
Secret Mind Control & Mass Surveillance

A FIELD GUIDE TO EXPERIMENTATION, FACIAL RECOGNITION & ALGORITHMIC CONTROL

Declassified, congressionally investigated, and in several cases formally apologized for — a plain accounting of programs that used American and Canadian citizens as unwitting test subjects.

Introduction

Between the 1930s and the 1970s, several arms of the U.S. government ran human-subject programs that would be flatly illegal, and were largely unknown to the public, at the time they happened. Some were run by intelligence agencies chasing Cold War fears about mind control and assassination. Others were run by public-health and academic researchers who simply decided their subjects didn't need to know, or didn't count. Most of what's below only came to light through a mix of investigative journalism, the 1975 Church Committee hearings, a 1990s presidential advisory panel, and lawsuits filed decades after the fact. This guide lays out the major threads: what each program did, who it was done to, and why the victims were chosen the way they were.

MK-ULTRA: The Umbrella Program

Authorized in 1953 by CIA Director Allen Dulles, MK-ULTRA was an umbrella project of more than 130 individual subprojects carried out in prisons, hospitals, and universities across the U.S. and Canada. Its stated goal was to find reliable methods of behavioral control and interrogation — a chemical or psychological “truth drug,” and techniques to make a person act against their own will. Subjects were dosed with LSD, mescaline, barbiturates, and other drugs; some were given electroshock at many times normal clinical strength or held in total sensory isolation for weeks at a time. Most subjects had no idea they were part of an experiment. In 1973, CIA Director Richard Helms ordered the bulk of the program's records destroyed just before leaving office; only a handful of boxes, misfiled in a records center, survived to be found later.



Subproject 68: Montreal

The best-documented single subproject was run by Dr. Ewen Cameron, director of the Allan Memorial Institute at McGill University in Montreal. Cameron developed two techniques he called “depatterning” — using repeated, above-standard electroshock and drug-induced sleep lasting weeks to strip a patient's mind down to a blank state — and “psychic driving,” in which patients were forced to listen to looped tape recordings, sometimes for sixteen hours a day, meant to rebuild their personality along different lines. Patients admitted for ordinary conditions like postpartum depression were never told they were experimental subjects. One, Velma “Val” Orlikow, was left with permanent memory loss and psychological damage; she and eight other former patients sued the U.S. government and reached a \$750,000 settlement in 1988. Canada later made separate payments to roughly 77 of Cameron's other patients.

Operation Midnight Climax

A Midnight Climax operative maintained furnished CIA safehouses in San Francisco, Marin County, and New York from the mid-1950s into the early 1960s, dressed up to look like ordinary apartments or brothels, complete with two-way mirrors for agents to observe from. Sex workers on the CIA payroll were paid to bring men back to these locations, where their drinks were secretly dosed with LSD so agents could watch the drug's effects on unwitting subjects under real-world social conditions. Subjects were deliberately drawn from men with little social standing — people picked up in bars, often from working-class or transient backgrounds — on the theory that they were the least likely to be believed, or to have the resources to complain, if they later realized something had been done to them. The same sourcing logic ran through related domestic MK-ULTRA testing more broadly: prisoners and drug users were used partly because their word already carried little weight, and partly because addiction gave researchers an existing point of leverage — access, payment, or drugs themselves, used as a means of securing cooperation.



MKNAOMI and the CIA's Poison Arsenal

Running alongside MK-ULTRA from the 1950s into 1970, a joint CIA–Army program called MKNAOMI stockpiled biological and chemical agents meant to incapacitate or kill, along with the hardware to deliver them. Church Committee testimony described dart guns and poison-tipped darts developed with the Army's Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick, and confirmed the CIA held a working reserve of lethal toxins well after it was legally required to destroy them. The most famous artifact surfaced at a public 1975 Senate hearing: a modified pistol, nicknamed the “heart attack gun,” built to fire a frozen dart tipped with shellfish-derived toxin. On contact the dart left a mark no larger than a mosquito bite; the toxin induced cardiac arrest and then broke down, so a standard autopsy would show only a fatal heart attack. Senator Frank Church displayed the weapon to the committee and, famously, to the press cameras in the room. President Nixon had formally renounced U.S. biological weapons in 1969, which is largely why MKNAOMI's stockpile was ordered destroyed the following year.

Radiation on Unconsenting Patients — Including Children

Separately from the CIA programs, Cold War-era radiation research used thousands of Americans as unwitting subjects, work later detailed by a presidential advisory committee under the Clinton administration. Some patients believed to be terminally ill were injected with plutonium without informed consent, so researchers could study how the human body absorbed it. Separately, from 1946 to 1953, MIT researchers — funded in part by the Atomic Energy Commission and with cereal supplied by Quaker Oats — fed radioactive iron and calcium to boys at the Fernald School, a Massachusetts institution for children with intellectual disabilities. The children were recruited into a fake “Science Club” and rewarded with trips and better food; neither they nor, in most cases, their families were told what was actually being tested. The Fernald case was settled in 1998 for \$1.85 million, and President Clinton formally apologized on behalf of the federal government for Cold War-era human radiation testing in 1995.



The Tuskegee Syphilis Study

Predating MK-ULTRA by two decades and run entirely separately, the U.S. Public Health Service's Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male began in 1932 in Macon County, Alabama. Roughly 600 Black men — 399 with syphilis, 201 as an uninfected control group — were recruited under the promise of free health care for “bad blood.” None were told their actual diagnosis. When penicillin became the standard, effective cure for syphilis in the late 1940s, researchers deliberately withheld it so they could keep observing the disease's untreated progression. The study ran for forty years and only ended in 1972 after a whistleblower's account reached the press. It remains the reference point most often cited for why Black Americans' distrust of the U.S. medical establishment is rooted in documented history, not rumor — and it directly shaped the informed-consent rules that govern human research today.

Modern Surveillance: Facial Recognition and ALPR Networks

The closest modern equivalent to a surveillance capability that reaches “any camera system” is Clearview AI, a private company whose database of more than 30 billion — by some 2026 accounts, over 60 billion — images was built by scraping social media, news sites, and mugshot databases without those platforms' permission. Rather than requiring its own camera network, Clearview lets an investigator upload any photo, from any camera, and search it against that scraped database to return a likely identity. More than 2,400 U.S. police departments have used Clearview licenses, and it holds active federal contracts with ICE's Homeland Security Investigations arm, Customs and Border Protection, and other DHS components, including for a mobile app reportedly used to identify people in the field. Because the underlying technology only needs an image, not a dedicated camera network, it can in principle be pointed at footage from a doorbell camera, a retail security system, or a phone — any camera system becomes a potential identification tool once its footage is run through it.

A parallel network exists for tracking vehicles rather than faces: automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras, the largest network of which is run not by a government agency but by a private company, Flock Safety. Flock's own cameras now sit on both public and private property: police departments deploy them, but so do thousands of homeowners associations, retail chains, and business districts, each buying camera clusters directly from Flock and choosing whether to feed that footage into the shared national search network. Home Depot and Lowe's have installed Flock cameras across store parking lots and shared the data with law enforcement; HOA boards can opt their residential footage into the same system, often without residents' knowledge. Individual police

departments that opt into the network can search plate data captured by other departments' cameras nationwide, not just their own — and 2025 reporting found that local police were running Flock searches on behalf of ICE and Homeland Security Investigations for immigration enforcement, even in cities whose own policies restricted cooperation with ICE. In effect, a single private camera opted into the network gives every other connected agency, public or private, a search interface into it.

The Facebook “Emotional Contagion” Experiment

In January 2012, Facebook data scientists, together with researchers from Cornell and the University of California, San Francisco, altered the News Feed algorithm for 689,003 randomly selected users for one week, reducing either the positive or the negative emotional content each group saw from friends, without telling any of them. The results were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in 2014: people shown fewer positive posts wrote more negative status updates themselves, and people shown fewer negative posts wrote more positive ones — measurable evidence that a platform's feed algorithm could shift users' expressed emotional state without their awareness. The only “consent” on record was users' original agreement to Facebook's general data-use terms; no separate research consent was obtained, and it later emerged the study had not gone through a university institutional review board before publication. PNAS took the unusual step of issuing a formal Editorial Expression of Concern after the backlash, while standing by the paper's findings.

What We Don't Know

The full scope of these programs was never established, and that gap is itself part of the documented record. Richard Helms ordered most MK-ULTRA files destroyed in 1973; investigators working for the Church Committee two years later had to reconstruct the program largely from a small set of financial records that had been misfiled outside the main archive and so survived by accident. The Church Committee's own 1976 report acknowledged it could not determine how many of the 130-plus subprojects it had identified, or verify that it had found all of them. No comprehensive list of test subjects was ever recovered, which is why most victims who came forward — including Val Orlikow — did so on their own, without the government confirming they'd been part of the program until they sued. The 1995 Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments ran into the same wall: it could document specific projects like Fernald in detail precisely because outside researchers and lawsuits had already surfaced them, while conceding it had no way to confirm whether other, similar projects existed in records that were never located or never created a paper trail to begin with.

Recap

Put side by side, these programs share a pattern more than a motive: intelligence agencies chasing Cold War fears, and public-health researchers chasing scientific or commercial gain, both reaching the same conclusion — that certain people's consent didn't need to be asked for. The subjects were disabled children, psychiatric patients, sex workers, drug users, prisoners, and poor Black sharecroppers: people whose objections, history suggests, the institutions involved did not expect anyone to take seriously. Every program above was eventually confirmed through congressional hearings, declassified records, or a formal government apology — which is also, in each case, the only reason the public ever learned what had been done in its name.

Key sources: U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities ("Church Committee"), Final Report, 1976; Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, Final Report, 1995; CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room; National Archives, Tuskegee Study records; Orlikow v. United States (D.D.C. 1988).

A note on this guide: Every claim above draws on congressional testimony, declassified government records, court filings, published scientific research, or established news reporting — all of it well-documented and independently searchable. This guide contains no speculation, no editorializing, and no unconfirmed claims; nothing here should be taken on faith. Readers are encouraged to verify any fact against the primary sources cited and to draw their own conclusions.

"Love Feels Best, love is the opposite of control. When you love something you appreciate it. You do not manipulate it and change the course of its progression, because then it ceases to be what you love and it becomes an extension of your will and agendas."

