Cold War Anthropology

Price, David H.

Published by Duke University Press

Price, David H.
Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/68675

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2431353
“The old formula for successful counterinsurgency used to be 10 troops for every guerrilla,” one American specialist remarked, “now the formula is 10 anthropologists for every guerrilla.”

PETER BRAESTRUP | 1967

TWELVE ANTHROPOLOGICALLY INFORMED COUNTERINSURGENCY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

From the CIA’s earliest days in Vietnam, the agency knew the importance of understanding the local culture’s mores. Edward Lansdale, Graham Greene’s model for CIA agent Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*, incorporated anthropological knowledge into his CIA counterinsurgency campaigns in the Philippines and Vietnam. In his memoir, *In the Midst of War*, Lansdale described using local superstitions of vampires that roamed the jungles at night as a force multiplier when he trained operatives to kill insurgents and leave their bodies punctured with holes to suggest that vampires had drained their blood (1972: 72–73).

In Vietnam, Lansdale developed counterinsurgency operations that mixed hard power techniques of assassination and organized strategic military assaults with diverse soft power methods such as dispersing economic aid and drawing on existing local Catholic organizations as counterinsurgency tools. The *Pentagon Papers* described Lansdale’s work for President Ngo Dinh Diem as relying on the “three withs,” consisting of a counterinsurgency approach in which Lansdale and his CIA operatives would “‘eat, sleep, and work with the people’ — some 1400 to 1800 ‘cadre’ undertook: census and surveys of the physical needs of villages; building schools, maternity hospitals, information halls; repairing and enlarging local roads; digging wells and irrigation canals; teaching personal and public hygiene; distributing medicine; teaching children by day, and anti-illiteracy classes by night; forming village militia; conducting political meetings; and publicizing agrarian reform legislation” (U.S. Department of Defense 1972: 306).
Anthony Poshepny, a CIA agent more commonly known as Tony Poe, who is sometimes credited as an inspiration for elements of Francis Ford Coppola’s Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, enacted Lansdale’s approach to culturally centered counterinsurgency (Branfman 1975: 56–58; M. Isaacs 1999). Poe’s knowledge of Meo culture and his willingness to work within local cultural confines made him an invaluable CIA asset in Laos during America’s secret war, though his tendency to follow local customs over CIA rules (e.g., marrying a Laotian “chieftain’s daughter” after a village raid, complete with a dowry of one hundred water buffalo and seventy-five goats) repeatedly violated agency procedures, while his efforts to “go native” earned him the respect and support of some locals (M. Isaacs 1999).

Because of the influences of CIA operatives like Poe, Lansdale, and others, the agency and the Pentagon increasingly understood the need for nuanced cultural knowledge when conducting counterinsurgency and military operations in Southeast Asia. This desire for cultural knowledge to be used for conquest and control led to a series of problematic interactions with anthropologists—dual use interactions that often found anthropologists trying to lessen harm to the indigenous groups they lived with and studied, while military and intelligence agencies pursued their own goals.


**Gerald Hickey, the Not-So-Quiet American**

In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, a rapidly increasing flow of American social scientists from the disciplines of sociology, political science, anthropology, and geography were drawn to the problems of the Vietnam War, and with these scholars came a stream of seemingly endless, futile theoretical approaches to the problems of America’s war (Marquis 2000). From 1955 to 1959, Michigan State University had a secret $25 million CIA contract, bringing CIA personnel to campus, where agency personnel and professors trained Vietnamese officials.
Anthropologist Gerald Hickey began working for the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) while in Vietnam in 1954, and in 1956 he attended MSUG meetings in which CIA personnel were Michigan State advisers to Saigon law enforcement personnel. Hickey later conducted MSUG work in Saigon with anthropologist Frederick Wickert (Hickey 2002: 3, 18–19, 23–24, 57–60), and MSUG designed curriculum for Vietnam’s National Institute of Administration to train civil servants, police, and security personnel, programs that included CIA employee Louis Boudrias (Ernst 1998: 64). The MSUG training taught the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation updated fingerprinting techniques and in 1957 advised the Central Identification Bureau on its new national identity card program (72). John Ernst, historian of MSUG’s role in these military and intelligence training programs, wrote that the applications of this training were clear, and “Diem approved of using repressive tactics to purge political rivals and communists from South Vietnam and enlisted Michigan State’s aid in doing so” (66).

The initial work by MSUG involved efforts to help refugees fleeing to the South following the 1954 Geneva Accords (Ernst 1998: 29–30). Following Diem’s 1956 call for MSUG to research highland peoples, it developed a line of analysis that “compared the situation of the highland peoples to that of the American Indians during the nineteenth century” (30). This comparison was not just an evocative metaphor to generate sympathetic comparisons; it was a reference to be used in developing a political managerial strategy, as Wesley Fishel at MSUG “wrote the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs requesting literature on agency policies. He noted that ‘From the Western and Vietnamese points of view, the Montagnards are primitive in respect to their social and economic way of life and religious beliefs” (31).

Diem cared little about MSUG’s recommendations and supported refugee resettlement programs in the highlands with the assistance of MSUG personnel as part of a defensive guerrilla action project. But Michigan State’s “role in the refugee resettlement program [was] complex. The MSUG tried to act as a positive force, and most of the Field Administration Division’s recommendations were utilized with solid results, but because numerous organizations and factors were involved in the resettlement program, the university’s overall impact is difficult to measure” (Ernst 1998: 35). Later, when the university’s collusion with the CIA was exposed in 1966, MSU president John A. Hannah claimed the university “did not have a spy operation within its Vietnam Project. It did not have CIA people operating under cover provided by the University, or in secret from the Vietnam government” (82). Hannah’s statement stressed this
was not a *spy operation* per se; it was a *training operation*. The university had become a CIA-financed training camp where paramilitary operatives learned the harsh tactics they deployed in Vietnam. Michigan State wasn’t spying (or an interrogator, a death squad overseer, etc.); it trained spies. Even after CIA funds ceased, MSUG continued working on counterinsurgency projects, including “internal security of strategic hamlets, registration and identification of family groups, and controls of the movement of both population and material” (MSUG 1962: 51). The Pike Commission later evaluated these “public safety” training programs run by AID and CIA personnel and concluded that between the early 1950s and 1973, up to five thousand foreign police officers from around the world were trained by the CIA through programs like the one at Michigan State (Pike Report 1977: 228–29).

From the late 1950s throughout the years of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, no other American anthropologist had more fieldwork experience with the cultures of Vietnam than Gerald Hickey. Hickey first conducted fieldwork in Vietnam in 1956 and 1957, at which time he met many of the individuals who would figure prominently in his future research. Hickey was in Vietnam when director Joseph Mankiewicz filmed the original Hollywood production of *The Quiet American* (1958), based on Greene’s novel, and he appeared as an extra in a scene shot with Michael Redgrave (Hickey 2002: 48). After earning his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1959, Hickey became a research associate at Michigan State University, working with MSUG (Elliot 2010: 25). Hickey spent much of the war in Vietnam, working for RAND and other agencies interfacing with U.S. military and intelligence personnel.

Between January and April 1962, Hickey and John Donnell conducted ethnographic research in resettled communities near Saigon, studying “social, economic, and certain political aspects of the strategic hamlet program as seen from the peasants’ point of view,” for a RAND report on the Strategic Hamlet Program (Donnell and Hickey 1962: iii). This program was a counterinsurgency operation that relocated entire villages in areas where U.S. military personnel could more easily reduce their contacts with the Vietcong. While the stated goal of these new hamlets was to move villagers from the “path” of insurgents, functionally, the new hamlets were locked-down encampments that maintained illusions of open-door free movement (complete with deadly fortified barriers) while isolating and controlling hamlet populations.

The Strategic Hamlet Program targeted village members suspected of being Vietcong supporters and installed village informers who reported to U.S. military and intelligence personnel on subversive activities (Donnell and Hickey
1962: 2–3). As Donnell and Hickey described it, the “program involves the political and social organization of the inhabitants in a way that permits close surveillance of their political activities, of their social participation in such government-controlled mass movements as the Republican Youth, and the contribution to labor projects for community development. Once these programs are established, the system is further designed to serve as a basis for wider programs of rural economic reconstruction, including agricultural credit and extension services” (2–3).

Strategic hamlets created panoptical microcosms that moved villagers from regions of Vietcong movements and redesigned village economic and social dynamics. As inducements for families to leave their traditional village homes, villagers were given small pieces of land to build homes within the perimeter of the strategic hamlet compounds and promised access to farmlands outside the compounds. In some instances farmers were left outside these compounds to collect intelligence (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 6–7).

Hickey did not oppose the Strategic Hamlet Program. He believed that for counterinsurgency to succeed, the military needed to increase the total control of (and reinforcements flowing into) these artificial village environments. Hickey understood that controlling physical space was as important as controlling cultural space, and that “the reorganization of a hamlet’s social and administrative organs is regarded by all officials as at least as important as the construction of physical defense facilities” (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 7). Units known as Rural Reconstruction Teams supervised the reorganization of villages and helped install social, agricultural, and economic programs that provided aid but also increased the contingencies of control over and dependency of villagers (see Donnell and Hickey 1962: 7; Millhauser 2008). These Rural Reconstruction Teams also tried “to learn about families with pro–Viet Cong sentiment who should be regrouped near a military post for easier surveillance” (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 7). Under a system of mandatory corvée, farmers built the new hamlet compounds, sometimes being forced to contribute between forty-five and ninety days of labor. This created conflicts with some villagers, as did the loss of valuable farmlands to build the new hamlets among those already living in the settlement region (10–11). Some farmers were forced to “contribute” the entirety of their most marketable crop, bamboo, to the strategic hamlet’s fortifications—a demand that at times created years of debt (11).

The scale of the Strategic Hamlet dream was massive. In 1962, the U.S. military planned to install twelve thousand strategic hamlets in a six-month period (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 3). Such increasingly large visions of total control
appear as logical and inevitable developments once militaries depend on counterinsurgency for military goals. These contrived “hamlets” installed “council of elders” advisory units composed of wealthy and influential community members whom American planners hoped could be manipulated to steer public opinions and policies (8). Rural Reconstruction Teams began their work by conducting a census, an act that Donnell and Hickey found “often prompts some pro-Communist individuals to flee the hamlet” (7). Hickey envisioned strategic hamlets bringing uniformity and control, and severing connections with preexisting cultural life, supplanting order and control in ways that fit the needs of the U.S. military and kept inhabitants legible to them (see Scott 1998: 37–40).

Donnell and Hickey’s report provided U.S. policy makers and military and intelligence agencies with an ethnographic view of why the Strategic Hamlet Program would fail. The report outlined how the debts, disruptions, generated ill will, and economic losses would outweigh any benefits of surveillance and disruption of village aid to the Vietcong. The report made the motives and lives of Vietnamese peasants understandable to agencies seeking to control them. It clarified that these peasants were “more favorably disposed to the side which offers [them] the possibility of a better life,” yet the inherent problems in the Strategic Hamlet Program could easily lead these farmers to turn against the program’s American designers (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 15).

Donnell and Hickey supported changing portions of the Strategic Hamlet Program to better meet the needs of villagers, while maintaining the U.S. military’s control over the hamlets. They recommended manipulating conditions so that farmers living in the strategic hamlets could derive direct benefits from the programs in which they were forced to participate. Donnell and Hickey used concrete examples to illustrate why rational peasants disliked their relocation and disruption of their normal agricultural activities. They explained that because farmers had short-term views of future payoffs, the immediate reductions in tobacco cash crops were rationally viewed as failures rather than simply as the inconveniences claimed by American Strategic Hamlet proponents. Donnell and Hickey warned that if the cultural views and needs of these people were not accommodated, the villagers’ support as allies would be lost. They wrote that “these farmers are the backbone of the village warning and auxiliary guard systems. In our opinion, they will participate in these security activities willingly and effectively only if, in the very near future, they see evidence that the strategic hamlet to which they have made such heavy contributions in time, materials, land, and reduced secondary crop yields is capable of
improving their economic, social, and political welfare beyond the narrower aspect of the greater physical security it offers them” (Donnell and Hickey 1962: 16–17). Their report viewed peasants as rational actors whose needs and values should be understood and respected if the Strategic Hamlet Program were to achieve its desired ends of control. They did not recommend the end of the forced relocation of villagers but instead suggested that peasants receive increased compensation for their work and cooperation, as well as more opportunities to participate in actual decision making.³

Hickey and Donnell recognized that many of the features of these hamlets alienated the villagers they were designed to protect, but their analysis did not address how long it would take to implement such a program or how difficult and expensive such an effort would be. Their vision of an “improved” hamlet program ignored larger problems of costs and scale. Roger Hilsman, the director of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research under President Kennedy, later explained that the British counterinsurgency experiences in Malaya taught American policy makers that the Strategic Hamlet Program could work, but it would take a long time. Even decades later, Hilsman insisted, “It would have taken twenty years, but it would have worked. Instead of chasing Communist troops all over the jungles, you would have slowly enlarged the secure areas, like an oil block with strategic hamlets moving out” (National Security Archives 1998). Hilsman’s plan would have increasingly locked down Vietnamese peasants in strategic hamlets until well into the early 1980s. Historian Eric Bergerud later observed that Donnell and Hickey understood that unless the Strategic Hamlet Program was overhauled to better fit the cultural and economic needs of the people living within the hamlets, it would fail, and “when Diem was overthrown, the junta in Saigon ended the Strategic Hamlet Program immediately, citing as reasons many of the points raised by Hickey and Donnell” (1991: 52).

**Hickey’s Other RAND Reports**

Though Hickey’s 1962 recommendations to RAND on the Strategic Hamlet Program were ignored, he continued producing military-related reports for RAND throughout the decade. In 1964, Hickey published a RAND report describing South Vietnamese highland ethnic groups, drawing on published and unpublished reports and ethnographic writings on the highland tribes. Hickey presented ethnographic information on the Rhadé, Jarai, Mnong, Stieng, Bahnar, and Sedang tribes using a uniform format in which he presented basic cultural
information about each group, then described settlement patterns, sociopolitical organization, and religious information. Many of his sources were unpublished and were consulted in France, primarily French ethnographic writings (thirty-eight out of forty-four were written in French, two in Vietnamese) or historical or geographic reports written by scholars who did not anticipate the RAND audience and military uses of this information.

Hickey compared Vietnam’s highland and lowland cultural formations, stressing how Indian and Chinese cultural traditions had influenced cultures of the Indochinese lowlands but had had only limited impacts on highland cultures, which “have not become part of any of the great traditions that have touched them; they have not been ‘civilized’” (1964: 2). Hickey described highland groups’ reliance on swidden agriculture, growing dry rice and other garden crops while also raising livestock.

Hickey identified villages as the basic political unit in highland culture, describing the importance of the village headman and the village council and outlining the basic principles of the “village-centered justice” system and the importance of rituals (1964: 8). He provided an overview of historical traditions of intervillage warfare and traditional institutions of alliance and peacemaking. He noted that, although the French had generally “abolished” highland warfare, it still occurred:

Institutions such as the aforementioned *toring* of the Bahnar, or clans among the Rhadé and Jarai which create intervillage kinship ties, serve to diminish wars and conflicts between villages. But among all the groups the favored means for avoiding them are the alliances. Through the father-son alliance or the “great xep” blood oath, for example, villages can prevent or end wars and other conflicts and can force bonds of co-operation. By the same token, of course, such alliances can be a means of gaining allies with whom to carry on a war more effectively. And families or clans can ally themselves so as to be able to carry out vendettas. (9, emphasis added)

Hickey’s narrative was designed not as some act of public education but to inform RAND’s military-intelligence audience concerned with tasks of domination and control. Hickey situated his presentation on cultural distinctions not only with frames of geography but also with frames of history and domination, writing that “the history of the highlands reveals the persistent role of the area as a buffer zone in the struggles among the Khmer, Cham, Siamese, Lao, Vietnamese, and colonial powers, as well as in the recent war between the French and the Viet Minh, and in the current conflict between the Viet Cong and the government of South Vietnam” (1964: 14). Hickey noted how the Sedang,
Stieng, and Mong tribes successfully resisted French domination and staged revolts, explaining how these groups resisted external control with religious revelations such as the 1935 reincarnation of the Thunder Spirit’s son (15). Hickey’s historical summary highlighted themes of sorcery, recurrent tales of rumored ghostly spirits undermining colonial efforts, intertribal warfare, revolts, the importance of gifts to highland leaders, and failed efforts of missions to dominate the highlands.

He drew attention to how French efforts, under Léopold Sabatier’s administration, to provide services and aid to Darlac Province in the early twentieth century helped subdue resistance in the region, and he summarized French land reform plans for the highlands—and indigenous efforts to resist these plans (Hickey 1964: 25–26). The role of blood oaths in establishing alliances and peace treaties was described in some detail; stressing the importance of proper participation in these acts, he wrote, “To refuse a friendship alliance is an act of bad faith. This was illustrated in the Odend’hal affair, when the French administrator refused to drink the blood-oath mixture prepared by the Sadet of Fire, whose anger at the insult undoubtedly contributed to Odend’hal’s subsequent slaying” (40).

Hickey’s discussions of the social structure of specific highland groups stressed the particulars of organization, drawing special attention to the roles of elders, headmen, extravillage liaisons, and supravillage power relations. The report’s final sections described specific details of different tribal groups. For example, one section of Hickey’s summary of Stieng social organization reported that “every village has a headman selected by the household heads. Tribunals for wrongs of varying degrees are organized in the village. Crimes of the first degree, entailing punishments above the value of two buffaloes, are dealt with by a tribunal composed of the village headman and two elderly men versed in traditional customs. When the contesting parties are from different villages, both headmen must sit on the tribunal, and no kinsmen are permitted to attend” (1964: 57). Given the report’s military audience and the state of the war, Hickey’s discussions of blood oaths, tribunals, and friendship rituals mandating alliances were specifically selected social features that could possibly be leveraged by his readers (see D. H. Price 2011f: 133–38). Hickey made no direct recommendations on how such information might be used, though the Phoenix Program and CORDS would later weaponize such knowledge in armed counterinsurgency campaigns (see Valentine 1990).

As part of a 1965 RAND and ARPA sponsored project assessing military advisors, Hickey interviewed “several hundred” individuals (Hickey 1965: iv). The factors he identified as influencing the effectiveness of American advisers were
the ability to recognize cultural differences, spending time in field battle settings, levels of training, linguistic competence in Vietnamese, availability of skilled translators, experience with different forms of military training, and training in the specific conditions that they faced in Vietnam.

Many American advisers misinterpreted Vietnamese behaviors as indicating the Vietnamese were lazy, unreliable, dishonest, dirty, wasteful, and unable to complete complex tasks (Hickey 1965: viii). Hickey tried to counter these impressions by recommending that U.S. military advisers receive specific cultural and language training before being posted to Vietnam, writing that they needed training in “history, economics, government, sociology, ethnic composition, major religious sects, and general customs of the country as well as on the special characteristics of the region to which they are being assigned” (xiii). He also recommended that “language and cultural training centers, similar to those that some missionary societies have found useful, might be set up as a pilot project within South Vietnam. In them, carefully selected personnel would live and study for several months in a community away from Saigon and without contact with other Americans, the instruction to be supplemented by frequent field trips to different regions of Vietnam” (xv). While such suggestions for cultural training continued the sort of work anthropologists had designed and implemented during the Second World War, the political differences between American intervention in Vietnam’s civil war and the previous war against fascism and nationalist occupations brought significantly different attitudes regarding the political ends to which anthropology was to serve. These, however, were distinctions not made by Hickey.

**RAND Visions**

At times Hickey’s analysis drew on classic sociocultural theory. His **RAND** report from 1967 contextualized the ethnic and historical complexities of Vietnamese social life with a Durkheimian analysis of the structural pulls at work in Vietnamese society. As he wrote, “Social and political complexity in any given society does not necessarily mean confusion and chaos; given the right circumstances, the interdependence that is intrinsic to such complexity can give rise to a kind of solidarity. It would be similar to Durkheim’s organic solidarity which arises out of the interdependence and need to cooperate as the division of labor in society becomes more specialized and diverse. Without this type of solidarity the society would fragment and perhaps collapse” (Hickey 1967a:1).
In September 1967, RAND published *The Highland People of South Vietnam* (1967b), Hickey’s most substantial ARPA report on the social and economic development of these people. This was an impressive piece of anthropological work combining data Hickey collected from villages of twenty-one highland ethnic groups (iii). Hickey drew on ethnographic fieldwork he had undertaken throughout the previous decade, as well as field research conducted in the company of Special Forces units (10).

Hickey’s writing at times strayed from anthropological analysis to advocating military strategies; for example, in a 1967 report he advocated that the South Vietnamese government end its opposition to the Front Unifie de Lutte des Races Opprimees (FULRO) and support FULRO autonomy. Hickey argued that this alignment would result in

the immediate acquisition of an estimated 3000 to 5000 armed men skilled in jungle warfare and familiar with the mountain terrain near Cambodia; it would greatly help the government’s intelligence network at the village level in areas where FULRO has much popular following. Also evidence of FULRO’s pro-gVN stand and of the government’s willingness to let the Highlanders assume a larger role within the nation would lessen not only the chance of open discontent and protest but also the demand for autonomy and, most important, the Highlanders’ susceptibility to the appeal of the Viet Cong, whose presence in the highlands would thus become increasingly untenable. (1967b: vii–viii)

As anthropologist Oscar Salemink notes, Hickey’s support for FULRO separated his analysis from “French anthropologists like Dournes and Condominas, as well as critical American scholars, [who] saw FULRO as a movement of tribal mercenaries organized and supported by the CIA” (2003: 247). From the mid-1960s to 1971, Hickey wrote a series of memos advocating that General William Westmoreland and members of the U.S. military command take specific actions (Emerson 1978: 287), including increased highland agricultural assistance and efforts to resolve land tenure disputes with lowlanders as a means of building support for these needed allies.

While Hickey conducted interviews in French or Vietnamese, he also sometimes used translators from the Summer Institute of Linguistics to help with his work (Hickey 1967b: 16–22). Hickey’s RAND report titled *U.S. Strategy in South Vietnam: Extrication and Equilibrium* (1969) argued that the United States did not understand the political nature and nuanced history of the war, and outlined American military withdrawal scenarios.
Hickey’s final RAND report, from 1971, retreated into a detailed historical analysis of past Vietnamese historical incidents. It generated a narrative (which detailed topics like “recent economic innovation; the French Period to the Present”) that was disconnected from the military realities traumatizing the Vietnam of the present (Hickey 1971: 137).

Over the course of a decade, Hickey’s work for RAND found him shifting from counterinsurgency support efforts involving the destruction of tribal villages in order to save them, to providing cultural information of strategic value and trying to inform a military-intelligence audience of the cultural intricacies of the world in which they were waging a war they were increasingly losing. Reading Hickey’s RAND reports and his memoir, it seems almost as if he did not understand how different his imagined mission (self-conceived of as reducing harm for tribal groups) was from that of the larger military and intelligence institutions that were consuming his reports. Yet this disconnect (and what appears to be an enduring, naive hope of prevailing over deep institutional forces) seems to have propelled him forward and kept him engaged with a military complex that appeared to ignore his recommendations while continuing to sponsor works containing detailed accounts of cultural customs that it likely believed could have militarized uses.

Hickey’s Back-Home Retcon

In late 1970, Hickey wrote his dissertation adviser, Fred Eggan, inquiring about the possibility of landing a visiting professorship at the University of Chicago. Eggan expressed excitement at this prospect. But funds were scarce, and when Eggan advised him to try to secure outside funding, Hickey turned to the Ford Foundation and RAND. Eggan warned him that “there is also a strong feeling on the part of some students and a few of the faculty about research for the government and even stronger feeling about classified research” (Hickey 2002: 297). These “strong feelings” were growing concerns within American anthropology over military and intelligence agency uses of anthropological information in Southeast Asia. When Eggan wrote a memo to department chair Bernard Cohn advocating for a yearlong appointment for Hickey, he added that he knew of “no evidence of any violation of ethic standards, as I have practiced them and as I have tried to teach them to graduate students” (298). Eggan wrote Hickey of growing departmental concerns about Hickey’s secret RAND or Defense Department research. Hickey replied that his work had been “classified” but not “secret” — missing the larger issue that writing noncirculating reports that mili-
tary and intelligence agencies could access raised concerns with his colleagues (298). After Chicago’s anthropology department voted against offering Hickey a one-year position, the Wall Street Journal ran an article characterizing this decision as “McCarthyism of the Left” (301).

Hickey later complained that his advice was largely ignored by RAND and the military, while in the academy he was demonized by his fellow anthropologists. He wrote: “If my accommodation-coalition approach earned me the reputation in some American political [military/policy] circles of being a heretic, my being in Vietnam with the RAND corporation earned me pariah status among my academic colleagues” (Hickey 2002: 296). Yet Hickey’s experience of being ignored in Vietnam was not one in which his influence decreased over time; in fact, from his earliest years onward, his experience was that his colleague’s “report was suppressed and mine was ignored” (350). Hickey did not give up when his Strategic Hamlet evaluation was ignored, but neither did he seem to question the ethical and political issues raised by such battlefield work and contributions to counterinsurgency, nor did he adequately consider that his declared interests in the people of Vietnam were so at odds with the U.S. military’s institutional behaviors and values that his contributions stood no chance of accomplishing what he envisioned. But over time, his views seemed to coalesce with the strategic thinking of the military.

There is an otherworldliness in the ethnographic representations in Hickey’s later RAND reports. He wrote as if he were living between dimensions in a world where traditional Vietnamese ethnic and linguistic groups maintained an existence outside of the American carpet bombing, napalm, and Agent Orange. Hickey wrote just-so-story vignettes in which hardworking capitalist peasant entrepreneurs rose above their poverty with cash crops like coffee — yet the narrative frame of these peasants’ success was not expanded to incorporate capitalism’s war raining down on them.

The political and historical context in which Hickey produced his RAND work transformed these reports into works with meanings and uses far beyond the sum of their parts. Meanings hinge on uses, and Hickey took pieces of ethnographic work produced by himself and others and transformed disparate elements into weaponized knowledge — political knowledge that he knew would be used in military contexts to manipulate, as identified in the title of one of his works for RAND, the “major ethnic groups of the South Vietnamese highlands.” Despite Hickey’s latter-day complaints about military and intelligence agencies’ neglect of the “proper” use of his research, his continual participation in this process documents a form of complicity that is difficult to reconcile.
Oscar Salemink’s research adds a chilling final chapter to the tragic unintended consequences of Hickey’s research. Salemink found that in the years after American military forces left Southeast Asia, Vietnamese scholars used Hickey’s ethnographic writings to identify and persecute the Montagnard *FULRO* village leaders Hickey made identifiable in his book *Fire in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands* (1982). Hickey had published “a list of ‘One Hundred Highlander Leaders: Ethnic affiliation, approximate birth date, and religion.’ After his books were published and arrived in Vietnam, security officials who were still fighting *FULRO* started to arrest every person mentioned in the book. Thanks to the courageous intervention of a Vietnamese ethnologist these persons were gradually released” (Salemink 2003: 4). When Salemink later relayed to Hickey these unintended outcomes of his fieldwork and publication, Hickey was “very upset” (4).

Hickey did not understand how different his anthropological purposes were from those of the individuals who consumed his RAND reports. He wanted to protect those he studied while steering the military toward a kinder form of conquest, at the same time arguing that he was serving the needs of those to be conquered. While the contradictions of this approach did not cause Hickey to disengage from his sponsors, this ongoing cross-purpose relationship fundamentally served the military’s needs and apparently served as a salve to Hickey’s conscience, at least in the short term. Such relationships of cross-purposes and lopsided outcomes favoring sponsors’ desires are not unique to military-linked projects and can be found in a variety of ongoing applied anthropology projects throughout the years (see Downing 2002; D. H. Price 1989).

*Delmos Jones and the Complicity of All*

While Hickey naively sought to reshape American military-intelligence actions in Southeast Asia from within the system, other anthropologists openly resisted such uses of anthropological knowledge for counterinsurgency. Delmos Jones’s reaction to U.S. military and intelligence agencies’ efforts to use his anthropological field research to assist military actions in Southeast Asia presents a stark contrast to Gerald Hickey’s contributions.

In 1965, while a doctoral student in anthropology at Cornell University, Jones was selected for a Ford Foundation Foreign Area Fellowship, which financed his first fieldwork in Thailand. His wife, Linda Jones, and their children accompanied him to Thailand, and his family lived in Chiang Mai while he collected...
data for his dissertation work examining cultural variation in several Lahu villages in northern Thailand (LJ to DHP 3/3/08; Jones 1967).

The Jones children attended school in Chiang Mai, while their father conducted research in Lahu villages, regularly traveling back and forth between his research sites and his family. Chiang Mai had a small air force installation with significant radar and communications facilities that Jones and others in the community assumed were monitoring Chinese communications. The Joneses and other expatriates assumed some sort of intelligence operation was being run out of Chiang Mai. Delmos Jones’s now former wife, Linda Jones, wrote me, almost four decades later, that at the time they “were aware of American activities being conducted out of Chiang Mai. ‘Air America’ had lots of planes flying in and out of Chiang Mai airport (an otherwise pretty sleepy place). People who ostensibly worked for various American agencies, but who were known to be CIA would board helicopters and go off, sometimes never to return. Their wives could never get any information and were eventually removed from the country” (LJ to DHP 3/3/08).

Efforts were made to maintain a pretense that Chiang Mai was not a covert-ops base, but with the Jones’s children attending the area’s only English language school and playing with the children of personnel stationed at Chiang Mai, it became apparent from socializing with this community that this base was being used for clandestine operations. These paramilitary activities occurring in the background of his fieldwork troubled Jones, and as these activities later crept into the foreground, the knowledge of military-intelligence interests in his own work became increasingly difficult for Jones to ignore.

After returning from this fieldwork, Jones completed and defended his dissertation at Cornell in 1967 without delving into the political backdrop of his traditional comparative village study. Like so many other anthropologists who were encountering American paramilitary or intelligence activities while conducting fieldwork, he wrote his dissertation without remarking on these events. This has long been the standard practice of the discipline, and to do otherwise would have been unusual and academically inadvisable (see Nader 1997b).

We now know that the CIA was trying to monitor the spread of communist sympathies in the area of northern Thailand where Jones was working. The National Intelligence Estimate report titled “Communist Insurgency in Thailand” (1968) described agricultural programs implemented in the region of Jones’s work as vital elements of the region’s counterinsurgency campaign. The CIA monitored counterinsurgency operations, giving special attention to the use of
“Mobile Development Units (MDU), teams of specialists working on small-scale projects and attempting to stimulate self-help efforts in selected villages, and the village-level programs of the Community Development Department” and the ARD [Accelerated Rural Development] program they hoped would counter “the economic deficiencies which the Communists attempt to exploit” (CIA 1968a: 8–9).

In 1970 a Fulbright Fellowship allowed Jones to return to Chiang Mai, where he expanded on his earlier village-based research. Once in Chiang Mai, Jones found that American intelligence operations in the region had drastically increased. Linda Jones later wrote me:

I remember we were quite proud of [the Fulbright Fellowship], but discovered how naive we had been when we discovered that in Chiang Mai we would report to USIS (known to be CIA). Shortly after we settled in Chiang Mai, we went to the Chiang Mai hotel for dinner. While we were eating, an American came over to speak with us. He told Del that he was part of an ARPA program collecting information about the Hill Tribes. Del was uninterested in cooperating. This fellow said it didn’t matter. They had computerized and indexed all of his papers and notes anyway. Eye-opening shock number 2! So it went for I think about 5 months when Del had had enough of the situation. He told the head of USIS that we wished to leave Thailand immediately. In return, he was told that our fare home would not be paid. Del threatened to publish what he knew and they backed off. Our fare was paid and we left.

It was out of this ferment that Del began to write and speak about how the work of anthropologists could be used, even if they did not explicitly cooperate with governments. We talked about how it was common for anthropologists to note in their reports the names of village leaders, population counts, and geographical locations. These facts could then be used in ways that would not be in the best interests of the tribes. At that time, the tribal villages were suspected of harboring communists. To remove this opportunity, entire villages would just be uprooted and moved against their will. The idea was to get them out of the mountains, but their knowledge of agriculture was geared to that environment, not to that of the valleys. Also, the Thais were very prejudiced against the tribal people. Once they were relocated to the valleys, they were handy targets for mistreatment. (LJ to DHP 3/3/08)

Jones had not looked to become involved in a contentious political issue, but he understood that if he did not withdraw from his planned research project, his work would be used by military or intelligence operatives for purposes that he did not approve, and to which his research participants had not consented.
Jones returned to the United States and began writing about how troubled he was by his experiences in Thailand. His angst was channeled into the short piece “Social Responsibility and the Belief in Basic Research: An Example from Thailand,” published the following year in *Current Anthropology*. He identified the dangers facing anthropologists and research participants, not only when anthropologists engaged in military-sponsored research but even when they conducted basic independent research that had potential uses in informing counterinsurgency operations.

Jones described the economic importance of the highland and lowland regions of Vietnam and stressed the military significance of highland villages because they “can be of tremendous strategic importance for storing supplies and establishing camps for guerrilla forces” (1971b: 347). He connected these same dynamics with the situation in Thailand’s highlands and lowlands and asked, did “the anthropologists who rushed into the area to do basic descriptive studies consider these political facts? It is safe to say that most of us did not” (347). Jones questioned whether it was a coincidence that funding for research on the cultures of these highland peoples had increased throughout the decade, by ARPA and nonmilitary organizations (348).

He wrote that the Thai Information Center was “controlled and funded” by ARPA, and that it held a collection of more than fifteen thousand documents gathered by the Thai and American governments (Jones 1971b: 348). But Jones’s fundamental criticism was not directed at ARPA; he considered all anthropologists culpable, himself included, and argued, “Most of us who have conducted basic research in Thailand have in fact contributed to that end, we might as well have taken ARPA’s money. The question of ethics and responsibility may have little to do with the source of funding and much more with the social and political context within which the data are produced” (348).

Jones described specific reports and publications focused on counterinsurgency and the control of highland populations and argued that “the more information there is available, the easier it is to develop new techniques of dealing with the people whom the government is trying to manipulate. The techniques may not be ones the social scientist himself conceives; the results may not be ones he would approve. Nevertheless, those approaches that have been developed and are being developed by the United States and Thai governments to deal with hill peoples have been aided by all of us who have done research on hill culture” (1971b: 348). Because of the political context in which this fieldwork was conducted, Jones saw a clear ethical course of action. He argued that anthropologists should “consider seriously the political implications of research
and publication and cease doing both where the situation warrants” (349). Jones insisted that anthropologists needed to embrace their political values and to use their scholarly research to advance political causes they supported. This was not an anticounterinsurgency stance but one insisting that since anthropological work was being used for unintended ends, researchers should clarify their political stance and integrate it into the work they published. He wrote, “Anthropologists who wished to aid the counterinsurgency efforts of the United States in Southeast Asia should do so, and do so with conviction. Such persons can at least be respected. I would class as unethical only those who attempt to hide behind the idea of pure research while their activities aid the preservation of the status quo” (349). Jones’s argument bestowed respect on anthropologists like Gerald Hickey, while damning a seeming majority of anthropologists whose silence appeared to support a belief in the neutrality of research.

While Jones’s call for anthropologists to acknowledge their research as inevitably embedded within larger political processes that left them without the option of neutrality, his call for anthropologists to acknowledge their political stance helped clarify this situation, but it did not resolve problems of anthropological data being used for ends they did not approve. An anthropologist who clarified his or her anticounterinsurgency stance while continuing to report ethnographic information that could be used for counterinsurgency campaigns still left studied populations vulnerable.

Jones argued that anthropologists should cease chasing funding and publishing opportunities that advanced their careers but could endanger those they studied, arguing that “there is no longer any excuse for any of us to pretend that the results of our research are not being used to help bring about the oppression of groups. This has been the traditional role of the anthropologist, it seems” (1971b: 349).

Anthropologists on the New York Review of Books Warpath

In November 1970, Joseph Jorgensen and Eric Wolf published a lengthy analysis in the New York Review of Books, “Anthropology on the Warpath in Thailand,” describing military and intelligence efforts to use anthropological knowledge for counterinsurgency operations in Southeast Asia, and offering an important critique of anthropology’s historical connections with colonialism, military and intelligence agencies. They described the collection of identifying data on individuals and ethnic groups as a means of tracking and manipulating populations in Thailand, including proposals by the Tribal Data Center, in Chiang Mai,
Thailand to monitor villagers using village data cards. They also championed the recent work of an unnamed anthropologist (Delmos Jones) who resisted efforts to co-opt his fieldwork in Thailand for counterinsurgency programs. Jorgensen and Wolf also wrongly assumed that it was the brouhaha deriving from the Student Mobilization Committee’s leaking of documents that led the unnamed Jones to take a stand against what he had seen in Thailand earlier that year (Jorgensen & Wolf 1970; Jones 1971b).

On July 22, 1971, Delmos Jones published a response to Jorgensen and Wolf’s essay, clarifying that his decision to speak out against the abuses of anthropological research in Thailand was unrelated to the Student Mobilization Committee’s revelations (Jones 1971a). Jones identified himself as the unnamed anthropologist described in their article and explained that he had chosen not to publish his findings because of his concerns that the military would abuse his work. Jones bristled at being cast as the hero of Jorgensen and Wolf’s piece, pointing out the article’s errors and mischaracterizations both large and small and ending his response by striking back at the authors, writing that “the distortions presented in the Wolf and Jorgensen article are disturbing.” According to Jones, “They seized upon the more or less individual examples offered, rather than the general issues which were being discussed. The problem is not restricted to Thailand. The comments which I made about anthropologists were meant to apply to anthropologists in general, not only to those who worked in Thailand. The problem comes even closer to home as we begin to shift our attention to the study of urban areas in the United States” (1971a).

In 1973, after learning that U.S. Special Forces had translated his ethnographic writings and used them in armed campaigns, Georges Condominas acknowledged that anthropologists’ writings could be used by military and intelligence agencies in ways anthropologists never intended, but he argued that Jones went too far in suggesting that anthropologists should refrain from publishing altogether. Condominas argued that anthropologists were engaging in what he termed a “double exaggeration”: the first exaggeration occurred when they overestimated the military’s understanding of how to use anthropological reports against local populations; the second exaggeration was the assumption that even if military or intelligence personnel learned how to exploit anthropological knowledge, it would be difficult to convince anyone within the entrenched military-intelligence bureaucracy to take action using this knowledge (Condominas 1979: 192). Condominas’s second point certainly voiced a recurrent experience of many World War II anthropologists (see D. H. Price 2008a: 197).
Condominas believed anthropologists’ self-deceptions came from a “lack of modesty” and that the media embraced and spread these ideas. He wrote:

We all know how difficult it is to convince specialists even with training in the social sciences to admit the practical importance of the cultural frame in a limited program of development. It is difficult to conceive how the military, or their so-called advisors, whose creed is force, would be able to use such data on such a large scale as they fight against counterinsurgency. Even if one of them, as a technically good anthropologist having betrayed his profession, wanted to launch himself into such an operation, he would very soon be blocked by an institution as strictly structured as an army. There are of course some kinds of documents which give information useful for police operations, such as demographic data. But for that job they have no need of anthropologists; a local border police sergeant, such as those in Thailand, is more than enough. (Condominas 1979: 192)

Condominas ridiculed claims that anthropological knowledge could shift counterinsurgency operations as betraying “naïve confidence in science” and revealing a predilection for wasteful military spending (Condominas 1979: 192). Delmos Jones’s admonition that anthropologists “consider seriously the political implications of research and publication and cease doing both” (1971b: 349) to undermine the militarization of anthropological knowledge cut to the heart of Cold War anthropology’s dual use problems, but it ignored the political economy that governed the lives of most anthropologists. In academic settings where struggles for tenure and promotion guide many of the contingencies regulating research and publication decisions, such an altruistic call to not publish is doomed (to abuse an evolutionary metaphor) to lead to an evolutionary dead end, as those following this ethical call for silence would inevitably be selected against. Outside the academy, applied anthropologists choosing to not write reports would face even grimmer survival prospects. As Eric Ross observed, “While anthropologists readily profess to be the advocates of the dispossessed, their theoretical tendencies nonetheless have often been in conflict with the needs of the world’s poor by failing to clarify the structural sources of injustice or to endorse radical, systemic solutions” (1998a: 497).

On Good Intentions, Naiveté, and Bad Outcomes

While Hickey tried to influence American policy in Vietnam by working within the system to affect incremental change, other anthropologists used less orthodox means to direct attention to the failures of American actions. In August
1965, Marshall Sahlins paid his own way to Saigon and traveled for ten days in South Vietnam, talking with American soldiers and learning about the American presence there (Sahlins 2000a; MS to DHP 8/1/14). Returning home, he published his essay “The Destruction of Conscience in Vietnam” (1966), and his reports of his interactions with some locals and U.S. and South Vietnamese military personnel broke a significant silence, as he wrote: “It is often said of South Vietnam that the day belongs to the government, the night to the ‘Vietcong.’ Perhaps it is better said of An Phu District that the day belongs to the Neolithic, the night to the Cold War of the mid-twentieth century” (Sahlins 2000a: 229).

Sahlins’s contributions were unlike Hickey’s efforts to redirect or shore up the failed American military presence by hoping for a less destructive, more effective activities; instead, Sahlins found a corruption of mission so pervasive that regardless of individual intentions, no good outcome could be achieved in a war requiring that the conscience of those fighting “must be destroyed” (2000a: 248). Sahlins understood the intentions of those trying to diminish the impact of the war to be admirable, writing that “the motivation and dedication of American aid people is beyond question and not at issue. Many, I understand, work tirelessly under dangerous conditions to bring a modicum of betterment to the countryside. Likewise the small Special Forces detachment I saw at An Phu was committed to a program of medical and economic aid for the people—the Peace Corps of the War Corps. But these slim measures of good intention have to be put in the balance against the huge, unplanned subsidization of decadence in the cities to determine a final reading on the American presence” (237).

Jones’s stance was perhaps even more radical than Sahlins’s as his analysis questioned the responsibility of all anthropologists who made their work public. Jones and Hickey offered stark choices to anthropologists with needed expertise during times of war, a choice between either blind optimism that individuals can redirect institutional uses of knowledge or maintain a state of recalcitrant skeptical silence. Hickey believed he could steer the military straight; Jones believed that military and intelligence agencies would rob his and other anthropologists’ work for their own ends and that he had no control over these uses. Hickey’s memoir chronicled how his reports were used only in selective ways or ignored, yet he did not adequately consider the possibility that structural dynamics governing the military’s consumption of anthropological knowledge necessarily led to such outcomes—unless anthropologists front-load their assumptions to meet with military culture, a tendency that often seems to increase over time. Hickey acknowledged that these structural
dynamics are rooted in the forms of military and civilian decision making but they also derive from the deeper contingencies bred within forms of warfare in neocolonial states seeking to suppress occupied insurgents.

Hickey was a slow learner. Over the course of a decade he was unable to acknowledge that the larger forces unleashed when he and other anthropologists engaged with military decision makers doomed his ability to control how ethnographic reports would be used. Hickey’s cameo in *The Quiet American* leaves us with an ironic moment for viewing his contributions to American military and intelligence policies over the dozen years that followed his film debut, but this afterimage also portrays him as having an early awareness of Graham Greene’s critique of the CIA’s interventions and intentions in Vietnam. Hickey appears as a tragic figure—but why he is tragic changes with different readings. One can read him as a martyr or a willfully ignorant, tragic hero, or as naive, self-serving, or uncaring, but there is no reason for contemporary anthropologists to not learn from his experiences. Some might claim the moral of Hickey’s story is that we must work harder to make the military understand what anthropology has to offer, but such an interpretation ignores the importance of institutional culture and the possibility of larger contingencies governing the use of military knowledge. One lesson from Hickey’s years trying to protect groups with his failed efforts to redirect American military actions is that in the last instance, motivations can have little impact on outcomes. As Graham Greene’s narrator Thomas Fowler said of Alden Pyle, “I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused” (1955: 60).