

Secrets of science

Undue risk: secret state experiments on humans

Jonathan D. Moreno

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In *Undue Risk*, Jonathan D. Moreno, Director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Virginia and a former member of President Clinton's Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, presents a comprehensive overview of the controversial and often secret use of human experimental subjects to serve the interests of national security. The book is an insightful and provocative inquiry into the unfortunate inclination of modern governments to test chemical, biological and atomic weapons on their own citizens, often without their knowledge. Moreno's account primarily involves American cases, but experiments conducted in other countries, including Canada, are also discussed. Although each chapter deals with a different set of experiments, the author weaves these studies together into a

seamless account that is well-organized and fascinating to read.

Moreno draws on example after example, ranging from Nuremberg to the Gulf War, to make the case that governments invariably tend to favour the interests of national security over the rights of individual citizens, particularly during times of war or political instability. The experiments he discusses include studies involving exposure to biological and chemical toxins, as well as the deliberate exposure of unsuspecting military personnel and even disabled children to nuclear radiation. Other experiments involved secret LSD and mescaline administration to unprepared and unsuspecting subjects with a view to determining the potential value of these substances in temporarily disabling enemy soldiers. Still others involved CIA-

funded "brainwashing" experiments conducted at McGill University in the 1950s by psychiatrist Ewen Cameron. Moreno also cites a variety of contentious US government policies that permitted such a state of affairs, including the attempted recruitment of Nazi medical scientists after World War II.

The historical catalogue Moreno meticulously assembles in *Undue Risk* amply supports his argument that the rights of many thousands of human experimental subjects were ignored in attempts by medical scientists to acquire new knowledge of potential military and national security importance. He makes the case that many of these experiments occurred even after the development of a code of ethics for medical experimentation by the American Medical Association and the even more celebrated Nuremberg code of ethics, the first principle of which begins with the assertion, "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential."

One appealing facet of the book is the many interesting tangents it takes, such as the evolution of various codes

One thousand words



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World War I veterans learning handicrafts under the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment program, circa 1918–1919