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Dawson M. Neely, Gonzaga University, undergraduate student, “Project MKULTRA: How the CIA Used the Cold War to Commit Horrors on US Citizens”

Abstract: Project MKULTRA, the CIA’s covert mind-control program, began in 1953 and operated throughout the 1960s. Evidence from a number of sources, including the transcripts from the Church Committee hearings (1975), and several news reports uncovered the atrocities of the program. One victim of MKULTRA described the effects of his treatment (for falsely diagnosed psychosomatic leg pain) as “mental rape.” These therapies ranged from electroshock, to being unwittingly drugged with LSD. The Church Committee found that these horrific events were not isolated, but rather conducted within universities, research foundations, and even prisons. The Washington Post later editorialized that lawsuits were filed to force the government to take responsibility for its culpability in the systematic torture of civilians. It became evident that ethics were abridged holistically, displaying a complete malpractice of medicine and science to further the national interest. This essay is relevant because it bares similarity to recent governmental abuses of power uncovered by Edward Snowden, once again displaying that governmental lucidity is imperative for the rights and freedoms of the American people to be sustained. The atrocities of the past must serve as admonitions, and MKULTRA provides compelling evidence against unwarranted trust in governmental operations.

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Project MKULTRA: How the CIA Used the Cold War to Commit Horrors on US Citizens

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In 1953 the United States was embroiled in a cold war with the Soviet Union. The arms race that was the hallmark of this time period has stretched from ICBMs and nuclear weapons, to behavioral modification, or more colloquially, mind control. The US had been collecting analysis on Soviet weapons testing, armament, and military capacity since the end of the second World War, and the tension was mounting. The government intelligence agencies have been put on high alert to determine a winner in the arms race, creating countless projects, conducted by the security agencies, to improve military ability as fast as possible. Some of these projects ran without direct congressional or executive oversight, leaving many, 24 years later, to question how some projects were allowed to run on American soil. Of these projects, several infringed on American rights, overreaching the mandates of the various agencies that conducted them. These included intelligence actions such as FBI campaigns against Martin Luther King Jr. and wiretapping for presidential political aims. Yet the most heinous and shocking of these Cold War era programs is Project MKULTRA, the CIA's deliberative use of controlled substances and psychotherapy on witting and unwitting subjects alike to prepare against Chinese and Soviet mind-control. These experiments that encompassed a large number of human rights violations went on throughout the 1960s and were discovered more fully in the 1975 Church Committee hearings.ⁱ The full story has been piecemealed together throughout lawsuits, congressional hearings, and Freedom of Information Act requests, and it begins with the rediscovery of crimes against American citizens.

In 1973, the events of the Nixon Watergate Scandal were revealed to the public and government dealings of the past 30 years were called into question. Congress began hearings into the malfeasance of government under the oversight of Senator Frank Church (D) from Idaho.ⁱⁱ A resolution was passed "to investigate federal intelligence operations and determine 'the extent, if

any, to which illegal, improper, or unethical activities were engaged in by any agency of the Federal Government.”ⁱⁱⁱ This investigation brought about the unearthing of programs by the NSA, FBI, IRS, and CIA that all undermined the value of American liberty, including COINTELPRO, the FBI’s attempt at civil control by infiltrating and creating chaos in groups that were seen as social antagonists, like those against the war in Vietnam.^{iv} The Senate investigation also uncovered a massive amount of evidence suggesting the government betrayed the trust of the American people during the Cold War Era. “We uphold the highest standards of lawful conduct,”^v is the CIA’s statement on integrity, yet it completely breached that promise with Project MKULTRA.

The basic facts of Project MKULTRA began at the end of the Truman administration when reports began to indicate that the Soviets and Chinese had developed some form of behavioral modification, and because the CIA did not want to be caught unaware, they began their own research into the area.^{vi} According to Congressional records, the program was “a CIA initiated project. It started out of a concern of our being taken advantage of by other powers who would use drugs against our personnel and it was approved by the Agency.”^{vii} Included in the overall research were “149... subprojects, many of which appear to have some connection with research into behavioral modification, drug acquisition, and testing or administering drugs surreptitiously.”^{viii} This sounds more innocuous than it was in actuality, especially seeing as the drugs in question were narcotics and hallucinogens, mainly LSD, before the mainstream drug culture grew to incorporate these things into the list of generally normalized substances.^{ix} Nevertheless, not all of the programs infringed upon human rights; with this large a project, some fields of research were based in clean psychology and understanding the human mind, though the disastrous nature of this research extends past the substances that were implemented.

Not only were the drugs far from FDA-approved, but a statement prepared by the Agency states, “Other MKULTRA research was performed in a questionable manner: research and tests were conducted on individuals who were not witting that they were the subjects of a research program and that they were being given a drug.”^x This unwitting participation in research is what provoked Congress to pointedly question the ethics and oversight of the Central Intelligence Agency, and to propose legislation to protect Americans from unethical domestic intelligence activities in the future.

The program was administered in a manner to disguise CIA involvement and most research was, according to a department memo, “conducted at well-known institutions under the control and direction of researchers at, and to the standards of, those institutions.”^{xi} In attempt to hide sponsorship of these programs, the grants were placed into foundational coffers, concealing direct funding.^{xii} Yet this money did stimulate scientific inquiry into areas of CIA interest, and as such the Agency viewed all research as under its purview. According to the US Senate Foreign and Military Intelligence Committee, project MKULTRA contained “three phases: first, the search for materials suitable for study; second. laboratory testing on voluntary human subjects in various types of institutions; third, the application of MKULTRA materials in normal life settings.”^{xiii} Most subjects were unable to give their consent, and those who were classified as “voluntary” were, in fact, tricked or in positions unable to decline participation. The administrative aspects of this program were overseen by Sidney Gottlieb who brought institutions into the fold for the CIA and was the point-person for the program as a whole. Although the names of many institutions involved are unknown, due to Privacy Act restrictions (these institutions are protected because they were unaware that they were participating in a program that violated the CIA charter), the Senate investigation found that there were, “44

colleges or universities, 15 research foundations..., 12 hospitals or clinics, and 3 penal institutions”^{xiv} known to be involved. This suggests that subjects were likely students, the ill, or the incarcerated, casting a harsh light on whether the test subjects were really “voluntary.” The third phase of MKULTRA, using controlled substances in general life, involved “surreptitious administration to unwitting nonvolunteer subjects in normal life settings by undercover officers of the Bureau of Narcotics acting for the CIA,”^{xv} displaying that governmental ethics were abridged across spectrum of agencies. These MKULTRA drugs were also used in foreign capacities, to aid in investigations. This program operated without moral governmental oversight within the Agency until 1963 when the staff of the Inspector General learned of the project’s workings and halted the progress indefinitely.^{xvi} More knowledge about the project could have been found in the CIA’s database, had not most of the records been completely destroyed on the orders of Gottlieb and DCI Helms^{xvii}, leaving much of operational detail to be cleared up by the work of legal teams (for those affected by the program), journalists, and later historians.

For insight into the means of scientific exploration, most knowledge comes from recollections of the victims, though there is mention of tactics in the Church Committee Report, as well as the Select Committee Hearings conducted under Chairman Inouye. The committee transcripts corroborate many horror stories. For the so called “voluntary” test subjects, it is known that in the penal institutions that “volunteer prisoners who, after taking a brief physical examination and signing a general consent form, were administered hallucinogenic drugs. As a reward for their participation in the program, the addicts were provided with the drug of their addiction.”^{xviii} There are two other well documented cases, by the media and legal services, cases of general abuse on unwitting participants of the psychological experiments. The first centers around Dr. Ewen Cameron, a psychiatrist at the Allen Memorial Institute at the McGill

University in Montreal. Cameron became involved in the inquiries made by MKULTRA, and acted as a program researcher, though mad scientist is more accurate.

Patient Zal Orlico, who suffered from depression, was referred to Dr. Cameron for treatment, and what she received was nowhere near psychotherapy. She was given “massive doses of lysergic acid diethylamide, a new experimental mind-altering drug called LSD. It destroyed her mental health.”^{xix} When she found out that she had been used as a human guinea pig she filed a suit against the CIA, and several others came forward and joined the legal action against those who had stolen years of their life. The case would be settled in 1988. Other treatments involved electroshock at several times over the accepted usual dosage, paralysis drugs, sleep therapy, or a medicated pseudo-coma that could last up to 60 days, as well as psychic driving and LSD. Robert Logey, coming to Cameron for perceived psychosomatic pains in his leg, was forced to endure psychic driving, where he was medicated and forced to listen to tape-recorded messages, trying to make him believe different things. It was discovered later that his leg pain was physical, not mental. Finally, Dr. Cameron left a lasting impact on one last patient, Dr. Mary Morrow. The twist to Morrow’s story that makes it all the more sinister is that she came to Dr. Cameron as a prospective fellow in psychiatry. Having dealt with depression in the past, however, Cameron only agreed to take her on as a fellow on the basis that she also undergo treatment. “What she got was electroshock depatterning”^{xx} This completely stripped her identity and stole years off of her life. These horrors and techniques can be corroborated within the Church Committee report: “radiation, electroshock, various fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology, and anthropology, graphology, harassment substances, and paramilitary devices and substances.”^{xxi} In other words, the CIA used avenues of behavioral modifications that could “mentally rape”^{xxiii} the test subjects, and strip away their personalities and years of their lives.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a series of lawsuits were filed against the CIA —the aftermath of MKULTRA— where reparations had to be paid to the victims of the program. With Orlico, Logey, and Morrow (and others who were co-plaintiffs), there were four inmates in the Atlanta federal penitentiary who make up the second well-documented case. After being drugged by the CIA, they were affected by several long-term psychological issues.^{xxiii} A kingpin who served time in the penitentiary described the treatments as bringing about “Hallucinating. Hours of paranoia and feeling violent. We experienced periods of living nightmares and even blood coming out of the walls.”^{xxiv} The legal actions that stemmed from treatment like this, as well as the devoted reporting of several journalists, triggered the Agency to confess to the project’s unethical side. Not only these events, but also the hearings from the Church Committee brought out the truth. As well, several Freedom of Information Act requests made more knowledge available to the public two years after publishing of the 1975 committee’s findings. These findings were brought to a select committee under Daniel Inouye, and more information about the fiscal aspects and program organization were published. Even after all the public backlash and condemnation, the CIA still has not officially apologized for the actions it took during the Cold War and beyond.

This secretive section of American history is nestled inside an already troubled time, a time of threats, domestic and foreign; yet however hidden, it speaks to the present with an uncanny clarity. The past four years have been rife with political unrest, from the contentious election results of 2016 there has stemmed several investigations into governmental abuse of power. With Robert Mueller appointed to investigate Russian interference into an American election, the country split into factions, with some calling it a hoax. But even if it was, does MKULTRA not provide historical precedent for the necessity of seriously investigating every

claim of federal unethical behavior seriously? It must have been absurd to believe that people were forcibly fed LSD and curare, yet when the matter was pushed it became evident that these things did happen. The Church Committee uncovered how the intelligence agencies used their considerable power and influence for governmental aims that were either not ethical, or downright illegal. Project MKULTRA perpetrated testing on American citizens, going beyond their charter and betraying the trust of the nation. In more modern times, we see the leak of classified information by Edward Snowden, displaying that the intelligence community was once again acting seemingly against its own people, this time by spying on them. Snowden, acting in the way he did made himself a traitor, and, when held in juxtaposition with the enlightenment of MKULTRA, it becomes clear that there is a way to force governmental compliance with hunches and mistrust. This avenue is the Freedom of Information Act. Along with the Senate investigations into the security agencies, FOIA requests played a large part in uncovering the government's atrocious actions during Cold War era. In a prepared statement to the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research, Admiral Turner states, "The employee who located this material did so by leaving no stone unturned in his efforts to respond to FOIA requests."^{xxv} This demonstrates that, when pressured, the government will comply to the public's demand for sensitive information to which it has a right to. This all stands as a reminder of the public's continued vigilance and remembrance of this right, especially in a time when government lucidity is often a dream. Most recent of events that display this importance is the transcript of the call between the President of Ukraine and President Donald Trump, wherein unethical behavior is assumed. This document being brought to the public played a very important role in the impeachment process, making the point once again that the Federal Government needs oversight. We should always hold our republic

accountable, especially the divisions that hold the most operative power. In short, Project MKULTRA is relevant today because it provides a historical horror story of intelligence misconduct and serves as an admonition against complacency when things don't add up.

ⁱ *Final Report of the Select Committee ... Together with Additional, Supplemental, and Separate Views*. Washington: USGPO, 1976.

ⁱⁱ United States Senate. "Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities." U.S. Senate: Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, July 21, 2020. <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/church-committee.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} *Ibid.*

^v "CIA Vision, Mission, Ethos & Challenges." Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency, November 1, 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/cia-vision-mission-values/>.

^{vi} Memo, Executive Assistant to the DDCI to Director of Public Affairs, 12 September 1983, 83-4478.

^{vii} *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, United States Senate: Ninety-Fifth Congress, First Session: August 3, 1977*. Washington, 1977.

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} *Into the Mind: Mind Control*. Films On Demand. 2010. Accessed November 21, 2020. <https://digital.films.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=16149&xtid=43512>.

^x Memo, Executive Assistant to the DDCI to Director of Public Affairs, 12 September 1983, 83-4478.

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1976), Book I: *Foreign and Military Intelligence*.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*

^{xiv} *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, United States Senate: Ninety-Fifth Congress, First Session: August 3, 1977*. Washington, 1977.

^{xv} *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1976), Book I: *Foreign and Military Intelligence*.

^{xvi} *Ibid.*

^{xvii} *Ibid.*

^{xviii} *Ibid.*

^{xix} Bradley, Ed. MK-ULTRA/ Mind Control Experiments. Other. *CIA FOIA*. Radio TV Reports, December 23,1984.

^{xx} *Ibid.*

^{xxi} *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1976), Book I: *Foreign and Military Intelligence*

^{xxii} Bradley, Ed. MK-ULTRA/ Mind Control Experiments. Other. *CIA FOIA*. Radio TV Reports, December 23,1984.

^{xxiii} Anderson, Jack. "Lawsuit Forces CIA Confession On MKULTRA." *Washington Post*, August 28, 1982.

^{xxiv} Getlen, Larry. "The Mad Scientist behind America's Mind-Control Quest with LSD." *New York Post*, September 16, 2019

^{xxv} *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, United States Senate: Ninety-Fifth Congress, First Session: August 3, 1977*. Washington, 1977.

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