

Perfecting the Art of Brainwashing: The CIA's Efforts to Weaponize Mind Control

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World War II brought a virulent plague of paranoia to America that ran rampant through the population and the government. As tension between the United States and Communist forces escalated in the late 1940s, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) embarked on a series of covert research projects to determine the significance of the Communist threat. The CIA initially began mind control research programs as a defensive maneuver against brainwashing tactics that it suspected the Communists had already acquired. However, as the CIA increasingly embraced offensive strategies, the programs devolved from necessary research conducted in the interest of national security to extraneous experimentation performed on human subjects to perfect methods of interrogation and coercion through torture. Moreover, the CIA's experiments undoubtedly crossed the ethical line when the agency continued to perform esoteric research on human subjects *after* CIA research concluded that the Communists had not developed the mind control capabilities initially feared. While the CIA's research began as an attempt to safeguard the interests of the United States, the CIA took advantage of its power by conducting progressively more aggressive experimentation that was not consistent with the level of provocation from its enemies.

The CIA's questionable ethics during its research was first investigated in 1975 when a Congressional hearing was held to vet accusations that the CIA was conducting torturous experiments. However, the depth of the agency's offenses were not revealed until 1977 when John Marks acquired thousands of documents about the CIA's mind control programs through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). After a year of tediously examining these documents and extensively researching the CIA and its victims, Marks's *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate* was published in 1979. Marks argues that the CIA's brainwashing research was a defense tactic invoked by paranoid suspicions of communist methods of mind control that first arose after the Moscow Show Trials in the late 1930s.¹ However, he claims that while the CIA's research began as a response to suspicious Communist activities, its own research was aggressive from the start. He says, "The line between offense and defense—if it ever existed—soon became so blurred as to be meaningless."² The first section

¹ John Marks, *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate: The CIA and Mind Control* (New York: Times Books, 1979) Kindle Edition, 18.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

of Marks's book discusses the events that compelled the agency to investigate brainwashing. Marks explains how the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the CIA's forerunner—was already researching gruesome experiments conducted by Nazis at Dachau. The Moscow Show Trials and the mysterious confessions of Korean Prisoners of War (POWs) thus provided justification for continuing research on possible mind-altering methods.³ Marks likens the experiments performed at Dachau to the CIA's experiments by observing that in each case the victims were selected out of prejudice. He equates the Nazi's Jewish victims to the CIA's "mental patients, prostitutes, foreigners, drug addicts, and prisoners, often from minority ethnic groups."⁴ The second section of Marks's book outlines the various methods of drug use that the CIA conducted on witting and unwitting individuals alike, and the third section covers the CIA's exploration of hypnosis and various behavioral modification techniques. Marks asserts that the CIA's worst fears overshadowed the facts at hand because the intelligence acquired on the Communist's programs was severely lacking and misguided from the start.⁵ Furthermore, he argues that, despite confirmation that the Communists had not acquired unconventional mind control methods, the CIA moved forward with its research under the faint hope that the desired methods were remotely feasible.⁶

The excellent research done by Marks has left little to be uncovered by others on this subject as of yet. Subsequent research overwhelmingly supports the events outlined in Marks's book. Certain works, however, such as Dominic Streatfeild's *Brainwash*, do offer some alternative approaches in understanding the CIA's mind control activities. In his book, Streatfeild contends that while it is not clear how much hard evidence the CIA had on any mind control methods the Communists were using when the initial research programs began, the CIA did have evidence that the Communists were experimenting with various drugs and chemical substances.⁷ Like Marks, Streatfeild concludes, "[w]hat appears to have started as a defensive programme—researching interrogation techniques as a means of preparing US servicemen for capture—soon became an offensive one."⁸ Streatfeild expounds on Marks's belief that false POW confessions were used to justify further research. He claims that the CIA knew that the POWs had simply succumbed to torture and loss of morale, but the U.S. government found these confessions embarrassing. Therefore, in order to distract from the POW testimonies, the CIA allowed unfounded rumors to persist that the POWs had been brainwashed.⁹ Propaganda also gave the Agency an excuse to uncover the possible benefits of brainwashing.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Streatfeild, echoing Marks's conclusion, claims that despite the CIA's intensive research, all available

³ Ibid., 4-25.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷ Dominic Streatfeild, *Brainwash: The Secret History of Mind Control* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 22-39.

⁸ Ibid., 26-27.

⁹ Ibid., 339-340.

¹⁰ Ibid., 341.

evidence shows that the CIA was never able to master brainwashing the way it had hoped, and it is highly unlikely that the CIA ever controlled any “Manchurian Candidate”¹¹ puppet.¹²

Another scholar who built upon ideas from Marks’s work is David Price, who provides further insight into the covert funding of the CIA’s activities in his article, “Buying a Piece of Anthropology.” Like Marks and Streatfeild, he contends that the CIA covertly funneled government money into professional, educational, and medical organizations to conduct research that the CIA could harness for its own use.¹³ He claims that most of the individuals who took part in CIA funded research had no knowledge that their work was being used for military purposes.¹⁴ He furthers this argument by saying that the behavioral information obtained from these institutions was used to develop the *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation Manual*—a CIA manual describing methods to efficiently interrogate enemy prisoners as well as teach U.S. prisoners to resist interrogation.¹⁵ He further points out that the document essentially teaches agents how to torture those being interrogated.¹⁶ He claims that the CIA created experiments that seemed benign to the average researcher but were extremely useful to the agency’s interrogation research, and experiments that provided little or no aid to CIA interrogation tactics were funded as a way to acquire legitimacy.¹⁷ Price’s analysis of the CIA’s covert funding operations in behavioral studies provides critical insight into the CIA’s aggressive intentions.

My analysis of the CIA’s research programs is possible because of the intensive research collected by the authors I have cited. From the evidence available, the historiography overwhelmingly agrees on the basic timeline of events, and I concur with scholars who recognize that the CIA embarked on increasingly aggressive tactics over the duration of its research. Like the authors cited, my research has corroborated ideas that the CIA’s experiments were a reaction to intelligence that reported that the Communists were conducting mind control procedures and drug experimentation. It is important to note, however, that the CIA documents available for assembling the pieces of an unavoidably dismembered narrative, were written by people with varying biases and fears. While the Communists were undoubtedly conducting experiments of their own, the extent to which these experiments were taken

¹¹ *The Manchurian Candidate* is a 1959 novel written by Richard Condon about a U.S. infantry unit that is kidnapped and brainwashed during the Korean War by Communist forces. The story reveals that the members of the infantry unit were released back to the United States with false implanted memories. One of them is also brainwashed into becoming an unwitting sleeper agent who is triggered by a visual cue. The popularity of the book and subsequent film adaptations has made the term “Manchurian Candidate” synonymous with an unwitting, programmable assassin.

¹² Streatfeild, 345.

¹³ David Price, “Buying a Piece of Anthropology: Human Ecology and Unwitting Anthropological Research for the CIA.” *Anthropology Today* 23, no. 3 (June 2007). 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

cannot be substantiated solely on the intelligence gathered by a paranoid agency. Nonetheless, this paper's aim is to understand the CIA's motives and actions during its mind control research. It is clear that the main motive behind the CIA's initial actions was to protect against the threat of Communist brainwashing; however, the CIA's paranoia caused it ignore its own violation of human rights. Furthermore, I concur with Streatfeild that the CIA took advantage of widespread propaganda to continue to search for psychological weapons despite the lifting of the Communist brainwashing threat. Therefore, because the majority of the CIA's research proved to be preemptive, the CIA became the danger that it initially tried to defend against.

It took years for the CIA to pursue research that was dangerous. The CIA began looking into the effects of drugs and hypnosis after World War II when a series of trials held by Communist regimes conjured confessions from seemingly innocent individuals accused of treason. Initially, the CIA's drug testing was conducted on volunteers, but began very quickly on unwitting individuals. Then, in 1953, confessions from American POWs, admitting to knowledge of U.S. involvement in germ warfare, marked the beginnings of the most notorious of the CIA's brainwashing research known as MKULTRA. The majority of details about the CIA's mind control projects were unknown to the public until victims began surfacing in the media in the 1970s. With the rise in victim testimonies, Senator Frank Church held a Congressional hearing in 1975 to investigate the extent to which the CIA had taken its research.¹⁸ However, the 1975 hearing left many unanswered questions because CIA director Richard Helms had destroyed most of the CIA documents useful to the investigation in 1973.¹⁹ It was not until John Marks' FOIA inquiry that substantial evidence was provided. Marks obtained over 20,000 CIA documents covering the span of the CIA mind control projects. With this new evidence, Senator Ted Kennedy held another hearing in 1977. While not all the accusations could be proven from the new evidence, the recovered FOIA documents and the 1977 hearing confirmed that many of the accusations against the CIA were, in fact, true.²⁰ U.S. citizens were dismayed and frightened at how the CIA pursued such menacing experiments on its own people. Hindsight has proven that paranoia is indeed a persuasive force!

In the late 1930s, the confessions obtained through the Moscow Show Trials created a climate of suspicion and confusion that the United States could not ignore. Many of the accused confessed their crimes during the public trials, appearing unnaturally eager to admit to high counts of treason punishable by death.²¹ Furthermore, witnesses described the defendants' behavior as trance-

¹⁸ ABC News, *Mission: Mind Control*, Altemeyer, Paul, 1979, http://www.personalgrowthcourses.net/video/mind_control/mission_mind_control_abc (accessed April 16, 2012).

¹⁹ Marks, 153.

²⁰ Senate Committee on Human Resources, *Project MKULTRA, the CIA's Program of research in Behavioral Modification. Joint Hearing before the Select Committee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources. 95th Cong., 1st session, Aug 3, 1977.*

²¹ Streatfeild, 4.

like.²² One recovered document written by an Office of Strategic Offices document notes, "It became apparent at the outset of the study that the style, context and manner of delivery of the 'confessions' were such as to be inexplicable unless there had been a reorganization and reorientation of the minds of the confesees."²³ From the onset of the trial, the CIA believed that mind control methods were used because the behavior of the accused was not consistent with the behavior of individuals who have undergone physical torture. One document states that those facing trial, "regress[ed] to [an] infantile state of abject dependency on a parental object (the State), characteristic of hypnosis (consistent with transference phenomenon), a basic change in character structure result[ing from] hypnosis."²⁴ During this time, the OSS knew little about the capabilities of hypnosis, so the prospect that Communist powers had such astonishing success with these methods was cause for alarm.

By 1949, the trial of dissident Hungarian Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty gave the CIA further reason to worry. The Cardinal's trial mimicked the earlier Moscow Show Trials, although his case had one more intriguing piece of information: before his arrest Mindszenty sent letters to Catholic officials in Hungary stating that he was not involved in any conspiracy.²⁵ His confessions during the trials, however, said otherwise. A 1949 CIA document states, "It is a reasonable certainty (though unproven) that 'confessions' in high-level trials of political or propaganda significance in Russian-dominated areas are prepared by hypnosis. Hypnosis control is begun following a period of psychological duress and drugging, the re-education under hypnosis being re-inforced with interim dialectical pressure."²⁶ Under the assumption that the Communists used hypnosis and drugs to predetermine the actions of the people at trial, the CIA could not ignore the baffling evidence. However, it was not until 1950 that the CIA took direct action to investigate the use of hypnosis.

In 1950, project BLUEBIRD was initiated. This project had specific defensive goals of acquiring information on the tactics being employed by the Russians. One document states the following main goals of BLUEBIRD:

- (a) Discovering means of conditioning personnel to prevent unauthorized extraction of information of them by known means,
- (b) the possibility of obtaining control of an individual by application of special interrogation techniques,
- (c) memory

²² Marks, 17.

²³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Office of Strategic Services: Development of 'Truth Drug,' #184373," June 21 1943, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

²⁴ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Office of Strategic Services: Development of 'Truth Drug,' #184373," 3.

²⁵ Streatfeild, 4.

²⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Report No. 1 (on two month trip), #144892," August 15 1949, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

enhancement and (d) defensive means for preventing hostile control of Agency personnel.²⁷

The main agenda stressed in these goals was to protect against invasive interrogation techniques. However, another CIA document shows that BLUEBIRD was a preemptive project. It states, "It is further suggested that a collection requirement be issued so that this office might be the recipient of all available information concerning the interrogation techniques under actual use or research by unfriendly countries. By acquiring such information, this office can at least keep abreast to or possibly surpass these interrogation techniques."²⁸ It was necessary for the CIA to protect against Communist tactics, but discovering tactics to use against enemies along the way were welcomed as well.

By 1951, the CIA moved further into offensive strategies with the initiation of project ARTICHOKE. ARTICHOKE's goals, as highlighted in one CIA document, were as follows:

1. Extraction of information from unwilling subjects
2. Preventing extraction of information from our agents
3. Control of activity of individuals whether they wish it or not
4. Preventing control of our agents²⁹

Essentially, at the outset, ARTICHOKE had two main agendas: establishing defensive and offensive understanding of interrogation and coercion. The CIA was not only willing to understand Communist tactics, but had made it equally important to explore aggressive methods for the Agency's own use. One ARTICHOKE document says, "In addition to its consideration of the standard methods...it will also consider other special or unorthodox methods such as brain damage, sensory stimulation, hypnosis, so-called 'black psychiatry,' 'Pavlovian condition,' 'brain-washing,' or any other methods having pertinence for such procedures as interrogation, subversion, or seduction."³⁰ In the following years, the CIA's efforts to understand and surpass Communist interrogation and coercion methods manifested into three

²⁷ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Behavioral Drugs, #146193," January 29 1975, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 2.

²⁸ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Security Research Section: Interrogation Techniques of Unfriendly Countries, #184367," February 24 1949, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 3.

²⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Organization of SO Components Dealing with ARTICHOKE, #190716," 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

³⁰ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Narrative Description of the Overt and Covert Activities, #190882," 1950, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 2.

main efforts: to attain a reliable truth serum, to use hypnosis to control one's actions, and to develop consistent methods of brainwashing.

While the trials may have initiated the CIA's interest in hypnosis, the agency hoped to harness unparalleled—though morally questionable—results, even in the earliest stages of its research. One document outlining some of the agency's shocking ambitions regarding hypnosis reads, "Can we in a matter of an hour, two hours, one day, etc. induce an H condition in an unwitting subject to such an extent that he will perform an act for our benefit?"³¹ Another document asks, "Can we seize a subject and in the space of an hour or two by post-H control have him crash an airplane, wreck a train, etc.?"³² Essentially, the CIA was trying to create a programmable assassin.

The CIA official that spearheaded BLUEBIRD's hypnosis research was Morse Allen, who was instrumental in pushing forward many of the CIA's efforts in hypnosis.³³ Allen interviewed one hypnotist in particular who gave a disturbing account of his abilities. In one CIA document, Allen explains, "[The hypnotist] stated he had constantly used hypnosis as a means of inducing young girls to engage in sexual intercourse with him...Many times while going home, [he] would use hypnotic suggestion to have a girl turn around and talk to him...and...as a result of these suggestions induced by him he spent approximately 5 nights a week away from home engaging in sexual intercourse."³⁴ Allen wanted to see if this powerful influence could be used for the CIA's benefit. One 1951 document described an experiment in which two hypnotized, female volunteers followed instructions given to them post-hypnosis to assemble what they were told was a bomb. The document says that one volunteer,

[deleted] being in a complete SI (sleep induced) state at this time, was then told to open her eyes and was shown an electric timing device. She was informed that this timing device was an incendiary bomb and was then instructed how to attach and set the device. After [deleted] had indicated that she had learned how to set and attached the device, she was told to return to sleep.³⁵

³¹ "H" was the code for "hypnosis"; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Special Research, BLUEBIRD [deleted], #148197," January 1 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 6.

³² U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "BLUEBIRD," 6.

³³ Streatfeild, 151.

³⁴ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Untitled, #147378," July 9, 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 2.

³⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "SI and H Experiments, #190527," 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

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³¹ "H" was the code for "hypnosis"; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Special Research, BLUEBIRD [deleted], #148197," January 1 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 6.

³² U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "BLUEBIRD," 6.

³³ Streatfeild, 151.

³⁴ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Untitled, #147378," July 9, 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 2.

³⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "SI and H Experiments, #190527," 1951, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

Both women carried out the experiment perfectly, though one had only partial memory of her actions.³⁶

Allen's experiments continued for several years without success in creating a programmable assassin; however, in 1954, one anonymous hypnotist gave the CIA hope. In response to CIA personnel asking whether or not a person could be manipulated into doing something they would not do otherwise, the hypnotist replied,

This is a muchly [*sic*] debated subject and, in my opinion, as a general rule, no individual will do anything against his moral code or upbringing under a hypnotic trance they would not do otherwise. However, it should be remembered that by the proper type of conditioning and a very intelligent and understanding approach using psychology, individuals could be taught to do anything including murder, suicide, etc.³⁷

This was put to the test with Allen's infamous pistol experiment in which a female volunteer who previously expressed a fear of firearms was hypnotized and told to pick up a gun on the floor and shoot it at someone in the room. The gun was not loaded, but she was told that it was. A document describing the experiment says, "Miss [deleted] carried out these suggestions to the letter including firing the (unloaded pneumatic pistol) gun at [deleted] and then proceeding to fall into a deep sleep."³⁸ She did not remember the experiment when she woke, however, and she could not be made to go through with the instructions after she woke from the hypnotic trance.³⁹ According to CIA documentation available to the public, the CIA's efforts in hypnosis experimentation continued throughout the 1950s but were unsuccessful in creating a Manchurian Candidate. However, if the CIA had developed a programmable assassin, it would have gone to great lengths to keep this information from ever being released to the public.

The CIA's drug experimentation began even before its efforts in hypnosis. Shortly after the Moscow Show Trials, the OSS employed George White, head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, to begin researching the effects of THC⁴⁰. In 1943, he first began giving oral doses of the drug to individual volunteers who had worked on the Manhattan project. Since the individuals held

³⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "SI and H Experiments," 3.

³⁷ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Interview With., #190597," 1952, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 5.

³⁸ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Hypnotic Experimentation and Research, #190691," February 10 1954, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

³⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Hypnotic Experimentation and Research, #190691," February 10 1954, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

⁴⁰ Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the constituent derived from a cannabis plant (marijuana) that has psychoactive effects when consumed.

top-secret information, White concluded that the experiment would be a success if he could extract secret information from the volunteers. The tests proved to be unsuccessful however.⁴¹ White modified the experiment and injected cigarettes with THC and gave it to an unwitting drug dealer. Another document describes how “[White] gave treated cigarettes to a New York gangster, but without the subject knowing of the treatment. The gangster became voluble and imparted much secret information as attested by the attached copy of [deleted] report.”⁴² With these results, White was confident that finding a successful truth drug was possible.

In 1953, new information on Soviet drug experimentation, followed by the alarming confessions of the American POWs a few months later, prompted the CIA to move into its most infamous and aggressive phase of drug experimentation and brainwashing research, MKULTRA. The CIA became paranoid that the Soviets were trying to find drugs to use as a truth serum as well. One document reads, “Evidence of the use of drugs for court trials and probable extensive use on war prisoners in the future, is supported by a report of large plantation in Nikita Gardens and another plantation at Dakehisarai in the Crimea devoted to the breeding and raising of subtropical plants for their speech producing effects.”⁴³ Pressure intensified when the confessions of the POWs gave rise to rumors that the Communists had acquired successful brainwashing methods. Despite the CIA’s lack of evidence to support this theory, the rumors were enough to breed anxiety about the sinister implications. To combat these threats, MKULTRA was initiated in April 1953, and the CIA moved forward with increasingly aggressive research.

The most shocking of MKULTRA’s aggressive tactics in the CIA’s search for a truth serum involved experiments conducted by the head Bureau of Narcotics officer, George White. White set up safe houses in New York and San Francisco.⁴⁴ The first safe house was set up in Greenwich Village, New York in 1953, preceding another in San Francisco, established two years later.⁴⁵ At these safe houses, men were solicited by CIA members or prostitutes and asked to come back to the safe house where the men were unwittingly dosed with drugs and monitored, even during sexual acts.⁴⁶ In Senator Kennedy’s opening address during the 1977 hearing, he said, “We now have collaborating

⁴¹ Streatfeild, 43.

⁴² U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Office of Strategic Services: Development of ‘Truth Drug,’ #184373,” June 21 1943, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 3.

⁴³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Office Memorandum: Request for [deleted]--Artichoke, #147390,” 1953, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 5.

⁴⁴ The safe houses set up by George White were locations designed to observe individuals that White, or other hired individuals, such as prostitutes, invited to the location. The individuals were observed without their knowledge, even during sexual intercourse, and often unwittingly given mind-altering substances.

⁴⁵ Streatfeild, 84.

⁴⁶ Marks, 71.

information that some of the unwitting drug testing was carried on in safe houses....”⁴⁷ According to the hearing’s briefings,

Prior consent was obviously not obtained from any of the subjects. There was also, obviously, no medical prescreening. In addition, the tests were conducted by individuals who were not qualified scientific observers. There were no medical personnel on hand either to administer the drugs or to observe their effects, and no follow-ups were conducted on the test subjects.⁴⁸

Since the CIA did not conduct follow ups and many of the CIA’s unwitting participants were too embarrassed to disclose that they were at the safe house brothels, it is unknown how many people suffered severe psychological and physical consequences due to the experiments.

It was this casual attitude towards the well-being of the individuals on whom the CIA experimented that ultimately cost Dr. Frank Olsen his life. Olsen was a civilian employee of the Army who was unknowingly dosed with LSD by CIA officials. According to the 1977 hearing briefings,

Olsen unwittingly received approximately 70 micrograms of LSD in a glass of Cointreau he drank on November 19, 1953...Olsen exhibited symptoms of paranoia and schizophrenia...While in New York for treatment, Olsen fell to his death from a tenth story window in the Statler Hotel.⁴⁹

It is believed that Olsen committed suicide days after suffering from a psychotic episode due to the LSD dosing. Shockingly, the CIA suspected months before Olsen’s death that the “Communists [had] not employ[ed] sinister techniques such as drugs, serums, etc., but straight propaganda indoctrination.”⁵⁰ Moreover, fueled by the momentum the CIA gained from its increasingly aggressive research after the POW confessions, Olsen’s death did not hamper the CIA’s testing of LSD on additional unwitting individuals for more than a decade.

⁴⁷ U.S. Senate. Committee on Human Resources, “Project MKULTRA, the CIA’s Program of research in Behavioral Modification,” Joint Hearing before the Select Committee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources, 95th Cong., 1st sess., Aug 3, 1977, 8.

⁴⁸ U.S. Senate Committee on Human Resources, “Project MKULTRA,” 69. There is little information available to the public about the details of the safe houses and the individuals involved. The line quoted from the hearing briefing is a summary of the author’s knowledge from the trial as well as MKULTRA documents unavailable for my analysis.

⁴⁹ U.S. Senate Committee on Human Resources, “Project MKULTRA,” 74.

⁵⁰ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Memorandum For: Chief of Operations, Report on POW situation, #146093,” June 15 1953, http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012), 1.

As with the CIA's drug research, the POW confessions also catalyzed the CIA's aggressive research in brainwashing. Colonel Frank Schwable was one of the men captured in Korea who later confessed over a Chinese radio station that the United States had been involved in conducting germ warfare during the Korean War. According to a *New York Times* article from February 1953, "The deposition allegedly signed by Colonel Schwable and broadcast in full by Peiping was in excellent English without the usual mistakes noted in the enemy's propaganda."⁵¹ The United States denied all the charges. In another 1953 *Times* article, General Mark Clark repudiated the accusations, saying, "Whether the statements ever passed the lips of these unfortunate men is doubtful. If they did, however, too familiar are the mind-annihilating methods of these Communists in extorting whatever words they want for there to be any mystery as to how they were fabricated."⁵² By this point, propaganda about Communist brainwashing tactics had been circulating in the American press. The reality of the Communist techniques, contrary to the preaching of propagandists, was that there was no "magic bullet". As it turns out, Communist interrogation methods varied little from those used as far back as the Middle Ages. It was through tactics based on traditional psychological torture that the Communists developed systems of brainwashing.⁵³ However, the CIA suspected this. As indicated by the June 1953 document, stating that the Communists were using "propaganda indoctrination," the CIA knew at the earliest stages of MKULTRA how the Communists were extracting false confessions. In fact, the CIA had been acquiring information on psychological indoctrination well before MKULTRA.

The CIA's research into behavioral studies began in 1951, when the CIA invited eight men, well known for their psychiatric expertise, to a meeting in Montreal, Canada to discuss possible explanations for the Moscow Show Trials. Among these men was Dr. Donald Hebb of McGill University, who was researching the effects of sensory isolation and its manipulation of thought.⁵⁴ Hebb conducted tests on college student volunteers in which the students stayed in a small confined box and wore noise canceling headphones, gloves, and goggles.⁵⁵ The results were more surprising that Hebb had expected. He says, "It scared the hell out of us to see how completely dependent the mind is on a close connection with the ordinary sensory environment, and how disorganizing it is to be cut off from that support."⁵⁶ After Hebb relayed his findings to the

⁵¹ "Red Germ Charges Cite 2 U.S. Marines: Peiping Radio says Air Officers Disclosed Joint Chiefs Order for Bacteriological War," *New York Times*, February 23 1953, ProQuest (83712037).

⁵² "U.S. Wages Germ Warfare in Korea: Statment of Prisoners of War, Colonel Frank H. Schwable, 04429," Hsinhua Agency [Peking News Radio], February 1953, <http://www.umsl.edu/~thomaskp/schwab.htm> (accessed April 11, 2012).

⁵³ The Communists were using psychological methods to manipulate the behavior of their captives: isolation, sleep deprivation, shame, fear of pain, etc.

⁵⁴ Streatfeild, 106-107.

⁵⁵ Streatfeild, 109.

⁵⁶ Donald Hebb, "This is how it was," Address to Canadian Psychological Association, 1980, quoted in Alfred McCoy, "Science in Dachau's Shadow: Hebb, Beecher, and the Development of CIA

CIA and the POW's radical changes in behavior became known to agency, the CIA delved further into research related to Hebb's experiments.

To expand its research capabilities, the CIA founded the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology (SIHE) in 1954, and hired neurology expert Harold Wolff to run the organization.⁵⁷ SIHE began giving money to universities and hospitals in exchange for their conducting behavioral modification research that the CIA felt would be useful in attaining Communist interrogation techniques. Many of the individuals who conducted the research at these organizations were completely unaware of the CIA's involvement with their research. Under the guise of the SIHE, the CIA funded experimental research on human subjects that mimicked scenarios the Communists were likely employing. In 1955, psychologist Maitland Baldwin was recruited to work for the CIA. Baldwin's experiments were undoubtedly torturous. In one experiment, Baldwin locked a U.S. army volunteer in a box for forty hours. Despite the soldier crying uncontrollably, the experiment continued until he finally kicked himself free from the box.⁵⁸ In one 1957 CIA document, which references experiments conducted by two CIA funded organizations, the writer admits, "Some of the activities are considered to be professionally unethical and in some instances bordered on the illegal."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the torturous experimentation continued with support from CIA funding in the interest of mastering an understanding of how to best manipulate human behavior.

Research performed by Dr. Ewen Cameron at the Allen Memorial Institute from 1957 to 1963 made national headlines in the mid-1980s when nine victims of Cameron's research sued the CIA. Ewen conducted hypnosis, LSD testing and electroshock experiments on patients at the institute who had been admitted for mental health problems.⁶⁰ Another method favored by Cameron was what he called "psychic driving," in which the patient was made to listen to a looped recording of his or her own voice, oftentimes repeating negative messages such as "Everything about me was wrong" or "...my parents had me just to even up the family."⁶¹ In a 1979 ABC interview, Val Orlikow recounts her experience at the Allen Memorial Institute. Describing the "sleep rooms"—rooms in which electro-shock therapy and drugs were used to induce long bouts of sleep—Orkilow recounts, "People in there were like babies. They cried. And we were very afraid of the sleep room. We used to walk very carefully against

Psychological Torture and Modern Medical Ethics," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (Wiley Interscience), 2007: 44.

⁵⁷ Price, 2-3.

⁵⁸ Streatfeild, 117.

⁵⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Untitled, #146167," 1957,

http://wanttoknow.info/mind_control/cia_mind_control_documents_orig/ (Accessed March 16, 2012).

⁶⁰ Alfred McCoy, "Science in Dachau's Shadow: Hebb, Beecher, and the Development of CIA Psychological Torture and Modern Medical Ethics," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (Wiley Interscience), 2007: 408.

⁶¹ Ewen Cameron, "Psychic Driving: Dynamic Implant," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 31, no. 1-4 (1957): 704.

the side of the quarter that was opposite the sleep room with our backs against the wall when we went by.”⁶²

She says that no one asked permission to give her LSD and perform experimental medical practices on her. More than twenty years later, Orlikow can still barely describe the torment she endured during her time at the institute.

Ultimately, the CIA did discover the methods which the Communists used to successfully brainwash their captives, and these methods became a staple in CIA interrogation techniques. These techniques were consolidated into the *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation* manual in 1963. However, it did not take the CIA until 1963 to pinpoint the Communists' specific brainwashing tactics. In 1956, Harold Wolff and Lawrence Hinkle wrote an article entitled, "Communist Interrogation and Indoctrination of 'Enemies of States,'" in which they outline, specifically, the interrogation and indoctrination tactics that the Russian and Chinese Communist forces used. Not only does the *Kubark* manual reference much of Wolff's and other SIHE research, but the coercive interrogation methods that the manual advocates are similar to specific techniques that are described in Wolff and Lawrence's article. For instance, Wolff and Lawrence's article reads, "Those put in isolation for the first time...usually feel profoundly anxious, helpless, frustrated, dejected, and entirely uncertain about his future."⁶³ They describe that the Communists used anxiety to create an unbearable mental state in which the captive would desire any communication, even with his captor.⁶⁴ Likewise, the *Kubark* manual similarly describes isolation by asserting that prisoners "... have reduced viability, are helplessly dependent on their captors for the satisfaction of their many basic needs, and experience the emotional and motivational reactions of intense fear and anxiety."⁶⁵ It explains that anxiety can be used to the interrogator's advantage because "anxiety intensifies the desire to be with others who share the same fear," thereby allowing captives to deceive the detainee with spurious sympathizers.⁶⁶ Other similarities between Wolff and Hinkle's article and the *Kubark* manual include the use of sleep deprivation, regression, exploitation of guilt, and behavioral effects of social dependency. The CIA knew as early as 1956 that the Communists were using old-fashioned interrogation and indoctrination techniques to achieve temporary brainwashing. Nevertheless, the CIA continued its experimentation of hypnosis, drug testing, and torturous experiments. It is through the unnecessary continuation of the CIA's research that any ambiguity about the agency's ethics comes into focus

The story of the CIA's mind control research is one with many holes; however, the facts that are known are shocking. While the CIA's research was

⁶² ABC News, "Mission: Mind Control."

⁶³ Lawrence Hinkle and Harold Wolff, "Communist Interrogation and Indoctrination of 'Enemies of States,' Analysis of Methods Used by the Communist State Police," American Medical Association Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry; The Torture Archive, Vol. 76, August 1956, 14.

⁶⁴ Hinkle and Wolfe, 14-15.

⁶⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation," July 1963, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB122/index.htm#kubark> (accessed April 10, 2012).

⁶⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation."

prompted by the fear that the Communists had acquired dangerous methods of mind control, the CIA abused its power by going beyond what was necessary to alleviate the presumed threat. In spite of the CIA's lack of evidence, the agency conducted its research as if the Communists were undoubtedly conducting anomalous brainwashing tactics. The CIA's research was also often carried out with considerable negligence and flagrant disregard for the mental and physical health of the participants. Additionally, despite evidence mitigating the mind control threat, the CIA continued to commit atrocious acts against its own citizens to weaponize mind control itself. Consequently, when the agency was not able to obtain the mind control weapons it pursued, its research became a subterfuge to master torturous interrogation techniques. Some may justify the CIA's actions by arguing that is necessary for the CIA to hold defensive and offensive advantages over its enemies to protect national security. However, how safe are citizens when members of their own government have the power to use unwitting individuals as guinea pigs for haphazard and dangerous experimentation? After all, at what point does the ethical line become impenetrable?

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