

~~Search for the Manchurian Candidate~~
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Books/Ron Rosenbaum, Tom Bethell

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“... Was the psychedelic counterculture the result of CIA drug experiments? Were the sixties the ultimate ‘dirty trick’?...”

The Search for the “Manchurian Candidate,” by John Marks. Times Books, \$9.95.

Is our fascination with the secret history of things unappeasable? Will we never tire of pursuing the great white whales that roam the murky waters of conspiracy theory? Of these new books on the CIA and Howard Hughes—two leviathans of that realm—one surfeits our curiosity, the other provokes it even more.

John Marks has written the ultimate CIA book. His sober account of the CIA’s freaked-out experiments in its search for the perfect mind-control substance is as quietly horrifying as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

It’s now evident that the use of the word “cult” in the title of the book Marks wrote with Victor Marchetti (*The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*) was no accident. On the evidence of its own confidential files, the CIA regarded the LSD molecule with the same religious veneration as did that other acid cult of the sixties, the Manson family—and with almost the same lack of moral scruples about its use.

Marks’s astonishing tales of innocent minds raped by surprise druggings make this book the CIA exposé to end all CIA exposés. No revelation of any assassination plot against a foreign political leader could prove more shocking than the torture, maiming, and assassination of the minds of our own citizens by government-sponsored cult doctors. If the CIA did anything worse than this, I’m not sure we want to know about it.

But Marks’s book is not all horror and outrage. He makes an invaluable contribution to the ongoing revisionist history of the sixties with his speculation that the psychedelic counterculture was itself a creature of CIA drug ex-



periments. He demonstrates how charismatic acid evangelists such as Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, and Allen Ginsberg all ingested powerful psychedelics provided them by researchers whose work was funded or inspired by the CIA. “It would become the supreme irony,” writes Marks, “that the CIA’s enormous search for weapons among drugs, fueled by the hope that spies could, like Dr. Frankenstein, control life . . . would wind up helping to create the wandering, uncontrollable minds of the counterculture.” Were the sixties the CIA’s ultimate “dirty trick”?

Ron Rosenbaum, a contributing editor of New York, is the author of *Murder at Elaine’s*. Tom Bethell is a Washington editor of Harper’s.