



World as Laboratory: Experiments with Mice, Mazes, and Men

By Rebecca Lemov

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Deeply researched, *World as Laboratory* tells a secret history that's not really a secret. The fruits of human engineering are all around us: advertising, polls, focus groups, the ubiquitous habit of "spin" practiced by marketers and politicians. What Rebecca Lemov cleverly traces for the first time is how the absurd, the practical, and the dangerous experiments of the human engineers of the first half of the twentieth century left their laboratories to become our day-to-day reality.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Lemov, a historian and anthropologist, addresses nearly a century of study into "human engineering," the idea that behavior can be modified through manipulation of the surrounding environment. The social implications of such research are important, but equally worth pondering, she suggests, is what it tells us about "the impulse for scientific experimentation" and how far scientists will go to indulge it. Some of her most intriguing passages deal with individual researchers like fear specialist O. Hobart Mowrer and sociologist John Dollard and how their theories—their career paths, even—were shaped by their emotional conditions. But Lemov balances this personal approach with close consideration of the major institutions involved, tracking the effect of grants handed out by the Rockefeller Foundation and digging into the vast archives of Yale's anthropological database (all the more remarkable for being entirely on paper). She also reports on the government's interest in the field, including the CIA's encouragement of research designed both to combat and refine psychological torture. Lemov's final charge, that "many people continue to suffer from the use of these techniques" as deployed by consumer surveys and political polls, needs substantiation, but her historical argument is both eye-opening and persuasive. (*Dec.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Lemov explores the behavioral sciences during the years 1900-60, after which much of the human experimentation previously conducted acquired an odious reputation; the author remarks she was predisposed to dislike the psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists who conducted it. Lemov improved her opinion of them, but her well-researched book nevertheless imparts a sense of uneasiness about human engineering. An outgrowth of stimulus-response experiments on animals, behavior modification of people became the goal of ambitious psychologists such as John Watson, coiner of the conditioned-response theory. Tellingly, he eventually went into advertising, while in his wake in the 1920s, foundations directed by behaviorist enthusiasts funded behavioral science centers at Yale and Harvard. With World War II, Lemov remarks, their denizens traded lab coats for uniforms, applying behavioral theories to occupied areas. A balanced account of the behaviorists' crusade, Lemov's history provides crucial backstory to contemporary practices in psychology and mass media. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"Delves into both the grotesque and the comical experiments that built the modern world...With a healthy sense of amusement and an appreciation for the absurd, Lemov recounts the attempts of the now largely defunct fields of behaviorism and behavioral engineering to quantify, predict and ultimately control human behavior...the book handles tough subjects in a deft and even charming manner." —*Seed Magazine*

"Rebecca Lemov, a lecturer at the University of Washington, has produced a lively and well-researched history of the human engineering field and its broad intellectual and social legacy." —Michael O'Donnell, *The San Francisco Chronicle*

"...an often enthralling history of the young science of human behavior and society." —Scott LaFee, *San Diego Union Tribune*

Users Review

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