Cold War Anthropology

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The days of naïve anthropology are over. It is no longer adequate to collect information about little known and powerless people; one needs to know also the uses to which that knowledge can be put.

JóSEPH JORGENSEN AND ERIC WOLF 1970

THIRTEEN ANTHROPOLOGISTS FOR RADICAL POLITICAL ACTION AND REVOLUTION WITHIN THE AAA

By the mid-1960s, American anthropologists were at the forefront of growing movements on American campuses to stop the war in Vietnam. In March 1965, Marshall Sahlins led the movement to establish the first teach-in against the war in Vietnam on the campus of the University of Michigan. This was a precipitous cultural moment of anarchic simplicity and power, loosely bringing together scholars with relevant perspectives on the war and American militarism and a large audience hungering for critique. The moment spread like wildfire. “Within weeks of the first teach-in at Michigan,” according to Sahlins, “there were over 100 such events in colleges and universities across the country, culminating in mid-May with an all-day National Teach-In in Washington, DC” (2009: 4). Whatever lessons of conformity, silence, and disengagement had been imparted to anthropologist-activists in the 1950s were quickly set aside, as anthropologists became central figures in radical critiques of militarism and the war in Vietnam and played central roles in campus uprisings and national debates (Sanjek 1995; Gough 1968; D. H. Price 2004b: 306–40).

Within the American Anthropological Association, the establishment of the Radical Caucus in 1967 brought the association a firm critical voice, yet until a change was made in the bylaws in 1969, the graduate students who were developing this voice were disenfranchised from voting on association business. The Radical Caucus and, later, Anthropologists for Radical Political Action organized an impressive collection of sessions at AAA meetings in the late 1960s and early 1970s focusing on themes of liberation, anthropological praxis, Marxist
theory, and colonial critiques. The AAA’s 1969 business meeting demonstrated
the power of the Radical Caucus, as members adopted eighteen resolutions, all
of which were later ratified in a mail vote (D. H. Price 2008b).

In ratifying the Radical Caucus’s 1969 slate of resolutions, the membership
supported the following: an investigation of uses made of U.S. arms sent to
Latin America (passed by a vote of 1,450 to 573); “developing sanctions against
discrimination based on sex” (passed, 1,367 to 633); and Karen Sacks’s resolutions
that “members shall not engage in secret or classified Research” (passed, 1,077
to 941) and that “field workers shall not divulge information about informants
that might endanger their well-being or cultural integrity” (passed, 1,607 to
433) (NAAA 1970 11[6]: 1; NAAA 1970 11[1]: 7). Other resolutions, presented in
table 13.1, offered moral support to Alaskan natives in land disputes, took a stand
against sex discrimination, and opposed the construction of California’s Dos
Rios Dam (see NAAA 1970 11[1]: 7; NAAA 1970 11[6]: 1).

While the membership’s votes demonstrated that the Radical Caucus’s politi-
cal stances represented a disciplinary norm, these positions were not generally
shared by the association’s established power base. This schism would come
to dominate the dramas to be acted out at the association council meetings in
the late 1960s and early 1970s. The AAA leadership’s narrative during this pe-
riod conjured up visions of an undemocratic mob hijacking control of council
meetings, while the views of a claimed silent majority of members were not
present. But the mail votes of the wider membership in 1969, 1970, 1971, and
later demonstrated that when AAA voting members were able to vote on a full
docket of radical propositions, they adopted nearly every radical resolution
that they had the opportunity to consider.

The Thai Affair

The Student Mobilizer was an “underground” tabloid-size paper published by
the national organization, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the
War in Vietnam (SMC). The April 2, 1970, cover of the Mobilizer proclaimed,
“Counterinsurgency Research on Campus EXPOSED,” referring to the title of a
sixteen-hundred-word exposé based on documents stolen from the UCLA of-
office of anthropologist Michael Moerman. These stolen documents detailed the
work of Moerman and three other anthropologists (Herbert Phillips, Steven
Piker, and Lauriston Sharp) on ARPA-sponsored counterinsurgency research
projects in Thailand, and of the Academic Advisory Committee for Thailand
(AACT), USAID, SEADAG, and other organizations. Other Student Mobilizer
articles focused on SEADAG membership, the role of Abt Associates in Project Agile, ending campus-based counterinsurgency research, Michigan State University’s past role in Vietnam counterinsurgency research, USAID’s role in Thailand, and a geographic listing of Thai experts at American universities (Mobilizer 1970).

The stolen documents were quoted at length in the Mobilizer and showed how the Defense Department’s ARPA used anthropologists and other social scientists
to improve the military’s understanding of the cultural groups it sought to control in rural Thailand (Mobilizer 1970: 3). The Mobilizer printed excerpts from a 1967 letter by Herbert Phillips complaining about the poor quality of ARPA social science, which was conducted by “only two professionally trained anthropologists” and a collection of people with bachelor’s degrees in subjects such as physics or public administration taking the title of anthropologists, “to provide them with a veneer of legitimacy.” Phillips estimated that “there are about eight of these pseudoanthropologists in the entire ARPA project” (Mobilizer 1970: 26).

The Mobilizer’s published documents did not show these anthropologists walking in lockstep with the military. In a letter that Phillips sent to anthropologist William Rittenberg on May 1, 1967, Phillips wrote, “There is little that is particularly secretive, earth-shaking, or CIA’ish about ARPA activities; most of their people are intelligent, but bumbling American bureaucrats trying to obtain basic descriptive materials on aspects of Thai society” (Mobilizer 1970: 26). In this 1967 letter Phillips worried about ARPA hiring fake “anthropologists” and about the ineffectiveness of ARPA’s governmental bureaucracy, arguing that “there is little that we, as scholars, can do about it, unless we choose to become applied anthropologists or advisors to ARPA — a position that is not without its professional and moral dilemmas, but one that does involve more intellectual and moral responsibility than sitting on the sidelines and simply condemning ARPA for its immorality or ineffectiveness” (Mobilizer 1970: 26). These documents showed USAID, ARPA, and AACT buying access to Piker, Moerman, Sharp, and Phillips, as well as economists, political scientists, and geographers, to gain their expertise for Thai counterinsurgency programs operating under euphemisms like “village security” programs. Whether this purchased access meaningfully altered American interactions with Thai populations, or simply addressed the legitimacy concerns raised by Phillips and others that these agencies were only using fake “anthropologists” was open to interpretation; but the revelations of these anthropologists’ interactions with these appendages of America’s intelligence apparatus shocked the discipline.

The SMC held a press conference in San Francisco and read from a telegram, sent on April 1 by Marshall Sahlins and Eric Wolf, and a statement by Gerald Berreman condemning anthropological contributions to counterinsurgency (EBW, MM to GF 4/24/70). Because Wolf and Berreman were members of the AAA Committee on Ethics, these early condemnations soon became the focus of criticism by the accused anthropologists and their supporters.
On April 3, 1970, in his role as chair of the AAA’s Committee on Ethics, Eric Wolf sent letters of inquiry to Michael Moerman, Herbert Phillips, Lauriston Sharp, and Steven Piker informing them that he and Joseph Jorgensen had seen “a number of documents bearing on the involvement of anthropologists in secret research.” Wolf informed these individuals that their names appeared on these documents and that the Committee on Ethics was investigating this matter. Wolf wrote that the committee would “deal with cases on as anonymous a basis as possible” and that it was making efforts to “develop an approach to cases without penalizing any individuals.” He invited them to make statements “especially in view of the past resolutions of our Association on the subject of clandestine research and restricted, non-public publication of research results” (ebw, EBW to MM 4/3/70).

While the letters sent to these anthropologists were identical, there were some variations in the responses Wolf received. Moerman responded with outrage, others with a tone of personal hurt, having been attacked in the press before receiving Wolf’s letter. Each argued that The Student Mobilizer’s uses of quotes without context created the false impression that their interactions with ARPA assisted nefarious governmental actions in Southeast Asia. They were angry that others did not interpret their actions as efforts to correct misguided military acts.

**The Accused Respond**

Moerman wrote Wolf of his unease about how to address him or Sahlins. Moerman knew them as his former professors and friends but now found them “behaving inhumanely . . . and unprofessionally” toward him (ebw, MM to EBW 4/8/70). He insisted he had done nothing against the AAA’s Code of Ethics and believed that the telegram to the Mobilizer indicated he had been prejudged as guilty. Moerman viewed Sahlins and Wolf’s sending the telegram as unprofessional conduct, and he accused Wolf of acting in collusion with the Mobilizer (ebw, MM to EBW 4/8/70). Wolf wrote Moerman that on March 30, he and Jorgensen had received copies of the documents later published in the Mobilizer and that after reading these, they responded to the ethical implications of this work in a message to the newspaper. Wolf stressed that he had not identified any individuals in his comments to the Mobilizer, and that he had no connection to the publication or control over what it published (ebw, EBW to MM 4/14/70).
On April 10, 1970, Charles Keyes circulated a sixteen-hundred word statement to colleagues, explaining both the circumstances under which his name had appeared in _The Student Mobilizer_ article and his involvement with SEADAG. He indicated that his research in Thailand was funded by the Ford Foundation’s Foreign Area Fellowship program and the NSF, not by the military. Keyes had joined SEADAG to voice concerns about U.S. policies in circles that included policy makers. With time he “grew disillusioned with SEADAG owing to the fact that its structure and leadership have prevented it from being such a forum,” and he had not participated in any SEADAG activities for three years (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70). Keyes came to understand that policy makers tended to ignore critiques from scholars not aligned with their preconceptions or with U.S. policies. But Keyes did not completely withdraw from his engagement with USAID policy groups; after disengaging with SEADAG, in early 1968 he joined USAID’s Academic Advisory Council for Thailand. Keyes wrote that he had no idea that AACT was involved in counterinsurgency operations until he attended a recent Association for Asian Studies meeting—where he had learned the Regents of the University of California had authorized AAFT-USAID counterinsurgency work (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70).

Keyes wrote that he and other AAFT members were never asked to contribute to Thai counterinsurgency operations, and that all proceedings of AAFT were open to the public and reported in the _Newsletter of the Association of Asian Studies_. He explained that his only interaction with ARPA had occurred in January 1967 when he traveled to Washington, DC, to protest the allocation of extremely large sums of money for social science research on counterinsurgency in Thailand. As a result of that meeting, I realized that ARPA was unwilling to reconsider its decision to undertake the work it had projected and thus I wrote to my colleagues warning them that ARPA research was of such a scale that no scholar undertaking field work in Thailand would be able to leave it out of account. _My worst fears have subsequently been realized as it is now apparent that all research by Americans in Thailand has been seriously compromised by the fact that the greatest proportion of research funds spent by Americans in Thailand and the largest number of American researchers involved there have been connected with agencies whose aim it is to further the objectives of counterinsurgency programs._ (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70, emphasis added)

Keyes was concerned about the “size and character of the American presence in Thailand,” and he expressed his opposition to counterinsurgency research.
Herbert Phillips wrote angry replies to Wolf (ebw HP to EBW 4/5/70; 4/6/70) and Berreman (ebw HP to GB 4/4/70). After Wolf replied in a lengthy circumspect letter (ebw EBW to HP 4/12/70), Phillips adopted a more measured tone, but he continued to call for Wolf’s, Berreman’s, and Jorgensen’s resignations (ebw HP to EBW 4/16/70). Phillips complained that he had not seen a copy of the documents taken from Moerman’s office until May 19, 1970, and that he had to request these from the committee (ebw, HP to aaa Committee on Ethics 5/19/70). Phillips stressed there was nothing secret about ARPA’s relationship with anthropologists working in Thailand, and that “any social scientist who has been in Thailand for a week knows about the role that ARPA — with its annual budget of 5–12 million dollars — plays in subverting the purpose and direction of social science research in that country” (ebw, HP to aaa Committee on Ethics 5/19/70). Phillips told Wolf that he had overstepped his role as chair of the Committee on Ethics and asked him to resign from the committee (ebw, HP to EBW, 4/5/70); he also chided the committee, writing that “if this is the way you treat your informants in the field, God help the anthropological profession” (ebw, HP to aaa Committee on Ethics 5/19/70).

Steven Piker’s response to Wolf was calm and nonthreatening (EBW; SP to EBW 4/6/70). Piker replied that he was “happy . . . to make known to your committee — and anyone else who might inquire — the specifics of all research and professional work generally in which I have been involved since my association with anthropology began more than ten years ago” (ebw, SP to EBW 4/6/70). To demonstrate his long-standing opposition to American militarism in Southeast Asia, Piker mailed Wolf two academic papers, from 1966 and 1969, voicing his opposition to U.S. military policy in Vietnam and Thailand (ebw, SP to EBW 4/6/70).

On April 8, 1970, Lauriston Sharp sent a memo, titled “Allegations of Professional Impropriety,” to the officers of Cornell University and sent carbon copies to a large group of colleagues (st 62, 8, 4/8/70). Sharp wrote that the “scholarly integrity” of AACT had recently been attacked in The Student Mobilizer, making charges that

AACT conducts, organizes, coordinates, and initiates “counterinsurgency” research on Thailand according to the needs of the Agency for International Development, that its members work “secretly (or semi-secretly) serving as instruments of counterinsurgency programs in Thailand,” and that it has “been employed by the United States government as part of a counterinsurgency program directed.
against revolution in the Kingdom of Thailand.” Charges that AACT in pursuit of its alleged “counterinsurgency” interest improperly intervened in the scholarly meetings of the Association of Asian Studies on April 3, 1970, were rejected by the A.A.S. Program Committee and received and not acted on by the Board of Directors. (st 62, 8, 4/8/70)

Sharp’s enclosed documents described the work undertaken by AACT, as well as copies of The Student Mobilizer article and an AACT reply to a New York Times story on AACT (see NYT 1970, for original story).

Sharp asked colleagues to examine “selected excerpts from some of the purloined documents as published in The Student Mobilizer on April 2, 1970, of which I unfortunately purchased only two copies at the Association for Asian Studies and Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars meeting in San Francisco last week,” as well as an AACT press release and other AACT documents (st 62, 8, 4/9/70). Answering accusations that he and others at AACT had engaged in clandestine activities, Sharp explained that after checking with others attending this meeting, he had confirmed that there were no reports issued (st 62, 8, 4/9/70). He acknowledged that he was a member of the American Institute for Research, which he described as “a private organization which, I believe, had done classified research in Thailand for ARPA and the Department of Defense, but with which I have never had any communication whatsoever” (st 62, 8, 4/9/70).

Sharp sent a memo to colleagues across the country. After quoting from passages published in The Student Mobilizer claiming that he and AACT engaged in “secret” or “semi-secret” counterinsurgency research, Sharp complained that “nowhere is the term ‘counterinsurgency’ defined.” Sharp conceded that AACT did “advise and consult with staff of the Agency for International Development who are concerned with Thailand,” but he clarified that none of this research dealt with “banditry, terrorism, or insurgency” (st 62, 8, 4/10/70). Sharp claimed that his work with AACT “is totally unlike another kind of relationship in which universities undertook contracts to provide technical assistance directly,” specifying that arrangements with AACT were not like “Michigan State University’s famous Vietnam Public Administration Institute contract” or Cornell’s work in the Philippines. He explained that AACT was a problem-oriented research group drawing on scholars’ expertise as part of “U.S. non-military assistance to Thailand” to share information about development for Thailand.

In his memo, Sharp argued this was an innocent study group, completely unconnected with the counterinsurgency campaigns of the wars of Southeast Asia,
as if aid programs themselves existed outside of a specific geopolitical framework. He assured colleagues that instead of working on military counterinsurgency operations, “AACT is dealing with problems of agricultural production, land tenure, education, regionalism in North Thailand, population increase, urbanization and the urban-rural gap, investment, and means for supporting more research by Thai in Thailand” (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70). But claims that these development projects in Northern Thailand were removed from the context of counterinsurgency rang false to many anthropologists.

Sharp maintained that none of this research was hidden from the public and that had SMC “been more patient, we would have gladly sent them a full report of this conference published in English and Thai” (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70). He acknowledged that this conference included issues of civil security in isolated villages but claimed that in its “eagerness to depict AACT as sinister,” SMC “concludes gratuitously that ‘security in this context is really counter insurgency’” (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70).

Because AACT worked with groups with names similar to those recently identified as working with the CIA (e.g., Sharp mentioned AACT’s association with the “Asia Society” being confused with the exposed CIA-linked “Asia Foundation”), Sharp argued, it was being accused of “guilt by association.”

He believed the false claims that AACT did Pentagon research created an “argument as vicious and spurious as any concocted by the late Senator Joseph McCarthy” (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70). Sharp made no effort to distance himself or AACT from USAID’s work in Thailand and stated that AACT members “judge its work to be benevolent and on the whole beneficent and wanted by most Thai” (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70). He stressed that AACT had “complete control over their own work,” and assured his colleagues that there had “been no improper conduct as defined by my conscience or by the AAA 1967 ‘Statement on Ethics.’” He explained that he had been “moved to work with AACT” by an interest in seeing if academic knowledge could improve policy, stressing his personal admiration of the Thai people (ST 62, 8, 4/10/70).

Sharp mailed Wolf memos he had sent to colleagues at Cornell in the aftermath of the Mobilizer article’s revelations. He pointed out several errors in the article (including claims that Sharp had been at a meeting in Bangkok in June and July 1969) and objected to efforts to not differentiate between SEADAG, AACT, and ARPA work and the CIA and other Pentagon programs (EBW, LS to Cornell Anth. 4/9/70). Sharp asked Wolf, Jorgensen, and Berreman to resign from the Committee on Ethics and then to either make specific documented allegations or issue an apology (EBW, LS to EBW 4/17/70).
Moerman, Phillips, Piker, and Sharp each wrote AAA president George Foster, arguing that if any wrongdoing was to be investigated by the AAA, it should be the behavior of Wolf, Berreman, and Jorgensen, not any accusations against themselves. Sharp wrote President Foster on May 8, 1970, that he would not cooperate with the Committee on Ethics given Wolf’s and other committee members’ “slanders.” He requested that Foster appoint an AAA ad hoc committee to investigate Wolf’s, Jorgensen’s, and Berreman’s unethical behavior (EBW, LS to GF 5/8/70).

Michael Moerman sent President Foster a thirteen-page letter requesting the appointment of an ad hoc committee to investigate the conduct of Wolf, Berreman, Jorgensen, and Sahlins, claiming that “a kangaroo court has been loosed on the profession, and we were only the first to be kicked” (EBW, MM to GF 4/24/70). Moerman explained that once he saw the actual documents,

it was clear that my files had been stolen — no difficult task since the papers were all personal, and not “secret” in any official sense and since the University cabinet in which they were stored has no lock. That same evening I learned the last name of the man who had first presented my papers to the SMC. His name was the same as that of a married graduate student who had worked for me as a typist under my NSF grant from 12 June to 13 March and who had quit just before I was about to fire her. . . . Since I had hired and retained this student (whose formal MA committee chairman I had been) only because a colleague had recommended her and because she pled poverty, my suspicions of her (since confirmed) made me feel that I had been used and my trust (I supervised neither her activities nor the honesty of her time-reports) abused. The instantaneous corruption of trust caused by the smear tactics that have been used is also suggested by the suspicions that Phillips and Wilson, long-time friends, had of me. (EBW, MM to GF 4/24/70)

Moerman called for Wolf’s, Berreman’s, and Jorgensen’s resignations, arguing that “since I am accusing about half of the Ethics Committee of unethical behavior, it is clear that the Ethics Committee is not the arena for hearing my charge.” He worried that many other documents might have been stolen from his office, some of which could be misinterpreted in a bad light, and that if he made statements about the limits of his work, some forgotten exception could impeach his claims.

Moerman claimed to have evidence that a Committee on Ethics member was part of a conspiracy in which he “knew the kind of case which SMC was assem-
bling, offered to fund it, and is sufficiently a party to these operations to be told where the next files have been stolen from and to be sent copies of them. It is a charming slogan, ‘Even paranoids have enemies’” (EBW, MM to GF 4/24/70). Moerman sent a copy of a letter to Foster that he claimed supported this assertion, but soon Moerman dropped this claim from his litany of arguments.

In April 1970, President Foster asked Ralph Beals whether the actions of Keyes, Moerman, Phillips, Piker, and Sharp were improper under the standards Beals identified in the Statement on Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics (SPARE), which the AAA had adopted in 1967. Beals replied that because this work was not clandestine, he did not identify specific activities as violating SPARE’s principles (Wakin 1992: 183). Beals wrote that it was an individual decision whether or not an anthropologist contribute to governmental programs, and he indicated that Wolf, Jorgensen, and Berreman had acted unethically in speaking out as members of the Committee on Ethics and should resign from the committee (183–84).

**Public Discourse in the AAA Newsletter and Beyond**

In the June 1970 issue of the *AAA Fellow Newsletter*, the Executive Board provided a summary of the purloined documents published in the *Student Mobilizer* and shared concerns raised by two of the (unidentified) professors who feared “their professional reputations have been adversely affected” and who questioned “the propriety of the action of two Ethics Committee members in this matter.” The Executive Board reaffirmed the AAA’s SPARE document from 1967 and the association’s recently adopted resolutions prohibiting “secret or classified research” and research that “might endanger [the] well-being or cultural integrity” of studied populations. The board wrote that Wolf’s and Jorgensen’s actions “went beyond the mandate of the Executive Board” to the Committee on Ethics, and it admonished the committee to stick to its charge and clarified that personal statements must not be confused with official positions (*AAAFN* 1970 11[6]: 10).

Wolf and Jorgensen responded to the board’s criticisms by providing additional information about the documents they received from the *Mobilizer* (*NAAA* 1970 11[7]: 2). Their response itemized the documents they received, listing minutes of the JASON group, an ARPA counterinsurgency proposal, a 1969 report of a visit to rural Thai villages, a USAID contract, meeting agendas, and minutes. They wrote that because these documents contradicted the AAA’s resolution opposing clandestine and secret research, “we feel that they raise the most
serious issues for the scientific integrity of our profession.” They rejected most of the Executive Board’s claims about process and clarified they had not indiscriminately circulated documents (NAAA 1970 11[7]: 2). Wolf and Jorgensen stressed that this counterinsurgency research conflicted with the ethical principles identified in Beals's 1967 statement and adopted by the association, and they presented examples of their correspondence.

Frustrated that the Executive Board so narrowly interpreted the Committee on Ethics’s charge, Wolf and Jorgensen stressed that while the board was trying to avert conflict, limiting the committee’s activities and chastising Wolf and Jorgensen created more conflict. Because of the board’s actions, Wolf and Jorgensen closed their letter by resigning from the Committee on Ethics (NAAA 1970 11[7]: 19).

The Newsletter of the AAA published a letter from David Aberle registering his misgivings over the Executive Board’s criticisms of Wolf and Jorgensen. As a board member and the board’s liaison with the Committee on Ethics, Aberle had been a part of the board’s discussions leading to its criticism of Wolf and Jorgensen while ignoring the problems of anthropologists working for ARPA in Thailand. In frustration, Aberle resigned as the board’s liaison with the committee (NAAA 1970 11[7]: 19).

The Newsletter carried angry letters representing a broad spectrum of members’ views, making arguments about ethics, politics, process, fascism, and totalitarianism; one even (mistakenly) claimed that Eric Wolf’s book Peasants contained a photograph produced by a Soviet propaganda agency (NAAA 1970 11[8]: 12). In one letter, Robert Ehrich sounded an alarm that Berreman could win the upcoming AAA presidential election if he split the establishment vote with the three establishment candidates (Albert Spaulding, James Spuhler, and Anthony Wallace) all remaining in the election (NAAA 1970 11[7]: 22). The next issue of the Newsletter carried an announcement that Spaulding and Spuhler had withdrawn their candidacy (NAAA 1970 11[8]: 1). As discussed in the previous chapter, Jorgensen and Wolf raised the public profile of this crisis by publishing “Anthropology on the Warpath in Thailand” in the November 19, 1970, issue of the New York Review of Books.

In the November Newsletter, David Schneider and David Aberle published (as a “minority report”) a lengthy resolution that they had submitted to the Executive Board at its October meeting, but which had failed to garner board support. Their resolution called for the establishment of a fact-finding committee to investigate claims that anthropologists were assisting counterinsurgency campaigns in Thailand, in violation of the AAA’s expressed position in the 1967 Beals statement. Some of the accused used the Newsletter as a platform for de-
fending themselves. Herbert Phillips attacked the Committee on Ethics in the *Newsletter*, claiming it had “misinformed the membership” and forfeited claims of impartiality (*NAA 1971 12[1]: 2, 7–9*). Moerman explained he had been a USAID consultant from 1964 to 1970, out of a conviction that American policy in Thailand was based on ignorance and he wished to improve it (*NAA 1971 12[1]: 9–11*). He described his work on USAID’s ARD program not as counterinsurgency but as development work, and he explained that his work with Jason (at an unclassified meeting) was an effort to add some understanding of the complex environment in which foreign aid was being directed (*NAA 1971 12[1]: 10*).

The 1970 annual report of the Committee on Ethics stated that Wolf had acted properly in calling for more information after he received documents from *The Student Mobilizer*. It found Wolf’s statements as a private citizen were appropriate and concluded that “acting as a body, we therefore gave our unanimous support and endorsement to Wolf and Jorgensen at our May 2 meeting, transmitting the first resolution” (*NAA 1970 11[9]: 12*). The report’s Appendix A was the committee’s proposed Principles of Professional Responsibility (PPR).

At the 1970 AAA annual council meeting, the Radical Caucus maintained a forceful presence, passing thirteen resolutions, including ones from Radical Caucus members on gay rights, the status of women, and the treatment of Brazilian Indians. One adopted resolution required the Executive Board to adopt the resolution that Schneider and Aberle initially had failed to pass within the Executive Board (subsequently published in the *Newsletter*) calling for the formation of an ad hoc committee to investigate the Thai affair. In response to this motion adopted at the council meeting, the Executive Board adopted a motion calling for the “establishment of an ad hoc committee of inquiry to deal with the controversy over research and other activities of United States anthropologists in Thailand and their implications for anthropology as a profession and for anthropological research throughout the world” (*NAA 1971 12[1]: 1*). The motion clearly stated that the ad hoc committee’s charge was to investigate controversies involving U.S. anthropologists working in Thailand; it did not charge the committee with investigating the actions of Wolf, Jorgensen, or the AAA Committee on Ethics — yet the Executive Board would soon take actions to subvert this democratically approved resolution, leading to this result.

*Heading toward the Mead Committee*

George Foster and most of the Executive Board represented the discipline’s older generation, a group that largely opposed the sort of antiwar militancy
that Wolf, Sahlins, and many younger anthropologists advocated. Had Foster charged a task force with investigating the propriety of Wolf’s, Berreman’s, and Jorgensen’s actions, there would have been a significant uproar from the AAA’s increasingly organized and activist radical members. When Foster first charged the ad hoc committee, its instructions were broad and phrased in such a way that it appeared the committee would primarily investigate the ethical propriety of anthropologists assisting counterinsurgency operations in Southeast Asia. At its February 1971 meeting, the Executive Board decided the inquiry charge endorsed at the 1970 council meeting would have prohibitive costs due to the need to hire attorneys and gather testimony, and the board modified the description of, and charge for, the committee (NAAA 1971 12[3]: 1).

The new charge instructed the committee to use primarily existing documentation, requesting additional written statements as needed from designated parties. The committee was also instructed to “determine what, if any, aspects of these activities violated the principles of that 1967 statement or subsequent resolutions pertaining to ethics and professional conduct passed by the Association” (NAAA 1971 12[3]: 1). The committee was now also charged with investigating the conduct of members of the Committee on Ethics. It was to “prepare a report to the Board for release to members of the Association”; this report was to summarize findings and make recommendations (NAAA 1971 12[3]: 1, 6–7). The committee was to consider whether the approved 1967 ethics statements (SPARE), as well as the pending Code of Professional Conduct (which would become the previously mentioned PPR), had been violated (see Wakin 1992: 202–3). By revising the charge, Foster cleared the way for Mead's committee to attack Berreman, Jorgensen, and Wolf while ignoring the ethical questions raised by anthropologists working on counterinsurgency projects.

The anthropologists appointed to the AAA’s Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the Controversy Concerning Anthropological Activities in Thailand were Margaret Mead (chair), David L. Olmstead, William H. Davenport, and Ruth S. Freed (executive secretary); the Newsletter carried an announcement requesting anyone with pertinent information to send it to Ruth Freed (NAAA 1971 12[4]: 1). The ad hoc committee requested that the Newsletter stop publishing letters on the Thai controversy and that all such letters instead be diverted to the committee. The editors of the Newsletter cooperated and notified its readers of this decision (NAAA 1971 12[6]: 2).

Mead’s committee received a wealth of correspondence and statements from anthropologists working in governmental settings and from opponents to military-linked anthropological work, and its members read a range of published docu-
ments and critiques (AAAP 328). The committee submitted its report to the Executive Board in September 1971, requesting that the board not release it to the AAA membership until after the annual meeting in November. When board member David Aberle objected to this request, he was told by the AAA executive director that should he or anyone else leak their copy of the report, they would be detected because “there were distinct mistakes on each copy to allow for the tracing of leaks” (Wakin 1992: 204). Aberle continued to pressure the board to officially release the document to AAA members, and it was only mailed to the membership in the weeks before the annual November meeting (Wakin 1992: 204).

The ad hoc committee’s report had two sections; the first covered “anthropological activities in Thailand,” and the second offered “guidelines on future policy.” The report acknowledged that all members of the ad hoc committee found the Indochina war to be “unconstitutional, unwise, and unnecessary,” but the committee did not find the activities of the accused anthropologist consultants to be unethical under either the AAA’s SPARE or the proposed PPR. The report described a range of “optimistic” consultancy relationships of anthropologists working with organizations such as USAID, SEADAG, and AACT but found these to not be secret or clandestine relationships. The committee stressed that none of the stolen documents printed in the Mobilizer were classified as secret. As acknowledged in the report:

It is very likely that secret and clandestine intelligence work among Thai people has been conducted at the instigation of special U.S. military and government intelligence units. The ad hoc committee has no information about such covert work, nor could it be expected to have. The committee has been informed about some American anthropologists who have been approached with proposals that they engage in such intelligence activity and who report that the proposals were refused. We mention this only in order clearly to distinguish such clandestine intelligence from the applied anthropology or mission-oriented research and consultation that American anthropologists, as well as anthropologists from other countries, have openly pursued. (qtd. in Wakin 1992: 288)

The committee explicitly rejected the premise that anthropological contributions to war zone counterinsurgency operations are “sinister” (288). The report described American academia’s historical problems with McCarthyism, anti-intellectualism, and other factors that limited the availability of nondirective governmental research funds. There instead developed problem-related research funds from governmental agencies focusing on contemporary issues such as
“communications” or “mental health” that provided funds for the problems of an era.

The report argued that community development and counterinsurgency were simply the contemporary issues providing funding opportunities for anthropologists. It noted that while anthropological contributions to community development or rural public health projects were counterinsurgent insofar as they reduced the likelihood of revolutionary uprisings “such activity is well within the traditional canons of acceptable behavior for the applied anthropologist, and is counterinsurgent only for present funding purposes; a decade ago it might have been ‘mental health’” (qtd. in Wakin 1992: 289). The report also argued that soft power anthropological contributions to military operations were all part of applied anthropologists’ historical legacy and therefore were not to be judged as ethical violations regardless of their contributions to military actions. This historical argument was used to normalize counterinsurgency work, and instead of questioning the ethical nature of this past work, the present was excused without critical examination.

The report stressed that all anthropologists need to be aware of the dangers that their work could be reused by others for military action, citing the Tribal Research Centre at Chieng Mai as a possible example of how centralized files could be used for targeted military strikes (qtd. in Wakin 1992: 290).

The committee reserved its criticism for the unnamed members of the Committee on Ethics (Berreman, Jorgensen, and Wolf) who had publicly criticized the anthropologists identified in The Student Mobilizer and other documents. The report found their “unauthorized identification of themselves as members of [the ethics] committee in connection with their public denunciations,” their use of stolen documents, and accusations without due process to be “reprehensible” (qtd. in Wakin 1992: 291). The report’s conclusions exonerated the anthropologists contributing to counterinsurgency projects of any wrongdoing but found members of the Committee on Ethics to have “acted hastily, unfairly, and unwisely in making public statements” (293).

The Mead Committee understood that the report would generate controversy among the AAA membership, and when its efforts to suppress the public distribution of the report failed, the stage was set for a public showdown. Since the 1968 meeting, there had been a broad coalition of radical members who organized before and during the annual meetings and, despite earlier association rules limiting the political participation of younger members, to use organization skills and their numbers to make their voices heard.
The 1971 AAA Council Meeting

Eric Wolf contacted anthropologist Richard Lee in the months leading up to the 1971 AAA annual meeting. Wolf was upset that the Mead Committee’s report found more fault with Wolf and Jorgensen than it did with the anthropologists who contributed to counterinsurgency projects, and he asked Lee to “organize colleagues to lead a floor fight at the business meeting raising objections to the Mead Report’s equal apportioning of blame” (Lee 2008: 1). Lee joined forces with anthropologist Steve Barnett and others to organize opposition to Mead’s report at the meeting.

At the November 19, 1971, AAA council meeting at the New York Hilton Hotel, Wolf and Jorgensen passed out a lengthy rebuttal statement to attendees. Their statement disagreed with the Mead Report’s characterization of their work and findings, and they objected to the report’s claim that the operations of anthropologists in Thailand were “well within traditional canons of acceptable behavior for the applied anthropologist.” They rejected the claim that “counter-insurgency” was merely a trendy buzzword for funding, and that it had no more necessary links to military or intelligence research than did “mental health” or “communication” research in earlier decades. They were “appalled by the degree to which the committee tries to disguise human and cultural realities through the use of an Orwellian language which turns phenomena into their very opposites. We are as much dismayed by the callousness of the report as by its factual and theoretical faults” (NAAA 1972 13[1]: 3).

The day before the council meeting, the Executive Board officially accepted (without approving or rejecting) the committee’s report. When the discussion of the report came forward at the council meeting, Mead asked that the report not be voted on, but only that it be received; she was greeted by hisses from many of the seven hundred in attendance.

From the floor, Berreman and Wolf read potions of their rebuttal, and Wolf stirred up outrage in the audience by reading sections from a 1965 report titled “Low-Altitude Visual Search for Individual Human Targets: Further Field Testing in Southeast Asia” that he told the crowd had been written by a member of the AAA. Wolf explained to the assembly that this report sought optimal ways of identifying and killing human targets in Southeast Asian rice fields. While Wolf did not identify the author by name, it was later determined, by Herbert Phillips, that Wolf had confused the nonanthropologist author Donald Blakeslee with an AAA member archaeologist of the same name. While Wolf’s reading of this report angered his listeners, it remains unclear what effect this mistake had in galvanizing the crowd in opposition to the Mead report; some claimed it was a decisive factor.
others that it was but one small piece of a larger picture. As Eric Wakin observed two decades later, “The importance attributed to the name confusion seems to correlate with one's position on the Thailand Controversy” (1992: 211).

A motion from the floor divided the report into three sections, for discussion and approval, and over the course of the long evening, the sections were successively rejected by floor votes (the first section, by a vote of 308 to 74; the second, 243 to 57; the third, 214 to 14), with attendance dwindling as the meeting continued past midnight. More than three decades later, Richard Lee recounted the evening’s drama:

Mead entered the hall, a striking matriarchal figure, with her shepherd’s crook and flowing robes, and was seated at the front with her committee members in tow. When the agenda inched its way and the Mead Report was tabled for consideration by the membership, I rose and summoning my limited eloquence, pointed out the gross injustice of equating anthropological actions which contributed to the killing of real people with actions of Wolf and Jorgensen that brought the wrong-doing to light; employing the idiom of the day, I commended the whistleblowers for bearing witness to evil, and for speaking truth to power. I moved that Part One of the Mead Report be struck down, and Steve Barnett quickly and with far more eloquence, seconded the motion. A furious floor fight followed with Mead’s backers vigorously defending her position and lauding the report’s even-handedness. Defenders of Wolf and Jorgensen spoke with equal passion. (2008: 2–3; cf. Lee 1972)

The rejection of the Mead Committee report exposed generational fissures within the association and indicated a shift in the AAA establishment’s ability to maintain top-down policy making for the association. Stephen Isaacs’s story on the clash for the New York Times characterized Margaret Mead as being “furious” and insisting that the report was never intended to be voted on by the association; he wrote that Mead “indicated that she had been tricked by the board.” Isaacs observed that “what became clear in the meeting was that the association’s younger members see the 69-year-old Dr. Mead as a kind of anthropological Uncle Tom. And it became obvious very quickly, the younger members had the votes” (1971: A10).

Mead joined the majority in voting to reject the report for which she had been the primary author (NAAA 1972 13[2]: 1). Some weeks after the 1971 meeting, Ester Goldfrank wrote Mead:

I have been wanting to tell you since the meetings ended that your Ad Hoc Report said just what needed to be said. I sensed things would go the way they did when
I learned in the afternoon that [Gerald] Berreman had been elected to a three year term on the Board. The Radical Caucus in the evening, you will remember, had an attendance of about 700 and the applause for the speakers [who authored the report] was certainly not exuberant. I had enough by 8:30 and left. I wasn’t surprised to learn that the meeting ended at 1:20 A.M. The vote was 248 to 14 against your report. So almost 500 persons who had been at the earlier meeting that evening had melted away. There is a good old Communist tactic—you wear down your opponents with endless and not too relevant discussion and amendments, and when you are sure you can win, you call for a vote.

In the afternoon Pete Murdock said if he were ten years younger he would start a new scientific association. Perhaps what we ought to try first is to organize a Scholarly Caucus so that our membership could be kept informed regarding what is really at issue. . . . I wanted to resign when I learned what had happened on the Night of Infamy in November, but my younger friends have been urging me not to—to see if something can’t be done to overcome the politicization of our Association—a process that has gone far already. (EG, EG to MM 1/3/72)

Goldfrank described articles in a recent edition of Liberation magazine detailing the growth of radical Marxist anthropology and tracing the crypto-Marxian elements of Leslie White’s and others’ anthropology (see Moore 1971). She signed off, writing, “If you are interested in a concerted move to offset the damage being done by what I think is a small but well-integrated minority I would be glad to hear from you. Yours for a better—but not a politicalized—anthropology” (EG, EG to MM 1/3/72). Goldfrank’s claim to want an anthropology without politics was ironic given her own role and that of her husband, Karl Wittfogel, as FBI informers who secretly attacked anthropologists and colleagues whose politics they disliked by reporting their suspicions that they might be Communists (D. H. Price 2004b, 2008c).

Mead replied to Goldfrank that she was “glad to have the references you sent. After all there has been boring from within before, as you and I well know.” This may have been a reference to the 1948 AAA meeting in Toronto, which led George Murdock to become an FBI informer after he incorrectly imagined that a group of fellows speaking out for the academic freedom of a colleague (Richard Morgan), suffering a McCarthyistic attack, were part of a Communist plot to take over the association (EG, MM to EG 1/25/72; see D. H. Price 2004b: 70–89).

Mead’s views were shared by many of the older generation of American anthropologists whose views on making disciplinary contributions to warfare had
been shaped by their contributions to the Second World War. Mead’s papers contain a series of letters she received following the 1971 AAA meeting supporting the position taken in her committee’s report. Among those writing with support were L. Pospisil, M. Estelleie Smith, Murray Wax, Raoul Naroll, and Douglas Oliver (MM E12). Max Gluckman wrote that he was “inclined to resign from the AAA, to persuade other Foreign Fellows to do so,” and he asked Mead if she believed this would be the correct stance to take (MM E12, MG to MM 12/21/71). Mead replied that no one should resign from the AAA because it was “in a sense a disavowal of democracy to get out instead of stay in and fight” (MM E12, MM to MG 1/23/72). L. Cabot Briggs wrote Mead that he and Robert Ehrich were thinking of leaving the AAA to break off and form their own professional association (MM E12, LCB to MM 11/21/71).

A few days after the council meeting, Joseph Jorgensen sent a curt note to “Mead’s Ad Hoc Committee” that read, “I want to thank you for your unwitting efforts to smite imperialist anthropology. I suspect the clincher was the subtle counter insurgency–mental health analogy, but the overall high comic presentation may well have turned the trick. Whatever the case may be, thanks for your excessive help.” In a postscript he asked, “Mead, did you really say all of those nasty and condemning things about Eric and me between the time that our NYR article was published and you accepted the post as chairwoman of your unbiased committee?” (MM E12, JJ to MM 11/24/71). Mead replied that she did not know what nasty and condemning things he was referring to, adding that if Jorgensen was still at the council meeting when the voting occurred, he would know that “the motion in favor of continuing vigilance on the part of the American Anthropological Association was seconded by me” (MM E12, MM to JJ 12/30/71).

The schisms of the 1971 meeting remained powerful within the AAA and affected association business for years to come, although in ways that were not always visible. After the meeting, Mead oversaw the destruction of the seven thousand pages of materials that had been collected for the report, thereby limiting the understanding and analysis of future generations of anthropologists (Davenport 1985: 68).

Anthropologists for Radical Political Action: Reorganizing the Radical Caucus

Years later, Richard Lee recalled a festive mood and late-night parties throughout the hotel following the rejection of the Mead Committee’s report and noted, “From the critical writing that has grown up around it, the rejection of the
Mead Report was a pivotal moment in American Anthropology” (2008: 3). This sense of coming change led a group of radical anthropologists to organize an ongoing anthropological resistance to the war in Vietnam, following organizational models developed by the Union of Radical Political Economy (URPE) (3). During the months after the rejection of the Mead Report, there were efforts to maintain the momentum by developing a network of anthropologists working for radical activist change. Lee’s datebook records that on January 27, 1972, he was “standing at a bus stop somewhere on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with Marvin Harris and Eleanor Leacock discussing the new organization. It was Harris who said let’s call it Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, ARPA, an ironic dig at the Pentagon’s Advanced Research Projects Administration, an agency which funded academic research on a wide range of the sciences including way at the bottom of the list, Anthropology. It was a branch of ARPA [Advanced Research Projects Administration] that had funded the original research on Thailand that had launched Wolf and Jorgensen’s careers as whistleblowers” (3). Anthropologists for Radical Political Action drew on the strategies and base of the AAA’s Radical Caucus, using decentralized local collectives to work on issues throughout the year.

In April 1972, Stanley Diamond hosted an Anthropologists for Radical Political Action meeting at the New School for Social Research at which attendees pooled resources, generated names of hundreds of progressive anthropologists across the country, and organized a mailing campaign that resulted in “over four hundred responses” and the creation of Anthropologists for Radical Political Action “collectives” in several cities (Lee 2008: 4). In the ARPA Newsletter, which was established in the fall of 1972, Lee outlined the four basic anarchistic principles of the organization as decentralization, nonsectarianism, combining theory and practice, and facilitating communication (Lee 1972).

In 1972, Lee left New York for a position at the University of Toronto, where he organized a Canadian Anthropologists for Radical Political Action chapter. James Faris returned to the United States from fieldwork in the Sudan, where, he later wrote, he “consequently became a rabid anti-imperialist” (2008: 3). When Anthropologists for Radical Political Action made its first appearance at the 1972 AAA council meeting, it pushed through nine motions — successes that led the AAA leadership to limit members’ ability to set association policy from the council meeting floor. But that year, the AAA’s old guard was battling a significant demographic shift. In 1972, “the majority of anthropologists at the meeting were young — fully half (1520) of the 3106 registrants were students; only 649 were Fellows and 475 Voting Members — yet in most sessions, even in the
Council Meeting, members were largely in accord” (NAAA 1973 14[1]: 14). When
the AAA’s elected leaders realized that opening up the voting membership be-
ond the exclusive fellow category had weakened the older generation’s grip
on power, they began enforcing rules governing the council meetings that the
Executive Board had violated for years.

At the 1972 council meeting, the present members passed “nine motions
brought before them there, but defeated the one resolution which was submit-
ted a week prior to the meeting as required by the constitution of the Associa-
tion” (NAAA 1973 14[1]: 1). The AAA leadership wrote in the Newsletter, “This
year, council members followed the constitutional requirement and all legislation
proposed at the sessions was in the form of motions—advisory to, but
not binding upon, the Executive Board and not needing mail referendum to
the Council at large. Texts of the motions with their authors and co-signers,
all passed by voice vote, are given below. They were released to the press and
distributed to appropriate organizations by the Executive Office as many of
the motions specifically requested and the Board then moved should be done”
(NAAA 1973 14[1]: 1). Still stinging from the Radical Caucus’s role in leading the re-
jection of the AAA’s ad hoc committee’s Thailand Report, AAA staff and the Ex-
cutive Board maneuvered to strictly interpret the association’s bylaws so that
the ongoing practice of allowing motions passed at the council meeting to be
passed along to the membership for a mail vote would no longer occur (see
NAAA 1973 14[1]: 1). In 1969, the Executive Board had violated these same rules
it now sought to enforce (NAAA 1970 11[1]: 7).13 Now that the violation of these
rules was being effectively used to weaken the power of the Executive Board,
the board enforced the rules to suit its own purposes.14

The Executive Board Limits Floor Democracy

After the Radical Caucus demonstrated its control over the agenda at council
meetings, and Anthropologists for Radical Political Action’s successes at the
1972 meeting, in October 1973 the AAA’s Executive Board, under AAA president
Joseph Casagrande, took direct action to limit the impact of the group at up-
coming council meetings. The October 1973 Newsletter carried a statement, “at
the request of” AAA executive director, Edward J. Lehman, by Daniel Whitney,
chairman of the AAA Resolutions and Motions Committee, and Robert Benja-
min, AAA parliamentarian. The statement specified the procedures that would
be followed at that year’s annual meeting (NAAA 1973 14[8]: 1, 8).
Whitney and Benjamin notified AAA members that Section 4 of the association’s bylaws stated that “new legislation or resolutions proposed by members of the Council” must be submitted to the Executive Board “at least one week in advance of the annual meeting if they are to be placed on the agenda.” This was indeed the language of the bylaws, but the Radical Caucus had successfully argued, with a two-thirds majority at the meeting, that under the bylaws members could add resolutions and other items to the agenda, and these should be sent to the general membership in a mail ballot as had been done in previous years. Whitney and Benjamin noted that the bylaws also allowed for the passage of a “referendum” under the following conditions: “A referendum vote may be held by mail ballot at any time upon the initiation of the Executive Board or a signed petition of fifty (50) of the Council members in good standing” (NAAA 1973 14[8]: 1, 8; D. H. Price 2008b).

The AAA leadership’s monopoly on interpreting rules restricted the radical group’s ability to set association policy from the floor of business meetings. The inability of members to send motions from the meeting floor to all members for a mail vote diminished the AAA business meetings’ central importance and initiated a trend of diminishing attendance. At the 1973 meeting, activist members of the association again submitted one resolution (on conditions in Chile), and fifteen motions were passed from the floor, including resolutions on civil liberties under the Chilean military junta and ones on issues of gender equality.

The years following 1973 marked a decline in efforts by activists to pass resolutions at council meetings. The two resolutions raised in 1974, which passed easily, were the least political of any passed at AAA meetings in years: one was a friendly blanket resolution encouraging “research across national borders”; the other supported “archaeological excavations for educational purposes.” The absence of political motions was conspicuous, but not surprising, given that the decision to hold the meeting in Mexico City meant that Anthropologists for Radical Political Action’s base could not afford the expense of traveling to these distant locations; it was as if the AAA business meeting had been relocated within the walls of a gated community.

By 1975, the central political purpose for mobilizing radical anthropologists, the war in Vietnam, was no longer the pressing issue it had once been: the public had turned on the war, and the American retreat from Vietnam was underway. In 1975, the Newsletter observed that council meeting attendance “was light, with observers almost as numerous as Council members.” Even as the AAA leadership achieved its goal of alienating radicals attending the meeting,
Rayna Reiter (later Rayna Rapp) pushed back with a resolution directing the Executive Board “to inform the membership through the newsletter of action taken and not taken on all resolutions and motions passed at the Council meeting and/or by mail ballot” (NAAA 1976 17[1]: 1, 9). The resolution was itself a commentary on the Executive Board’s disdain for bottom-up democracy in the association; the AAA leadership had succeeded in killing members’ interest in attending the business meeting (D. H. Price 2008b).

Because Anthropologists for Radical Political Action was a decentralized movement, the exact date of its dissolution is unclear. Jim Faris wrote that ARPA’s end “coincided with the end of the Vietnam War as well, and ARPA finally went the way of many radical organizations of the time — into quiet abandon. By the later 1970s, it was gone, short-lived as it was, our weak and largely under-organized struggles within the AAA essentially defeated. Working for USAID, DoD, the World Bank and others was no longer even remotely considered the unethical or morally wrong thing to do. Money flowed uphill in the opposite direction to what most of us would consider a principled way to practice our craft” (2008: 7–8). As America retreated in defeat from Vietnam, the group’s moment passed, though anthropologists’ opposition to war, and more specifically their opposition to applying anthropology as an instrument of warfare of oppression, left deep impacts on the AAA. Yet like most institutional reforms, many of the changes initiated in opposition to the war would be short-lived.

Not with a Bang, but a Whimper

The deep divisions among AAA members that were exposed at the 1971 council meeting were not easily repaired in the years that followed. Reactions to the political and ethical issues involved in deploying anthropology in the service of counterinsurgency largely, though not entirely, split the association along generational lines and were embedded in the contemporary struggles of America’s imperial wars in Southeast Asia, yet these issues were much deeper. The Mead Report’s claim that anthropologists’ contributions to soft power campaigns to quell uprisings or maintain power relations were in fact common features of applied anthropology projects revealed a profound truth, yet this observation could just as easily have been used to condemn many other applications of anthropology as to excuse, as the Mead Committee did, the counterinsurgency activities of these anthropologists.

Whatever gains had been made in rejecting the Mead Committee’s report were short-lived and established little counter-inertia against the push of larger
political economic forces steering the future course of the association. In 2008, James Faris reflected, “We currently have something of a statement, but no sanctions prohibiting members from doing the work of DOD and other sinister agencies. Margaret Mead, indeed, won. She kept the AAA safe for the America we know today and the AAA safe from us” (2008: 4–5).

In response to the insurgent movements of the Radical Caucus and Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, the AAA leadership used its power to subvert the democratic will of the majority of association members. The Executive Board worked hard to wrestle power from the Radical Caucus and other bottom-up manifestations of the membership’s power — and the Radical Caucus and Anthropologists for Radical Political Action proved they could use association rules to seize power at the annual business meeting. One measure of the success of these grassroots groups in exerting their political will on the larger association is seen in the leadership’s legalistic response of reinterpreting extant rules to limit their power at the AAA’s annual meetings.

These historical events had mixed outcomes. On the one hand, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the radical anthropologists effectively pushed the AAA to adopt official public policies opposing the militarization of the discipline and the Vietnam War, and supporting positions of gender, racial, and economic equality. On the other hand, the AAA’s power structure effectively disarmed this rebellion by selectively using association rules.

It is somewhat ironic that an essentially anarchistic group was in part subdued by institutional rules, but this was only a small part of what occurred. In truth, Anthropologists for Radical Political Action was more than a mechanism for controlling the AAA business meeting. Most members cared little about the legitimacy of getting their floor measures adopted by the AAA’s rank and file in a mail ballot; most important, by the time the AAA power structure coordinated its defensive efforts and enforced rules to minimize their use of the business meeting to set association-wide policy, the American withdrawal from Vietnam was already under way. Any statement Anthropologists for Radical Political Action wanted to make, it could still make from the council meeting floor as a motion, and in the short term it mattered little if these motions were voted on by the entire membership. But there were long-term consequences of adopting this approach.

Perhaps the most enduring outcome of this history was the steady decline in AAA members’ participation in the annual council meetings. The AAA membership’s lack of interest in the annual business meetings was not an accidental occurrence; it was initiated as an intentional design feature of the
sort Laura Nader (1997a) refers to as “controlling processes,” enacted to thwart a flare-up of troublesome democracy through processes of institutionalized disenfranchisement.

The radical critique of the militarization of anthropology and the adoption of disciplinary ethical standards born of this critique remain important disciplinary connections to this period. But many of the fundamental issues raised during this period remain unresolved. Anthropology could not save itself, much less the world it studied. While the moral outrage of the period was connected to the privileges of wealth that produced it, it cannot be reduced to this. These concerns of social justice and abuses of power reflected growing domestic awareness of the abuses of the peoples subjected to American military power, an awareness at least in part funded by programs hoping for more hegemonic analysis.