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THE NEW YORK TIMES
20 September 1977

Senate Panel to Focus on Linked to C.I.A. Drug

The following article is based on reporting by John M. Crewdson.
It was written by Mr. Crewdson.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 19—A Senate subcommittee reportedly has concluded that of the scores of scientific projects undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in its 25-year quest for control of the human mind none represented a greater potential abuse of governmental authority or medical ethics than the agency's testing of LSD-25 and other psychochemicals on unsuspecting subjects.

After an examination of the sparse public record and a score of interviews with past and present Federal officials and others, some new details have emerged of the agency's highly secretive and long-running drug-testing program, the advisability of which seemed uncertain to the agency itself at times.

The new details include an unusual relationship between the C.I.A. and a senior narcotics official—a relationship that was not known to at least one Commissioner of Narcotics.

C.I.A. 'Safehouses' Used

Documents made public by the C.I.A. thus far contain scant information about the experiments, part of a larger operation known by the crytonym MK Ultra, and the documents have raised more questions than they have answered.

Tomorrow, the Senate Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research, headed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, will begin two days of hearings that the panel

hopes will illuminate the C.I.A.'s oblique references to "realistic tests of certain development items not suited to ordinary laboratory facilities."

The documents show that the tests were carried out in New York City and San Francisco between 1953 and 1966; in C.I.A. "safehouses," mainly apartments and motel rooms, that were secretly rented for the agency by an official of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, since supplanted by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Prostitutes, perhaps men as well as women, may have been employed to lure the subjects to the safehouses, where they were offered cocktails laced with various chemicals while unseen C.I.A. officials observed, photographed and recorded their reactions.

Charter Violations Hinted

Several questions remain unresolved, and among them these stand out: How many individuals were subjected to the tests? Were the C.I.A. operatives who slipped them the drugs trained in their proper use? Were qualified medical personnel on hand in the event of an adverse reaction, and did any occur?

Was any attempt made beforehand to insure that the subjects were in good physical and psychological health? Were follow-up examinations conducted afterward to determine whether any harm to the victims had resulted?

Were the C.I.A. safehouses used, as some officials have suggested, to introduce foreign intelligence agents into compromising situations, something that would have directly violated the C.I.A.'s charter prohibiting domestic operations?

And most important, why did the C.I.A. continue its inherently risky tests of psychochemicals on what the agency termed "unwitting" subjects after the 1953 death of Frank Olson, an Army scientist who developed a psychotic reaction and committed suicide after having been given a glass of liqueur that he did not know contained LSD?

The Kennedy subcommittee's search for answers has been difficult, hampered by the C.I.A.'s destruction in 1973 of a large portion of the MK Ultra documents and by the intervening deaths of several of the project's key figures, especially George H. White, the flamboyant Federal narcotics official who served as liaison to the C.I.A. testing program.

But not all of those deeply involved in the safehouse project are dead, and tomorrow the Kennedy subcommittee will hear from Sidney Gottlieb, the man to whom Mr. White reported and, at the time he retired in 1973, the chief of the C.I.A.'s technical services division, with administrative responsibility for MK Ultra.

Top-Secret Operation

MK Ultra and its predecessor projects, code-named Bluebird and Artichoke, were among the most sensitive intelligence operations ever undertaken by this country.

Extraordinary measures were adopted to insure that hostile nations remained unaware of their parameters, and the C.I.A.'s concern about adverse reaction at home, both within the scientific community and without, led it to disguise its role as the source of funding, and to misstate the true intention of some of the research projects and in a form

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A Problem of Supplies

In the early 1950's, when the C.I.A. first became interested in the properties of the newly developed LSD and other relatively exotic substances, the agency was faced at once with the problems of how to obtain such chemicals and how to determine their effect on individuals who were unaware, as the target of an intelligence operation would be, that they had just ingested some.

For assistance the C.I.A. turned to George White, a senior official in the Bureau of Narcotics who had a wartime intelligence background as a lieutenant colonel. Mr. White was described by one former colleague as "sort of a curiosity in law-enforcement" and by another as a "maverick."

An outspoken man who never lost the affection for publicity he first acquired as a youthful newspaper reporter in California, Mr. White alternately distressed his superiors with his bluntness and impressed them with the superb police work of which he was capable.

'Wouldn't Poison Friends'

One longtime friend, who asked that he not be identified, recalled that while the C.I.A. experiments were under way Mr. White once showed him some glass ampules filled with a clear liquid that had come from a Swiss pharmaceutical concern.

Mr. White, the friend said, told him that he had slipped some of the liquid into cocktails at a drinking session with two men of his acquaintance, but that it was "a minimal dose—he wouldn't try to poison his friends."

According to Mr. White's papers, now in the possession of a small California college, the C.I.A. sought to enlist his cooperation in a most unusual way, proposing that he continue his service with the Bureau of Narcotics but enter into a formal, though secret relationship with the agency as a "consultant."

Though his diaries make it clear that he readily agreed to the proposal from Sidney Gottlieb that he sign on as a C.I.A.

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