHS requirements.[2] GAO recommended a standard consent form and training for doctors on the rules for sterilizing people under 21 and people judged mentally incompetent.[2]

The report itself gives the numbers. It was a letter report to Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota, chairman of the Senate's Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. In those four areas, in fiscal years 1973 through 1976, IHS performed 3,406 sterilizations on women, 3,001 of them on women between 15 and 44. About 30 percent, 1,024, were done at facilities under contract with IHS.[8] The National Library of Medicine uses the same 3,406 figure.[3]

GAO also found that IHS itself had identified 36 cases between July 1, 1973 and March 30, 1976 where women under 21 were sterilized in violation of a moratorium. Thirteen of those came after the federal rules were issued in April 1974. GAO said the violations happened "apparently because" some IHS doctors didn't fully understand the rules and contract doctors weren't required to follow them.[8]

When GAO looked closely at 113 sterilizations done from April to September 1975, it found: "In no case did the documented consents ... fully comply with HEW regulations." The most common form didn't show that the basic parts of informed consent had been explained out loud, and 13 cases had less than the required 72-hour waiting period.[8]

To be fair to the record, GAO also wrote that it found "no evidence of IHS sterilizing Indians without a patient consent form on file."[8] So the GAO finding is about consent that was badly obtained and badly documented, not about women sterilized with no paperwork at all. Whether a signature on a confusing form is real consent is a fair question. It's also a different claim from secret sterilization, and I want you to know exactly what GAO found.

California Prisons

This isn't only ancient history. In June 2014, the California State Auditor reported that 144 women in state prisons were sterilized by tubal ligation between fiscal years 2005-06 and 2012-13, with the last one in 2011.[4] Of those, 39 were sterilized after problems with the informed consent process: 27 had no evidence the doctor signed the required consent form, 18 had possible violations of the required waiting period, and 6 had both.[4] All but one of the 144 procedures lacked the required approvals.[4] The auditor's title for the report says it plainly: some inmates were sterilized unlawfully.[4]

Tuskegee

From 1932 to 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service ran what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now calls the "Untreated Syphilis Study at Tuskegee." It followed 399 Black men with syphilis and 201 without it.[5] The men believed they were getting a special government health care program. Researchers did not get informed consent, and they did not offer treatment even after penicillin became widely available.[5]

The study ended in 1972 after news articles exposed it. A $10 million out-of-court settlement in 1974 paid $37,500 to each living man in the syphilis group and smaller amounts to heirs and to the control group. In 1997, President Clinton formally apologized.[5]

Tuskegee isn't population control. It's here because it's part of the same record: a government agency deciding that a group of Americans could be used as research subjects without their consent.

Human Radiation Experiments

In January 1994, President Clinton set up the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments. Its October 1995 report found that the government had run "several thousand human radiation experiments" between 1944 and 1975.[6] Most advanced medical science and were unlikely to cause harm, but some were done unethically.[6] Among them were 18 people injected with plutonium. The committee recommended compensating their families, and the government settled with the 16 families who came forward.[6]

The committee's full report gives the details, and a few cases stand out.

Plutonium. Starting in 1945, people were injected with plutonium at hospitals in Oak Ridge, Chicago, Rochester and San Francisco to learn how the body handles it.[9] The first, in April 1945 at Oak Ridge, was Ebb Cade, a 53-year-old man in the hospital after a car accident, who received about 4.7 micrograms. A doctor told the committee there was no consent.[9] In California, Albert Stevens, 58, was injected in May 1945 because doctors suspected stomach cancer. His biopsy showed a benign ulcer. A four-year-old Australian boy with bone cancer, Simeon Shaw, was injected there in 1946.[9] A 1946 letter about the California program said the injections "would probably be made without the knowledge of the patient." Of Stevens, a doctor said, "to my knowledge he never found out."[9] In Chicago, a 1946 report said subjects were picked because "their life expectancy was such that they could not be endangered."[9] The California injections were stopped on December 24, 1946.[9]

The Fernald School. In Massachusetts, researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and staff at the Fernald State School, a state institution, gave radioactive iron to 17 boys in 1946, and radioactive calcium to 57 boys from 1950 to 1953, as part of nutrition studies.[10] The boys were members of the school's "science club," which came with perks like a quart of milk a day, baseball games and trips to the beach. The letters to parents described a special diet and blood tests and never mentioned radiation or risk. The committee accepted that the doses were low and harm was "extremely unlikely," but called the studies morally troubling

because of the incomplete information and the unfairness of using institutionalized children. One researcher had suggested that three boys who objected could be "induced to change their minds."[10]

Prisoners in Oregon and Washington. From 1963 to 1973, Dr. Carl Heller irradiated the testicles of 67 inmates at the Oregon State Penitentiary, under grants totaling $1.12 million. Inmates were paid $25 per biopsy, at a time when prison jobs paid 25 cents a day, and had to agree to a vasectomy. In the early years they were told nothing about cancer risk. Heller later said, "I didn't want to frighten them so I said tumor; I may have on occasion said cancer." The Oregon program ended in January 1973 when a state official concluded prisoners couldn't consent freely.[11] A similar Washington State program under Dr. C. Alvin Paulsen, funded with a $505,000 Atomic Energy Commission grant, was halted by the state in 1970. A state review committee said it "seems clearly inconsistent with the standards laid down by the Nuremberg Code."[11]

Intentional releases. On December 3, 1949, in a test called the Green Run, roughly 8,000 curies of radioactive iodine-131 were released from a stack at the Hanford site in Washington State. It stayed classified until 1986.[12] At Los Alamos, more than 200 "RaLa" tests from 1944 into the early 1960s released radioactive lanthanum into the air; the report's own counts differ, 244 in one place and 254 in another.[12] A witness told the committee, "Information regarding that radiation release was kept secret for almost 40 years."[12]

On October 3, 1995, President Clinton apologized: "Our Government failed in that duty, and it offers an apology to the survivors and their families." He also said the experiments had been kept secret "not for a compelling reason of national security but for the simple fear of embarrassment."[7]

What the Radiation Committee Concluded

The Advisory Committee's findings are worth knowing, because they answer the question people always ask: was this just the standards of the time?

The committee's answer was no, at least in part. It found that from 1944 to 1974, no government policy allowed researchers to skip consent for national security reasons.[13] Where agencies had sound rules and officials didn't follow them, "the government and government officials are morally responsible."[13] It found that some of the most troubling experiments used "institutionalized children, seriously ill and sometimes comatose patients, African-Americans, and prisoners," and that subjects "often were drawn from relatively powerless, easily exploited groups."[13]

It also said something that ties straight back to Part I of this book. Much of the documentation on CIA experiments, including MKULTRA, "has long since been destroyed," so the committee couldn't say for certain what rules governed those programs.[13] The radiation investigators ran into the same shredded files the Church Committee did.

Where the CIA Fits

You might have noticed the CIA barely appears in this chapter. That's deliberate. The forced sterilizations, Tuskegee and the radiation experiments were run by states and by other federal agencies. Lumping them in with MKULTRA as "the CIA's population control program" isn't accurate, and it lets the agencies that actually did these things off the hook. What ties them together is the attitude, not the agency.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Buck v. Bell (1927) upheld forced sterilization 8-1	Documented	Encyclopedia Virginia
Carrie Buck and her daughter were likely not mentally disabled	Documented by historians	Note 1
About 8,300 Virginians were sterilized, 1927-1972	Documented	Note 1
60,000 to 70,000 sterilized nationally	Estimate	Range across sources; no official count found
Buck v. Bell has never been overturned	Documented	Note 1
GAO found four IHS areas "generally not in compliance" (1976)	Documented	GAO HRD-77-3
3,406 sterilizations of women in four IHS areas, fiscal 1973-1976	Documented	GAO report text
144 California inmates sterilized, 39 with consent problems	Documented	California State Auditor, 2014
Tuskegee study ran 1932-1972 without informed consent	Documented	CDC
Several thousand human radiation experiments, 1944-1975	Documented	Advisory Committee, 1995
These programs were CIA operations	Unsupported	Run by states and other federal agencies
None of 113 reviewed 1975 consent records fully complied with federal rules	Documented	GAO
GAO found no IHS sterilizations without a consent form on file	Documented	GAO
People were injected with plutonium starting in 1945, some without their knowledge	Documented	ACHRE, Chapter 5
Boys at the Fernald School were given radioactive iron and calcium; parents weren't told	Documented	ACHRE, Chapter 7
67 Oregon inmates had their testicles irradiated, 1963-1973	Documented	ACHRE, Chapter 9
The 1949 Green Run released about 8,000 curies of iodine-131 in secret	Documented	ACHRE, Chapter 11
No policy from 1944 to 1974 allowed skipping consent for national security	Documented	ACHRE Finding 8

Claim	Label	Notes
The radiation committee couldn't review MKULTRA because the records were destroyed	Documented	ACHRE Finding 8

Notes

1. Encyclopedia Virginia, "Buck v. Bell (1927)." https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/buck-v-bell-1927/

2. U.S. General Accounting Office, Investigation of Allegations Concerning Indian Health Service, HRD-77-3, November 4, 1976. https://www.gao.gov/products/hrd-77-3

3. National Library of Medicine, Native Voices, timeline entry on sterilization of American Indian women. https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/543.html

4. California State Auditor, Sterilization of Female Inmates: Some Inmates Were Sterilized Unlawfully, and Safeguards Designed to Limit Occurrences of the Procedure Failed, Report 2013-120, June 2014. https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/summary/2013-120

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "About the Untreated Syphilis Study at Tuskegee." https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/about/index.html

6. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report, Executive Summary (1995), and follow-up summary. https://sgp.fas.org/library/humexp/exesum.htm

7. President William J. Clinton, "Remarks on Accepting the Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments," October 3, 1995, The American Presidency Project. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-accepting-the-report-the-advisory-committee-human-radiation-experiments

8. U.S. General Accounting Office, letter report B-164031(5) to Senator James G. Abourezk, Chairman, Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, November 4, 1976 (HRD-77-3), full text. https://www.gao.gov/assets/hrd-77-3.pdf

9. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995), Chapter 5, "The Manhattan District Experiments." https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/research/reports/ACHRE/chap5_2.html

10. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995), Chapter 7, "The Studies at the Fernald School." https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/research/reports/ACHRE/chap7_5.html

11. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995), Chapter 9, "The Oregon and Washington Experiments." https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/research/reports/ACHRE/chap9_2.html

12. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995), Chapter 11, "What We Now Know." https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/research/reports/ACHRE/chap11_2.html

13. Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995), Chapter 17, "Findings," Findings 8-11. https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/research/reports/ACHRE/chap17_2.html

Chapter 18: NSSM 200, the "Kissinger Report"

If you search for "government population control," you'll hit this document within a few clicks. It's often described as proof that the U.S. government planned to shrink the populations of poorer countries. It's a real document. So let's look at what it actually asked for and what it actually says.

The Request

On April 24, 1974, Henry Kissinger, then serving as President Nixon's national security adviser, signed National Security Study Memorandum 200. It went to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Deputy Secretary of State and the head of the Agency for International Development (AID).[1] Its subject: "Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests."[1]

The memo said, "The President has directed a study of the impact of world population growth on U.S. security and overseas interests."[1] It asked the study to look ahead at least to the year 2000, to focus on political and economic effects rather than ecological or social ones, and to propose U.S. actions on population abroad.[1] The study was due by May 29, 1974.[1,2]

The Report

The finished report is dated December 10, 1974.[3] Its argument, as the cover memo to President Ford summed it up, centered on food and growth in poorer countries, and the report itself tied that to American interests. In its chapter on minerals and fuel, it warned that "the U.S. economy will require large and increasing amounts of minerals from abroad, especially from less developed countries."[3,4]

The report named 13 countries that "account for 47 percent of the world's current population increase": India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, the Philippines, Thailand, Egypt, Turkey, Ethiopia and Colombia.[3]

The report stayed classified for years. The release stamp on the declassified copy reads "Declassified/Released on 7/3/89," by the National Security Council.[3]

The Cover Memo to President Ford

The State Department's official history series has published the memo that delivered the finished study to President Ford. It's dated December 14, 1974, and signed by Robert Ingersoll, who chaired the National Security Council's Under Secretaries Committee. It describes the study as a 198-page attachment.[4]

The memo's summary is mostly about food and growth. It cites the United Nations projection of world population growing "from 3.9 billion today to 6.4 billion by the year 2000," calls food "the most serious challenge" for developing countries, and warns that crop failures "will raise the

possibility of massive famines."[4] It says reaching replacement-level fertility "would hold developing country populations 500 million below" the UN projection by 2000.[4]

Its recommended strategy was to support the United Nations World Population Plan of Action, focus on the 13 key countries, deliver "family planning information and services to all fertile couples at the earliest possible time," pay for research on cheaper birth control, and increase food aid and farm assistance.[4] It said "success is only possible from internal commitment," and that U.S. efforts should "minimize criticism that they are directed against the interests of the developing countries."[4]

The cover memo doesn't mention coercion or abortion at all.[4]

What President Ford Actually Approved

The next question is what the President did with it. On November 26, 1975, the White House issued National Security Decision Memorandum 314. In it, "The President endorses" the study's policy recommendations, with some exceptions.[5] It asked for research on whether population programs actually work, a review of funding, and more help from other wealthy countries. It said the United States should work with others rather than impose its views, and that the global fertility goal for 2000 does not imply interfering in other countries' national policies.[5]

It also said U.S. efforts should recognize individuals' right to freely choose their family goals and methods of family planning.[5]

That matters for this book. The document critics quote most often is the study. The document that set policy is NSDM 314, and on paper it ruled out forcing anyone.

The Lines That Get Quoted

Here are the passages critics quote most often. I first found them through Human Life International, a group strongly opposed to population control programs.[6] Then I checked each one against a full transcription of the declassified report.[3] Here's what held up and where each line actually sits.

On coercion, from Part Two, in the section on how population aid is delivered: "it is important in style as well as substance to avoid the appearance of coercion."[3]

On how poorer countries might react, in the same section: leaders might see pressure for family planning as "a form of economic or racial imperialism."[3]

On mandatory programs, from a section titled "An Alternative View," which opens, "There is however, another view, which is shared by a growing number of experts": "mandatory programs may be needed and that we should be considering these possibilities now."[3] Human Life International's version adds the bracketed words "[population control]," which are not in the transcription I checked.

On food, in the same "Alternative View" section, as one of a list of questions: "Would food be considered an instrument of national power?"[3]

On abortion, critics quote the line "No country has reduced its population growth without resorting to abortion." I could not find that sentence in the full transcription I checked. The report does say that U.S. policy on abortion "is discussed at the end of this section" in Part Two.[3] Until I can find the line in the original, I treat it as Unconfirmed.

What It Proves and What It Doesn't

You might ask, "So is it a depopulation plan or not?" Here's how I'd break it down.

It's Documented that the U.S. government saw population growth in poor countries as a national security issue, linked it to American access to resources, and wanted to push population programs abroad through AID, the United Nations and others. That's what the report is about, and it doesn't hide it.

It's Documented that the report discussed mandatory programs and food as a bargaining tool. Notice, though, where those lines sit. The "mandatory programs" line comes from a section labeled an alternative view, and the report elsewhere tells officials to avoid the appearance of coercion. That doesn't make it harmless. "Avoid the appearance of coercion" isn't the same as "don't coerce." But it's not the same as a plan to force anything, either.

It's Unsupported that NSSM 200 was a plan to kill people, spread disease or secretly sterilize populations. I haven't found any of that in the quoted text, and nobody I've read has produced a passage that says it.

The honest takeaway is uncomfortable in its own way. You don't need a secret murder plan to be troubled by a government document that treats other countries' birth rates as a question of American access to minerals.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
Kissinger signed NSSM 200 on April 24, 1974	Documented	State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States
The report is dated December 10, 1974, and named 13 key countries	Documented	NSSM 200 transcription, note 3
The report tied population growth to U.S. access to resources	Documented	Note 3
The report discussed mandatory programs and food as a bargaining tool	Documented (context matters)	"Alternative View" section; also told officials to avoid the appearance of coercion
NSSM 200 was a plan to kill or forcibly sterilize people	Unsupported	No such passage found
The December 1974 cover memo to Ford recommended voluntary family planning and food aid, and does not mention coercion or abortion	Documented	FRUS Document 118
President Ford endorsed the study in NSDM 314	Documented	Ford Library

Claim	Label	Notes
on November 26, 1975		
NSDM 314 said individuals have the right to freely choose family goals and methods	Documented	Ford Library
"No country has reduced its population growth without resorting to abortion" is in NSSM 200	Unconfirmed	Not found in the full transcription checked
The "mandatory programs" and "food" lines come from a section labeled "An Alternative View"	Documented	NSSM 200 transcription

Notes

1. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-14, Part 1, Document 113, "National Security Study Memorandum 200," April 24, 1974. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve14p1/d113

2. National Security Study Memorandum 200, cover memorandum, Nixon Presidential Library. https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/virtuallibrary/documents/nssm/nssm_200.pdf

3. NSSM 200, "Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests," December 10, 1974, declassified July 3, 1989. Full transcription with declassification markings, hosted by the Schiller Institute: https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/strategic/NSSM200.htm The scanned original is in the AID document archive: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB500.pdf (the AID site did not load during my checks, so quotes were verified against the transcription).

4. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-14, Part 1, Document 118, memorandum from Robert S. Ingersoll to President Ford, December 14, 1974. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve14p1/d118

5. National Security Decision Memorandum 314, "Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for United States Security and Overseas Interests," November 26, 1975, Gerald R. Ford Library. https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nsdm314.pdf

6. Human Life International, "NSSM-200: National Security Study Memorandum 200." https://www.hli.org/resources/nssm-200/

Part V: Sorting Fact from Myth

Chapter 19: Claims That Don't Hold Up

Every true story attracts false ones. MKULTRA is a true story, and that's exactly why so many other claims get hung on it. If the CIA really did drug people in safehouses, the thinking goes, why not this, too? It's a fair instinct. But a true story doesn't make a different claim true. Each one has to stand on its own evidence. This chapter looks at four popular claims and what happened when I checked them.

Claim 1: "Project Monarch"

The claim: the CIA ran a program called Project Monarch, a branch of MKULTRA, that used trauma to program children into mind-controlled slaves.

Where it comes from: the best-known source is a 1995 book, Trance Formation of America, by Cathy O'Brien and Mark Phillips. In it, O'Brien says she was forced into "Project Monarch," which she describes as part of MKULTRA, and she names a long list of public figures she says abused her.[1]

What I checked: the 1977 Senate hearing record, including Turner's full breakdown of all 149 subprojects; the Church Committee's drug-testing chapter; Sidney Gottlieb's 1975 testimony; the Rockefeller Commission report; and the National Security Archive's MKULTRA materials. None of them mention a Project Monarch.[5,6]

Label: Unsupported. I'm not in a position to judge what happened to any individual person. But there is no record of a CIA program called Monarch, and the book's claims have no outside evidence behind them.

Claim 2: Jonestown Was a CIA Mind-Control Experiment

The claim: the Peoples Temple settlement in Guyana, where more than 900 people died in November 1978, was a CIA mind-control operation, a sort of MKULTRA follow-up.

Where it comes from: one of the people who pushed the claim hardest was Joe Holsinger, a former aide to Congressman Leo Ryan, who was killed during his November 1978 visit to Jonestown. In a 1980 interview, Holsinger called Jonestown "a mass mind control experiment conducted by the CIA as a follow-up to something called MKULTRA," based on documents he said he had, which the interview does not reproduce.[2] He also alleged that a U.S. embassy official was the CIA's station chief and that a top Jones aide had been a CIA operative.[2]

What the official record says: the House Committee on Foreign Affairs report of May 15, 1979, found: "No conclusive evidence is available to indicate that the CIA was acquiring information on Mr. Jones or People's Temple."[3] The same report found that Jones himself "staged and exploited the idea of a conspiracy as a means of generating fear in his adherents," and called him "first and foremost a master of mind control," meaning his own methods of isolation and enforced obedience.[3]

In November 1980, FBI Director William Webster wrote to Representative Edward Boland, chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, answering the committee's question about CIA involvement. The FBI's review of its files "did not show any involvement of the CIA from within the People's Temple" and "did not substantiate any allegation of any CIA conspiracy against the People's Temple or its members."[4]

Label: Unsupported. Holsinger's claims were serious enough that Congress asked about them, and they were checked. No official review found evidence for them. I'd add one honest caveat: an FBI review of FBI files is not the same as a full look inside the CIA's files. If the CIA's own Jonestown records are ever released in full, they deserve a look.

Claim 3: Vaccines Were Used for Mind Control

The claim: the CIA used vaccines to drug or control Americans.

Where it comes from: the April 1952 ARTICHOKE memo from Chapter 1. In February 2026, a British newspaper ran a story on "declassified CIA files," and on February 24 Representative Anna Paulina Luna, who would chair the June 2026 MKULTRA hearing, posted the headline online.[5]

What the memo says: it records suggestions from an unnamed CIA consultant for drugs that could be hidden in food and drink and that "should also be capable of use in standard medical treatments such as vaccinations, shots, etc."[5] In other words, a fake shot could be a way to give someone a drug without telling them.

What the experts say: the National Security Archive, which has studied the MKULTRA records for decades, says nothing in the memo shows the CIA used real vaccines to manipulate Americans' minds, or that fake vaccinations were used beyond ARTICHOKE. It calls vaccines "a footnote" in MKULTRA's history.[5]

Label: the memo is Documented. The idea of disguising a drug as a shot was discussed. The claim that vaccines given to the public were used for mind control is Unsupported.

Claim 4: The CIA Seized "40 Boxes" of MKULTRA Files in 2026

The claim: in May 2026, former CIA official James Erdman testified that the CIA had taken "40 boxes of JFK and MKUltra files" from the office of Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard.[5]

What happened: both the CIA and Gabbard's office denied it.[5]

Label: Alleged. It's a sworn claim by a former official, and it's been flatly denied by both offices involved. Until there's a document or a second witness, that's where it stands.

A Word About Why These Claims Spread

You might ask, "Why do people believe this stuff?" I'd answer it this way. The government did lie about MKULTRA. It did destroy the records. It did take decades to admit what it did to Frank

Olson and to the patients in Montreal. When people have been lied to before, they stop giving the benefit of the doubt. That's understandable. But the cure for being lied to isn't believing everything. It's checking everything, the way you'd want the government to have been checked.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
A CIA program called "Project Monarch" existed	Unsupported	No record; scholars note it's absent from MKULTRA histories
Jonestown was a CIA mind-control experiment	Unsupported	1979 House report; 1980 FBI review found no evidence
A 1952 memo discussed disguising drugs as vaccinations	Documented	National Security Archive
Public vaccines were used for mind control	Unsupported	National Security Archive: no evidence
The CIA seized 40 boxes of MKULTRA files in 2026	Alleged	Sworn claim; denied by the CIA and the DNI's office

Notes

1. Cathy O'Brien and Mark Phillips, Trance Formation of America (1995). Cited for what the authors claim, not as evidence.
2. Jonestown Institute, San Diego State University, interview with Joe Holsinger, May 23, 1980. https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?p=125076
3. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, report findings on Jonestown, May 15, 1979, as reproduced by the Jonestown Institute. https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/culteducation/10875-house-of-representatives-report-on-jonestown-findings.html
4. FBI Director William H. Webster, letter to Rep. Edward P. Boland, Chairman, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, November 21, 1980, in the FBI's RYMUR files, as reproduced by the Jonestown Institute. https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?p=105683
5. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," June 29, 2026. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets
6. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

Chapter 20: 2026 - Congress Reopens the File

For almost fifty years after the 1977 Senate hearing, Congress left MKULTRA alone. That changed in 2026.

The Hearing

On June 30, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the House Oversight Committee's Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets held a hearing titled "Mind Control and Accountability: Uncovering the Truth of the CIA's MKULTRA Project."[1] The task force is chaired by Representative Anna Paulina Luna of Florida.[2]

Three witnesses testified:[1]

- Stephen Kinzer, a senior fellow at Brown University and author of Poisoner in Chief, the biography of Sidney Gottlieb.
- Tom O'Neill, the journalist whose work on Jolly West and Charles Manson you read about in Chapters 12 and 13.
- Dr. Elizabeth Ginexi, a research scientist and former senior program director at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), called by the minority party.

What Kinzer Said

Kinzer told the task force that the CIA hired Gottlieb in 1951 and that Gottlieb believed a mind had to be destroyed before a new one could be put in its place.[3] He said experiments were carried out in "prisons, clinics, and safe houses" in the United States, Europe and Asia, though his written testimony doesn't name specific countries.[3] He repeated his account of "expendables," people "who would not be missed if they disappeared," and said the number of MKULTRA victims, including those who died, is unknown.[3] As I said in Chapter 6, that claim is labeled Alleged until the underlying records are cited.

He asked the task force to:[3]

- Investigate Frank Olson's death, which he believes may have left documents behind.
- Look for surviving 1950s MKULTRA records that show how the CIA worked at the time.
- Ask whether anything like MKULTRA exists today, given advances in neuroscience, cyber technology and artificial intelligence.

What O'Neill Said

O'Neill walked the task force through Jolly West's 1953 letters to Gottlieb, the 1956 false-memory report and the shortened version Congress received in 1977.[4] He offered to hand over the documents he cited.[4]

He also made a point that's easy to miss. At the 1977 hearing, senators got the CIA to promise it would identify the unwitting victims and compensate them. O'Neill says that never happened.[4] He called for "a thorough reexamination" of the program and of what Congress was told.[4]

And, as you read in Chapter 13, he told Congress plainly: "I was never able to put Jolly West in the same room as Manson that pivotal summer, despite my best efforts."[4]

What Ginexi Said

Dr. Ginexi's written testimony doesn't discuss MKULTRA. She spent 22 years, from 2003 to 2025, as a scientific program official at NIH and left in April 2025.[5] Her testimony focused on current federal research policy: she urged Congress to pass a resolution blocking a proposed Office of Management and Budget rule that she argued would replace scientific peer review with political approval.[5] I mention it so you know what was and wasn't said at the hearing. It's a different subject from this book.

What Historians Asked For

The day before the hearing, the National Security Archive published a briefing book urging the task force to focus on documented secrets instead of conspiracy theories. It called for "a genuine effort by trained archival professionals" to find any remaining MKULTRA files and to remove the redactions from the John Marks collection, the roughly 16,000 pages released in the late 1970s.[6]

What's Still Missing

Here's where the record stands as this book goes to press:

- The research files Helms ordered destroyed in 1973 are gone. The National Security Archive reports that Helms reportedly said, "Let's let this die with us."[6]
- Much of what survived is financial paperwork, and many of the surviving pages are still redacted.[6]
- The number of people dosed without their knowledge has never been established. In 1977, the CIA director said he had "no idea."[7]
- The promise to identify and compensate victims, according to O'Neill, was never kept.[4]

Last Word

I started this book by saying I didn't want you to take my word for anything. I'll end the same way. Every note in this book points to something you can check. Some of what you've read is ugly and true. Some of it is popular and false. And some of it sits in between, waiting for records that may or may not ever come out.

If you take one thing away, let it be this: the best answer to a government that hides things isn't to believe every rumor. It's to keep asking for the documents. Appendix D shows you how.

Fact Check

Claim	Label	Notes
The House task force held an MKULTRA hearing on June 30, 2026	Documented	House Oversight hearing page
Kinzer, O'Neill and Ginexi testified	Documented	Hearing page
The CIA promised in 1977 to identify and compensate victims, and didn't	Alleged	O'Neill's testimony
Historians called for releasing unredacted Marks collection files	Documented	National Security Archive
The total number of unwitting subjects is unknown	Documented	1977 CIA director testimony

Notes

1. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, hearing page, "Mind Control and Accountability: Uncovering the Truth of the CIA's MKULTRA Project," June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/mind-control-and-accountability-uncovering-the-truth-of-the-cias-mkultra-project/
2. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," June 29, 2026; and House Oversight, "Luna Opens Hearing on MKULTRA Project Transparency," June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/release/luna-opens-hearing-on-mkultra-project-transparency/
3. Stephen Kinzer, written testimony, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kinzer-Written-Testimony.pdf
4. Tom O'Neill, written testimony, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/ONeill-Written-Testimony.pdf
5. Dr. Elizabeth Ginexi, written testimony, June 30, 2026. https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Ginexi-Written-Testimony.pdf
6. National Security Archive, "MKULTRA: Declassification Task Force Should Focus on the Real Secrets," June 29, 2026. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets
7. U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf

Appendix A: Timeline

Every date below comes from the chapter listed, where you'll find the source.

- 1945: Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency begins bringing foreign scientists to the U.S. (Ch. 2)
- 1945-1946: Plutonium injections at Oak Ridge, Chicago, Rochester and San Francisco. (Ch. 17)
- Fall 1947: Navy begins Project CHATTER. (Ch. 1)
- December 3, 1949: Green Run radiation release at Hanford. (Ch. 17)
- April 5, 1950: BLUEBIRD memo to CIA Director Hillenkoetter, budget $65,515. (Ch. 1)
- September 1950: Edward Hunter's "brain-washing" article in the Miami Daily News. (Ch. 1)
- August 1951: BLUEBIRD renamed ARTICHOKE. (Ch. 1)
- April 1952: ARTICHOKE memo discusses disguising drugs as vaccinations. (Ch. 1, 19)
- January 8, 1953: Harold Blauer dies after an Army-contract drug injection. (Ch. 1)
- April 13, 1953: CIA Director Allen Dulles approves MKULTRA. (Ch. 3)
- June 11, 1953: Dr. Louis Jolyon West writes to Sidney Gottlieb. (Ch. 12)
- November 1953: Frank Olson given LSD without his knowledge; dies November 28. (Ch. 4)
- May 1955: Army LSD field testing on soldiers authorized. (Ch. 8)
- 1955: Unwitting testing of Americans "in normal social situations" begins, per the Rockefeller Commission. (Ch. 5)
- 1955-1956: P-1 drug interrogations overseas. (Ch. 1)
- 1955-1975: Army Medical Research Volunteer Program at Edgewood, about 7,000 people. (Ch. 8)
- 1956: FBI begins COINTELPRO. (Ch. 15)
- 1957: MKULTRA Subproject 68 funds Dr. Ewen Cameron in Montreal. (Ch. 7)
- 1959-1962: Henry Murray's Harvard study, with Ted Kaczynski as a subject. (Ch. 14)
- 1960: Harvard Psilocybin Project begins. (Ch. 11)
- 1961: Ken Kesey takes part in Army-sponsored drug study at Menlo Park VA hospital. (Ch. 10)
- 1963-1973: Oregon prison irradiation experiments. (Ch. 17)
- 1963: CIA Inspector General reviews MKULTRA; unwitting testing suspended. (Ch. 5)
- May 27, 1963: Harvard dismisses Richard Alpert; Leary relieved of duties. (Ch. 11)
- October 1963: Robert Kennedy approves wiretaps on Dr. King. (Ch. 15)
- December 17, 1963: Helms memo defends unwitting testing. (Ch. 5)

- November 1964: Hoover calls King the "most notorious liar"; FBI mails King a tape and anonymous letter. (Ch. 15)
- March 21, 1967: Charles Manson released from prison. (Ch. 13)
- June 1967: West opens Haight-Ashbury research house. (Ch. 12)
- August 1967: CIA sets up Operation CHAOS. (Ch. 15)
- January 30, 1969: Hoover approves the anonymous letter to Jeff Fort. (Ch. 15)
- August 9-10, 1969: Tate and LaBianca murders. (Ch. 13)
- 1970: CIA begins funding remote viewing research (SCANATE). (Ch. 16)
- March 8, 1971: Media, Pennsylvania FBI office burglary exposes FBI files. (Ch. 15)
- April 27-28, 1971: COINTELPRO officially ended. (Ch. 15)
- 1972: Tuskegee study ends. (Ch. 17)
- January 1973: MKULTRA records destroyed on Helms's instructions. (Ch. 9)
- March 15, 1974: Operation CHAOS ends. (Ch. 15)
- April 24, 1974: Kissinger signs NSSM 200. (Ch. 18)
- May 1974: Leary talks to the FBI. (Ch. 11)
- December 10, 1974: NSSM 200 report. (Ch. 18)
- December 14, 1974: Ingersoll memo sends the NSSM 200 study to President Ford. (Ch. 18)
- Late 1974: Seymour Hersh's New York Times story on CIA domestic spying. (Ch. 9)
- January 27, 1975: Senate creates the Church Committee. (Ch. 9)
- June 1975: Rockefeller Commission report. (Ch. 9, 15)
- July 21, 1975: President Ford meets the Olson family. (Ch. 4)
- October 1975: Gottlieb testifies to the Church Committee. (Ch. 6, 9)
- November 26, 1975: President Ford endorses NSSM 200 in NSDM 314. (Ch. 18)
- February 18, 1976: Executive Order 11905. (Ch. 9)
- April 29, 1976: Church Committee final report. (Ch. 9)
- October 12, 1976: Olson relief bill signed, $750,000. (Ch. 4)
- November 4, 1976: GAO report on Indian Health Service sterilizations. (Ch. 17)
- March 1977: Seven boxes of surviving MKULTRA records found. (Ch. 9)
- July 15, 1977: Turner reports the find to Congress. (Ch. 9)
- August 3, 1977: Senate MKULTRA hearing. (Ch. 3, 9)
- May 15, 1979: House Foreign Affairs Committee Jonestown findings. (Ch. 19)
- January 1988: Orlikow plaintiffs settle with the U.S. for $750,000. (Ch. 7)
- 1992: Canada begins $100,000 payments to Cameron's former patients. (Ch. 7)
- September 29, 1995: AIR report on STAR GATE. (Ch. 16)
- October 3, 1995: Clinton apologizes for human radiation experiments. (Ch. 17)

- July 1, 1999: Leary FBI cooperation reported. (Ch. 11)
- July 17, 2013: Olson family lawsuit dismissed. (Ch. 4)
- June 2014: California State Auditor reports prison sterilizations. (Ch. 17)
- July 2025: Quebec court authorizes MKULTRA class action. (Ch. 7)
- May 2026: James Erdman's "40 boxes" claim, denied by the CIA and the DNI's office. (Ch. 19)
- June 30, 2026: House task force MKULTRA hearing. (Ch. 20)

Appendix B: Who's Who

- **Alpert, Richard.** Harvard assistant professor; dismissed May 1963. (Ch. 11)
- **Bugliosi, Vincent.** Manson prosecutor; author of Helter Skelter (1974). (Ch. 13)
- **Buck, Carrie.** Virginia woman forcibly sterilized after Buck v. Bell (1927). (Ch. 17)
- **Bulger, James "Whitey."** Boston gangster who wrote that he was dosed with LSD in prison. (Ch. 6)
- **Cameron, Dr. Donald Ewen.** Montreal psychiatrist funded under MKULTRA Subproject 68. (Ch. 7)
- **Church, Senator Frank.** Chaired the Senate's 1975-1976 intelligence investigation. (Ch. 9)
- **Dulles, Allen.** CIA Director who approved MKULTRA. (Ch. 3)
- **Abramson, Dr. Harold.** New York doctor whose LSD research was indirectly CIA-funded; saw Olson before his death. (Ch. 4)
- **Anslinger, Harry.** Head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. (Ch. 5)
- **Blauer, Harold.** Died January 8, 1953, after an Army-contract drug injection. (Ch. 1)
- **Earman, John.** CIA Inspector General named in published accounts of the 1963 review. (Ch. 5)
- **Gittinger, John.** CIA psychologist who testified in 1977. (Ch. 1, 5, 7)
- **Gottlieb, Sidney.** CIA chemist who ran MKULTRA. (Ch. 3 and throughout)
- **Helms, Richard.** Proposed MKULTRA in 1953; ordered records destroyed in 1973. (Ch. 3, 9)
- **Hunter, Edward.** Journalist who popularized "brain-washing." (Ch. 1)
- **Kesey, Ken.** Novelist; took part in a 1961 Army-sponsored drug study. (Ch. 10)
- **Kinzer, Stephen.** Author of Poisoner in Chief; testified in 2026. (Ch. 3, 20)
- **Lashbrook, Robert.** Gottlieb's deputy; put the LSD in the Cointreau and was with Olson when he died. (Ch. 4)
- **Leary, Timothy.** Harvard psychologist turned psychedelic advocate. (Ch. 11)
- **Luna, Representative Anna Paulina.** Chaired the 2026 House task force. (Ch. 20)
- **Manson, Charles.** Cult leader convicted in the 1969 murders. (Ch. 13)
- **Marks, John.** Journalist whose FOIA request produced the main MKULTRA document release. (Ch. 1, 9)
- **Murray, Henry A.** Harvard psychologist; ran the study that included Kaczynski. (Ch. 14)
- **O'Neill, Tom.** Journalist; author of Chaos; testified in 2026. (Ch. 13, 20)
- **Olson, Frank.** Army scientist dosed with LSD who died in 1953. (Ch. 4)
- **Smith, Roger.** Manson's San Francisco parole officer. (Ch. 13)
- **Turner, Stansfield.** CIA Director who testified in 1977. (Ch. 3, 9)

- **West, Louis Jolyon "Jolly."** Psychiatrist whose CIA ties are in his own letters. (Ch. 12)
- **White, George Hunter.** Federal narcotics agent who ran the CIA safehouses. (Ch. 5)

Appendix C: How to Read a Declassified CIA Document

When you open an old CIA document for the first time, a few things will throw you off. Here's what to expect.

Code names. Program names like BLUEBIRD, ARTICHOKE, MKULTRA, MKNAOMI and CHAOS are code names the agency assigned. They're usually written in capital letters. A code name alone tells you nothing about what the program did. Read the document.

Redactions. Blacked-out sections are information the agency still withholds. A redaction tells you something was there. It doesn't tell you what, and it isn't evidence of anything in particular. Don't fill in the blanks with guesses.

Dates and versions. The same document can exist in several versions released at different times with different redactions. When two versions disagree, note which one you're quoting.

Who wrote it. A memo that says something isn't the same as proof that it happened. The 1951 memo calling hypnosis by phone "universally successful" in Chapter 1 is a good example. Ask whether a later record confirms what the memo claims.

Proposals versus actions. Many documents describe ideas, plans or requests. Some were carried out. Many weren't. The 1952 vaccine memo in Chapter 19 is a proposal, not a record of something done.

Appendix D: How to File Your Own FOIA Request

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lets anyone ask a federal agency for its records. Here's how, based on the government's own guidance at FOIA.gov.[1]

- **Check first.** Look to see if what you want is already public. The CIA's FOIA Electronic Reading Room at cia.gov/readingroom holds many of the records cited in this book. So does the National Security Archive at nsarchive.gwu.edu.
- **Pick the right agency.** FOIA.gov has a list of agencies and how each one takes requests.
- **Put it in writing.** The request "simply must be in writing and reasonably describe the records you seek." There is no required form. Most agencies take requests by web form, email or fax.[1]
- **Be specific.** Name the program, the dates and the kind of record you want. Narrow requests are usually processed faster.[1]
- **Know the limits.** An agency doesn't have to create new records, do research or answer questions. It only has to search for and release existing records that aren't exempt.[1]
- **Be patient.** Agencies generally work requests in the order received, and response times vary with the backlog. Each agency has a FOIA Requester Service Center you can contact about the status of your request.[1]

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Information Policy, FOIA.gov, "How to Make a FOIA Request." https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html

Appendix E: Main Sources

These are the primary sources this book relies on most. Every chapter's notes give the specific pages and links.

- U.S. Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of Research in Behavioral Modification, Joint Hearing, August 3, 1977. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/95mkultra.pdf
- U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church Committee), Final Report, Book I (April 1976). https://archive.org/stream/finalreportofsel01unit/finalreportofsel01unit_djvu.txt
- Church Committee, Final Report, Book III (April 1976). https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/sites-default-files-94755-iii.pdf
- Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), June 1975. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02330017
- National Security Archive, MKULTRA briefing book, June 29, 2026. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2026-06-29/mkultra-declassification-task-force-should-focus-real-secrets
- House Oversight Committee, Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets, hearing of June 30, 2026, and written testimony of Stephen Kinzer, Tom O'Neill and Dr. Elizabeth Ginexi. https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/mind-control-and-accountability-uncovering-the-truth-of-the-cias-mkultra-project/
- Gerald R. Ford Library, S. 3035 file on the relief of Alice W. Olson. https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0055/1669605.pdf
- Olson v. United States, Civil Action No. 12-1924 (D.D.C. 2013). https://leagle.com/decision/inadvfdco140317000255
- Defense Health Agency, Edgewood Arsenal Chemical Agent Exposure Studies. https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2015/05/08/Edgewood-Arsenal-Chemical-Agent-Exposure-Studies
- Vietnam Veterans of America v. CIA (9th Cir. 2015). https://caselaw.findlaw.com/summary/opinion/us-9th-circuit/2015/06/30/273931.html
- National Archives, Record Group 330, JIOA Foreign Scientist Case Files. https://www.archives.gov/iwg/declassified-records/rg-330-defense-secretary
- FBI Records: The Vault, COINTELPRO. https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro
- Federation of American Scientists, STAR GATE program history. https://irp.fas.org/program/collect/stargate.htm
- U.S. General Accounting Office, HRD-77-3 (1976). https://www.gao.gov/products/hrd-77-3

- California State Auditor, Report 2013-120 (2014). https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/summary/2013-120
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Untreated Syphilis Study at Tuskegee. https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/about/index.html
- Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report (1995). https://sgp.fas.org/library/humexp/exesum.htm
- U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, NSSM 200 (1974). https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve14p1/d113
- U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Jonestown findings (1979), via the Jonestown Institute. https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/culteducation/10875-house-of-representatives-report-on-jonestown-findings.html

Key books:

- Stephen Kinzer, Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control (2019).
- Tom O'Neill with Dan Piepenbring, Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties (Little, Brown, 2019).
- John Marks, The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control (1979).
- Betty Medsger, The Burglary.
- Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, Acid Dreams (1985).

About the Author

Andrew Dominguez is a business professional and the owner of Trinfinity Enterprises in Dayton, Nevada, where he builds and repairs custom guitars and publishes his books. In the Fact Check Series, he takes subjects Americans argue about and starts with the records instead of a side. The books are free to download at TrinfinityEnterprises.com.