Cold War Anthropology
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“But,” says Arthur, “I wouldn’t be proud of your clothes
For you’ve only the lend of them, as I suppose
But you dare not change them one night, for you know
If you do, you’ll be flogged in the morning
And although that we are single and free
We take great delight in our own company
We have no desire strange places to see
Although that your offers are charming
And we have no desire to take your advance
All hazards and dangers we barter on chance
For you would have no scruples for to send us to France
Where we would get shot without warning.”

“ARTHUR MCBRIDE AND THE SERGEANT”

early nineteenth-century traditional Irish folk song

FOURTEEN UNTANGLING OPEN SECRETS,
HIDDEN HISTORIES, OUTRAGE DENIED,
AND RECURRENT DUAL USE THEMES

The shift in America’s military mission from the Second World War’s fight against fascism and totalitarianism to Cold War policies supporting neocolonialism, militarism, and an expanding American empire helped transform American anthropologists’ attitudes to align with collaborations with military and intelligence agencies. Many of these changes were under way soon after the Second World War, but such shifts in mission were apparent to few Americans, as there was no public awareness of the secret policy developments driving American Cold War strategies. The public had little understanding of the National Security Act of 1947 and no knowledge of NSC-68’s plan for global containment of communism or Kennan’s “Policy Planning Study 23,” much less of the CIA’s covert and illegal activities: assassinations, foreign coups, interrogation experiments, kidnappings, and subversion of foreign democratic movements
threatening American corporate interests. In 1968, Kathleen Gough wrote that while “in the Fifties, it looked to some of us as though much of the non-Western world might gain genuine political and economic independence from the West by peaceful means, this is no longer the case” (1968: 17). In the short span of just over two decades, American anthropologists’ high hopes for global changes favoring the peoples they so frequently studied shifted from postwar optimistic alignment with U.S. government programs to growing support for revolutionary movements opposing American hegemony. While many debates over the militarization of anthropology focused on professional ethics, this political shift was the taproot of this movement.

By the time Dell Hymes published *Reinventing Anthropology* in 1972, growing numbers of American anthropologists challenged the discipline’s relationships to power, though not all anthropologists shared these critiques. As the generational confrontation over the Mead Committee’s report on the Thai Affair demonstrated, deep schisms had developed. In his review of *Reinventing Anthropology* for the *New York Review of Books*, Sir Edmund Leach appeared offended that these crass Americans would bring political concerns to the fore of their anthropology in ways that he believed oversimplified complex systems of oppression. Leach wrote:

The trouble with all the essays in Hymes’s collection is their denial of historical reality. The authors have been shocked by the fact that, in south-east Asia and South America, professional anthropologists have functioned as intelligence agents on behalf of the CIA and the American armed forces, from which they have inferred that a politically neutral anthropology is an impossibility. They take it for granted that the “others” whom anthropologists study are, by definition, in a state of political subjugation. Since they hold that attempts at objectivity in social studies are positivist illusions, it follows that the anthropologist must always be “involved” in his research situation. He then has a simple moral choice: he can side either with the oppressors or with the oppressed. From this it is readily deduced that it is always morally deplorable to serve any established authority and always morally virtuous to side with liberation movements. That sympathies may be divided or solutions elusive does not seem to occur to these writers. All the anthropologist’s actions must be immediately relevant to the manifest problems of those whom he observes. (1974: 35)

Leach’s dismissive slaps at a movement challenging the discipline’s historical complacency and its default siding with (to use Leach’s terms) the oppressed over oppressors revealed a generational dividing line marking many anthropologists’
responses to these issues, with many older anthropologists’ experiences during the Second World War tempering their responses to these new critiques.

You Like It, It Likes You: Did the CIA and the Pentagon Get What They Paid For?

The ways that Cold War CIA- and Pentagon-aligned funding impacted anthropology were nonmonolithic and inconsistent, and at various times they produced desired, undesired, direct, distant, or no meaningful outcomes of direct use to governmental regimes of power. There were ample funds aligned with strategic interests coming from private foundations and governmental agencies for anthropological work ranging from classroom language study to fieldwork research projects. These funds financed a theoretically and geographically broad range of research activities, with the work of conservatives, conformists, liberals, progressives, Marxists, Maoists, and other radicals (during the late 1960s and the 1970s) financed by public and private sources. But even with the rise of critical anthropological analysis in the late 1960s and early 1970s, anthropology still produced enough knowledge of use to the national security state for it to comfortably justify these expenditures, and the independence of peer-reviewed scholarship had a value that could not be produced within governmental structures (see Eickelman 1986:39).

Government and foundation funding programs spread their resources broadly. While much of the research funded in the postwar 1940s and throughout the 1950s aligned well with the needs and ideologies of the American Cold War state, in the 1960s and 1970s radical voices used these funds to generate their own critiques. The links between Cold War funds and outcomes were often not just nonlinear; at times they were oppositional, as scholars like Andre Gunder Frank and June Nash financed their graduate work, leading to powerful radical critiques, with funds from military-linked projects. While such unintended consequences had real significance in the development of American anthropology, these outcomes do not argue against payoffs for the national security state’s gambit — which still produced knowledge of use to national priorities and helped train generations of younger scholars, including some who would work within these governmental systems.¹ Regardless of the analytical or political orientation of a particular work, anthropological writings informed a larger intellectual zeitgeist and supported the training of a broad universe of area specialists outside the discipline.

Cold War agendas shaped anthropological research projects — sometimes in direct ways (e.g., anthropologists funded at SORO, CRESS, the Research in
Contemporary Cultures project, the Russian Research Center, the Human Ecology Fund), and other times in secondary ways (working in critical geographic areas, even if conducting radical analysis), but there were still either large or small political dimensions of this work. The Cold War’s progression at times influenced funding opportunities and analytical approaches.

In the postwar 1940s and throughout the 1950s, there was little room for critical work challenging American domestic or international policies. Threats of McCarthyism’s punishments clarified the narrow range of allowable critiques, and at times “the wandering dialogue of science with the unknown [was] straightjacketed for petty military projects” (Goodman 1967:18). In the 1960s, a greater breadth of critical analysis was allowed, even while some (at Soro, HRAF, CRESS, etc.) did work that was directly aligned with meeting military-intelligence needs. Often, both researchers and the national security state got something they wanted — though frequently this was something as nonnefarious as generating general knowledge about geographic regions of general potential national security interest, and field research opportunities for the anthropologist. Anthropology’s knowledge of “strategic cultures” and other topics enticed military interests, while funding opportunities provided enticements that directed some anthropological inquiries. But recognizing that multiple parties gained is not to claim that all these anthropologists would have pursued the same projects had different funding opportunities or different political pressures existed.

In the end, the CIA, the Pentagon, and a host of civilian programs mostly got what they paid for — though I suspect many contemporary scholars misjudge what it was that the military-industrial complex understood it was buying. The desired outcomes were clearly stated in the numerous postwar reports envisioning coming funding streams of public and private funds (see Pool 1963; Steward 1950; Wagley 1948). These reports called for the establishment of ongoing funding to train scholars and finance research projects around the globe that would have general and potential applications to strategic American policy issues — programs to establish a body of knowledgeable experts in regions of geopolitical interest. These postwar plans for area studies and increased governmental and foundational support for international research acknowledged that much of what was funded would be general scholarship contributing to the formation of the American academic brain trust. The directive nature of foundation funding helped shape the scope of research, but it only inconsistently succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of funded anthropologists. Functionally, this was only a minor inconvenience. Anthropologists produced enough useful knowledge to justify these relationships; loyalties were of minor impor-
tance. These interactions transformed anthropology in ways large and small. And while much remains unknown about all of the ways that the CIA and the Pentagon used these contacts, we know enough to map some of the ways these agencies and anthropologists each, though dual use processes, used these interactions.

As dual use partners, anthropology and the national security state both gained from Cold War relationships. Military and intelligence agencies, other civilian branches of government, and aligned private foundations gained a steady supply of well-trained specialists with linguistic, cultural, and political expertise covering the globe. Scholars were sometimes free to pursue a broad range of ideas, yet regardless of whether these scholars’ work aligned with military or diplomatic policies, it engaged with and informed academic environments feeding these operations. Sometimes scholars knowingly served as consultants to the CIA or the Department of State, or in ongoing consultancies like the Princeton Consultants. Some anthropologists used open sources to write copy for army handbooks, to which classified materials were later added. Sometimes, the CIA or the Department of Defense asked professors at top universities to have graduate students unwittingly pursue questions of interest to the government, later secretly sharing these findings with governmental agencies. Harvard’s Weberians and Parsonians embraced “value-free science” while hitching their wagons to an impressive array of value-laden Cold War-linked projects.

Anthropologists supported by the CIA through funding fronts contributed as unwitting subcontractors to larger projects — projects that included research informing the work of those producing the CIA’s interrogation manual, and numerous projects establishing contacts in developing nations; in other instances, fronts financed esoteric anthropological research to provide needed illusions of legitimacy. The academic projects financed by CIA funding fronts generated publications and reports that were generally indistinguishable from non-CIA-funded projects.

Anthropologists’ fieldwork in underdeveloped nations produced reports on peoples courted by the Soviets and the Americans as potential clients or players in the Cold War’s proxy wars; it generally mattered little what analytical perspective was used in their writings. The CIA’s “Family Jewels” report showed that USAID field projects provided “a major source of information” to the agency. Some anthropologists worked on economic assistance projects distributing soft power gifts and loans, achieving counterinsurgent ends while cultivating clients, debt, and dependence.

Agencies like RAND, CRESS, and SORO drew on anthropologists’ ethnographic reports to synthesize counterinsurgency plans for operations in South
America and Southeast Asia. At times, military and intelligence organizations simply stole anthropologists’ work for their own purposes—purposes frequently linked to counterinsurgency programs. This included instances like the U.S. Special Forces’ unauthorized translation and pirating of George Condominas’s book, or the ARPA program uncovered by Delmos Jones reading unpublished reports from northern Thailand to model counterinsurgency plans: anthropological knowledge fed a range of counterinsurgency operations. The Human Relations Area Files’s academic research provided military and intelligence agencies with a dual use retrieval system to locate cultural information of value to counterinsurgency operations, hoping to transform ethnographic literature into knowledge that could control others.

Elisabeth Bacon’s correspondence with Ralph Beals described the steps used by the CIA to contact anthropologists returning from the field, hoping to debrief them on what they saw and learned. Bacon’s knowledge of scholars with OSS backgrounds bridging transitions to the CIA, and appearing on grant selection committees and boards, shows how the agency influenced the selection of anthropologists’ field research. The CIA’s fake anthropologists, like Lloyd Millegan, at times gained access to developing nations or used claims of anthropological research to gather information from actual anthropologists working in these countries. Sometimes embassy personnel pumped anthropologists for insights on what they knew from the remote villages where they lived.

During the Cold War, the AAA occasionally provided valuable information to the CIA. At times, the agency sent personnel, unannounced, to AAA meetings. The CIA secretly helped design the collection of information for the AAA’s first comprehensive cross-indexed membership roster; CIA computers compiled, collated, and stored all the private data the AAA had collected on its members for the roster. Using the Asia Foundation as a front, the CIA collected information on the AAA’s Asian anthropologists. The CIA also used the Asia Foundation to provide generous travel funds for Asian anthropologists traveling to conferences, settings where foundation staff seeking further information had opportunities to approach them. Even while most American anthropologists during the early Cold War had little direct contact with military or intelligence agencies, these Cold War dynamics indirectly impacted their work.

Military and intelligence agencies were not the only ones that benefited; anthropologists also profited from these interactions. Area study centers, private foundations, and governmental grants funded anthropologists’ research in developing nations. In some instances, these field research opportunities, as in the case of Louise Sweet, had hidden links to military or intelligence agencies;
usually, however, no such duplicity occurred, as other more general gains in the development of a pool of regional experts were achieved.

Anthropologists benefited from new centrally funded, multischolar or interdisciplinary collaborative research projects like the Modjokuto Project, CIMA, or the Research in Contemporary Cultures project. These projects held theoretical significance to participating scholars that was unrelated to governmental interests. The CIA’s secret funding of academic books provided new publishing opportunities for anthropologists and other scholars. Millions of dollars in contract funds allowed HRADF to translate and code ethnographic works; dual use processes provided the army with the basic unclassified texts it needed for its handbook series, while HRADF used the resulting funds to buy materials it used in its basic theoretical research completely unrelated to these military and intelligence projects.

When the CIA secretly placed personnel in key positions within foundations, or maintained contacts with foundations funding projects focusing on underdeveloped nations, anthropologists were among the scholars who benefited from such arrangements. The paper trail is necessarily incomplete, but examples showing CIA-linked personnel at the Asia Foundation suggesting who should, and who should not, present at an academic conference on Southeast Asia, or seeding funds within the AAA to gain access to young Asian scholars demonstrates the CIA shifting discourse and gaining access in ways that we can assume occurred elsewhere with other organizations. Likewise, SEADAG funded anthropological research by scholars employing a broad range of political and theoretical frameworks. Even anthropologists who were unwittingly supported by CIA funding fronts like the Asia Foundation or the Human Ecology Fund at times worked on projects of their own design, undertaking research of interest to them without noticeable constraints from their funders.

The Cold War made previously unimaginable levels of funding available for diverse research topics—topics ranging from studying culture at a distance, to village studies in remote contested regions, to Russian economic studies, to physical anthropological studies of somatological typologies. There were funds to attend high-status junkets in New York, Washington, DC, Moscow, Salzburg, Hawaii, and elsewhere. Asian anthropologists received virtually free AAA memberships and at times were given money to attend academic conferences, and the AAA received a small fortune in free computer time from the CIA when completing work on its first comprehensive membership roster.

Some anthropologists found steady work outside of universities at places like RAND, CRESS, SORO, USAID, the CIA, and the Department of Defense.
Archaeologists, anthropologists, and other scholars working in the developing world with CIA links, like Donald Wilber, John Dimick, or James R. Hooker, mixed their travels with agency work. Frank Bessac gained valuable experiences as a CIA agent, exploring remote regions of Central Asia that he would otherwise have not visited, experiences that established the foundations of his later academic research.

Perhaps anthropology’s greatest gains from these dual use relationships came from the wealth of governmental and private funds available for language training and basic research in regions of the world deemed geopolitically significant. Anthropology graduate students had scholarships, fellowships, grants, and tuition waivers subsidized by federal and private programs supporting the production of expertise on geographic regions of strategic interest. Likewise, a range of programs with few direct ties to national security programs funded field research around the globe, with no commitments for scholars to contribute directly to governmental programs, yet the establishment of these programs during the postwar period was explicitly rationalized to support national security.

Cold War anthropologists’ research followed shifts in funds favoring specific geographic regions or languages. It has never been particularly difficult for research funders to redirect scholars’ interests and inclinations. Shifting the availability of specific language funds, at times favoring programs directing an influx of work in Latin America, Africa, Russia, or China, produced visible results that changed with Cold War geopolitical developments.

Yet, beyond the anthropologists, foundations, and military and intelligence agencies that gained from this work were the people who were studied and impacted by these relationships. To the extent that American foreign policies, military actions, and covert activities damaged the autonomy and interests of anthropologists’ subjects, anthropologists’ contributions to the knowledge systems supporting such outcomes undermined primary anthropological commitments to research participants.

Situating Interpretations

In many cases scholars were relatively free to pursue questions of interest to them with a mix of government and private foundation funds assuring the maintenance of a brain trust generating regional expertise, or knowledge on topics of interest to governmental agencies or policy makers. These funds helped stock universities with regional expertise. Anthropologists often studied theoretical questions of their choosing, yet in instances where hidden or open
governmental funds supported specific forms of research, we must question whether these choices were always as free as is often assumed. This leaves us with contested interpretations of relationships between anthropologists, sponsors, military and intelligence agencies, and their research outcomes.

While my interpretation of military and intelligence agencies’ impacts on the development of American anthropology and other disciplines aligns with the work of other scholars (see Diamond 1992; González 2010; Ross 1998a, 2011; Wakin 1992; and Jorgensen and Wolf 1970), still others find little impact of these interactions on anthropology and other branches of academia. During the two decades since the publication of Sigmund Diamond’s breakthrough book *Compromised Campus* (1992), scholars have added more peer-reviewed research establishing how links between the CIA, the military, and social scientists functioned during the Cold War. After Diamond and other critical scholars began documenting and critiquing these Cold War intrusions into academia, a first wave of academic critics responded with skepticism, but as more documented examples were published (e.g., Bundy 1977), there has been a perceptible shift from disbelief, to critics adopting a dismissive commitment to downplaying the significance of such relationships. Countering conservative positions shifting from skepticism to dismissive revisionist acceptance can be a bit like loading a truck full of mercury with a pitchfork (Brautigan 1976). Today, a new group of scholars acknowledge many of these links but discount their significance, arguing that CIA or Pentagon ties did not meaningfully alter the nature of academic research. These scholars find few significant connections between Cold War dynamics and the produced work.

Intellectual historians now analyze Harvard’s Russian Research Center, acknowledging CIA funding without meaningfully probing its influence (Engerman 2009); or argue that the CIA’s covert funding of political and academic movements supported rather than altered intellectual and political trajectories (Wilford 2008, 2013); or interpret Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Geoffrey Gorer’s postwar culture and personality work as if they might have freely chosen this exact research path without the enticement of previously unimaginable levels of military funding (Mandler 2013); or find minimal impacts of institutional framing in government-funded war zone ethnographic research (Oppenheim 2008). Some who lived through this period insist that they “did not tailor . . . theories to suit Walt Rostow or to serve the interests of the CIA, nor did we busy and bury ourselves in irrelevant projects in order to avoid controversy” (H. Lewis 2005: 108; cf. Rauch 1955). Some argue that the many examples of Cold War era anthropological work that cannot be tied to military or
intelligence agendas mitigate the significance of established connections. But such arguments are reminiscent of the claim by piano virtuoso Glenn Gould (a notoriously bad driver) that “it’s true I’ve driven through a number of red lights on occasion, but on the other hand I’ve stopped at a lot of green ones but never gotten credit for it” (Hafner 2008: 203). As Laura Nader argues in her essay “The Phantom Factor: Impact of the Cold War on Anthropology” (1997), most of the anthropologists who came of age during the early Cold War gave little thought to these processes shaping them and their work. That some who developed and prospered in this world later refused to acknowledge its impact is not surprising; if cultural insiders had sufficient insight to analyze the culture in which they live, there would be no need for anthropology itself.

From outside the Pentagon and the CIA, it remained difficult to access the fruits of many CIA- and Pentagon-funded projects. But a 1963 CIA memo from Asia Foundation president Russell Smith reporting on his first year as foundation president indicates that some CIA-funded programs that from a distance appeared disconnected from CIA matters often had agency uses that were not apparent to outsiders. As the CIA reported, “Mr. Smith acknowledged that a small percentage of the [Asia] Foundation's programs were for the sake of 'window-dressing,' public relations, or entrée into fields of interest. In discussing such projects, however, Mr. Smith remarked that since becoming President he has learned that some projects which, at first appearance seem to be frivolous, may have concealed edges [of] potential” (FOIA CIA-1705143 1/28/63, DTPIL-LAR 3, 24 p. 2).

Rewarding individuals whose work aligned with or informed larger projects of the American national security state helped some scholars “freely” choose topics or theoretical approaches of interest in ways that maintained certain illusions of academic free will. Most academics spend their lives agreeably working within the confines of their disciplines, departments, and universities, content enough with the parameters delimiting the boundaries of mainstream scholarship. For those who seldom question the directions of funded research, there is little to see that does not appear as freely chosen areas of study. To some degree, all people create illusions of agency and choice while reinforcing cultural norms. To argue that the dominant cultural milieu and political-economic forces did not shape anthropologists’ work would place the discipline of anthropology outside of the sort of usual influences of culture that anthropologists normally take for granted when studying other cultures. From the postwar rush to follow the funding of area studies onward, the Cold War brought recurrent episodes of anthropologists shifting their work to align with the era's funding opportu-
unities, and instances of governmental agencies acquiring and consulting the work these anthropologists produced; yet Ralph Beals’s account of Senator Fred Harris’s chief of staff describing warehouses in Washington with “great piles” of unread research reports (see chapter 11) offers some relief in the consolation of government incompetency.

There are high stakes for the discipline itself concerning how to interpret the writings of generations of anthropologists who traveled to the field and theorized using funds mixing academic pleasures with the business of empire. If, for example, we find that the writings of prominent Harvard scholars such as Clyde Kluckhohn and Talcott Parsons were in some way elevated because of their alignment with a power elite (explicitly rejected by Parsons) that included the CIA and the FBI, while others (Gene Weltfish, Richard Morgan, Richard Armstrong, Jack Harris, etc.) who opposed such regimes of power were driven to the edges of the discipline by the FBI, then we are left to confront new questions about this work.

I would not argue that the work of Kluckhohn, Wilber, Mead, Benedict, or others whose research aligned with the interests of CIA or the Pentagon was necessarily of an inferior quality, or that it should not be taken seriously simply because of these relationships, only that it should be read and interpreted with these relationships firmly in mind. Anthropologists study contexts, and these relationships are important elements of the context in which this work was produced and consumed. Clifford Geertz’s *Agricultural Involution* should not be dismissed as nothing more than a piece of cenis-influenced propaganda; it is something more than that, yet the context in which it was produced is part of the text that must be brought to the surface if we are to understand it. Burying the political context of this and other work obscures important elements of its meanings. While the political context of Jack Stauder’s essay “The ‘Relevance’ of Anthropology under Imperialism” (1972), Kathleen Gough’s “Anthropology and Imperialism” (1968), Marshall Sahlins’s “The Destruction of Conscience in Vietnam” (2000a), or Marvin Harris’s *Portugal’s African Wards* (1958) might seem obvious to most readers, these texts are no more or less political than *Agricultural Involution*; it is their clarity of political position — as well as their opposition to elite power structures — that creates illusions that they are somehow more political than those texts with more hidden political orientations.

Anthropology needs to concretely consider how regimes of power influence disciplinary developments in ways large and small. Such considerations necessitate formulating the sort of metanarratives of power that declined with the rise of some popular postmodern strains. Anthropologists who adapted Lyotard’s
“incredulity towards metanarratives” had no means of systemically interpreting recurrent intrusions of military and intelligence agencies on the discipline, leaving anthropology vulnerable to recurrent episodes of exploitation (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). As William Roseberry observed, “‘Grand narratives’ . . . are never sufficient, but they remain necessary” (1996: 22). While many anthropologists are stepping back from the extremes of postmodern reflexivity, a clear focus on anthropology’s relationship to the military economies in which it is embedded remains elusive, and the footprint of this inward turn remains deep. Even with recent calls for renewed attention to ontological developments, the discipline’s postmodern avoidance of grand narratives of power fosters notions that the Cold War political economy did not meaningfully alter the production of knowledge.

Social theory (or anti-theory stances) can selectively blind anthropologists, even as it fuels interpretation and understanding. During the Reagan years, anthropologists became increasingly entranced with postmodern inward-focused narratives and particularist versions of disciplinary history that, while ritualistically poking at colonialism, power, and othering, led us away from confronting ongoing disciplinary links to American militarism and other pressing political issues. Many postmodern and interpretivist narratives focus indulgently on the meanings and subjective engagements of ethnographers, even, as Geertz’s experiences show us, to the extent of missing massive bloody genocidal campaigns.2

With time, the programmatic rejection of metanarratives ironically become an unacknowledged metanarrative undermining explanatory paths of inquiry not taken in ways that made it difficult to identify and confront recurrent power relations. David Graeber recently critiqued this reflective turn as “vulgar Foucauldianism, which simultaneously developed the subjective experience of professional-managerial work arrangements as the basis for a universal principle of human sociality, and denied the central importance of either capitalism, or the threat of direct physical violence, at exactly the moment the threat of direct physical violence was becoming central to the operation of capitalism” (2014: 84).

Anthropologists’ research choices are routinely shaped by regimes of punishment and reward. During the 1950s, McCarthyism effectively corralled anthropological inquiry, limiting research that challenged tenets of American Cold War dogma; anthropologists learned to disengage from analysis focusing on stratification, open Marxist-derived analysis, applying anthropological research on racial equality to activist campaigns, and postwar anticolonial campaigns (D. H. Price 2003b, 2004b). As the Cold War progressed beyond the
scare tactics of the McCarthy era, funding seeds were cast broadly, with little effort to limit critical analysis.

It would be instructive to study the variety of research projects that were not funded during the 1950s, or at least not funded more than once, but beyond tallying numbers of unfunded proposals, foundations do not usually retain the records of rejected grant applications. Foundations named after dead tycoons paid anthropologists to study peasants, princes, and displaced peoples around the globe, with few funds forthcoming to study the public and private lives of Western elites. Governmental funding bodies expressed clear concerns about supposed left-wing biases and certain political uses of social research. At the National Science Foundation, specific policies were adopted, according to the NSF’s Harry Alpert, to “eschew identification with social reform movements and welfare activities, and especially, the unfortunate phonetic relationship to socialism” (qtd. in Solovey and Pooley 2011:250). Such policies meant governmental funding programs supported social science research seeking only specific types of social change, while dooming others.

Some progressive social research was unfundable during this period because of negative associations with “activism,” yet social research providing yeoman’s service to the national security state rarely suffered such setbacks. There were more funding opportunities for scholars to support the debt-laden regimes of modernization than to question them. Cold War biases against materialist theoretical perspectives during the 1950s caused several analysts to cloak their theoretical writings in obscure references and cumbersome logic. Leslie White hid his Marxist roots, while Julian Steward encrypted the notions of base and superstructure to such an extent that his model of human ecology at times contradicted itself (see Peace 2004). It took Karl Wittfogel, a committed anticom- munist and FBI informer, to openly reintroduce anthropology to Marx’s Asiatic mode of production during the darkest days of McCarthyism (D. H. Price 2008c).

**Anthropological Ambivalences**

An evaluation of anthropologists’ efforts to effect positive change within governmental and nongovernmental agencies linked to American wars in Southeast Asia would have difficulties finding positive measurable outcomes in which anthropologists had the desired impacts on the agencies with which they engaged. Anthropologists hoping to correct or reshape what they viewed as misguided policies had little success. These general failures had thematic connections with
many anthropologists’ contributions to the Second World War and today’s contemporary militarized engagements. The prospects for anthropologists working within military or intelligence agencies to change policies do not appear promising, though I suppose renewed interest and funding opportunities may present new ways for enthusiastic anthropologists to reconceive such measures.

Charles Keyes’s early correspondence with ARPA in 1966 expressed concerns that anthropologists’ contributions to ARPA’s project could lead to an Asian Camelot-like scandal. He threatened to expose the program in the press, but Seymour Deitchman convinced Keyes that he could help reshape the Rural Security Systems Study. With similar motivations, Gerald Hickey began working for RAND, in hopes of helping the U.S. military do less harm in Vietnam. Keyes, Hickey, Moerman, Piker, Sharp, and others expressed similar motivations for their work on these projects, and I found no records or correspondence contradicting this. Yet, their work with these military or advisory groups showed little impact on these groups, their participation brought a desired layer of legitimacy to these programs, and they had no control over the uses of their contributions. Effecting internal change on a bureaucratic organization as robust as the Pentagon is daunting even under the most favorable conditions, and when advocated changes cut against the grain of the core beliefs and behaviors of the Pentagon and the larger military-industrial economy, it is unlikely that any meaningful change will occur. Continuing to work under such conditions raises questions about the naivety or cynicism of scholars who remain in such well-paid positions while effecting no significant change.

American anthropologists’ experiences with military and intelligence agencies trying to harness anthropological knowledge have spawned several efforts to limit these incursions by strengthening professional ethics codes. From the Society for Applied Anthropology’s post–World War II code, to the AAA’s Vietnam era efforts to establish ethics codes, war forced the discipline to grapple with these issues of identity and meaning (see D. H. Price 2011f: 11–31). Warfare recurrently tempts anthropologists to betray assumed and assured trusts with those with whom they have lived and studied; but warfare does not create unique opportunities to betray trusts so much as it reveals raw components of existing relationships and weaknesses that exist in most anthropologists’ research interactions.

Professional ethics codes establish social norms, mark disciplinary borders, and affirm shared values and agreed-upon best practices. Clarifying professional ethics codes becomes an important project for professional associations during or after times of war, yet in times of war these codes have also been used to
avoid political discussions. Constructing ethics codes declaring the importance of voluntary informed consent, mandating disclosure, and prohibiting reports that studied populations cannot access can help delineate appropriate activities for anthropologists conducting research in any research context, yet such prescriptive guidelines ignore the core political questions raised by anthropologists within the Radical Caucus, the Committee of Concerned Anthropologists, Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, and other waves of critical anthropology that developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unless professional associations like the AAA can address these core political issues (which they are loath to do, precisely because they are political issues), associations like the AAA will continue to sidestep core issues of what anthropology is, what it should be used for, and what is it good for, by addressing only ethical research issues.

While attention to research ethics remain vital for all anthropologists, the AAA’s compartmentalization of concerns with disciplinary militarization as primarily an ethical problem fails to address the political issues raised by practicing anthropology in an American political economy and within an international policy of escalating militarization. The AAA and other professional organizations need to address the political problems necessarily embedded in practicing anthropology in settings dominated by a growing military-industrial complex, neocolonial militarization, and expanding fears of terrorism. There is no single answer to these political questions. But until anthropologists confront and hash out these political issues directly, the discipline seems doomed to recurrently suddenly discover militarized misappropriations of what it self-conceives of as its heart and soul, with repeated crises and misguided efforts to solve political problems using ethics, not politics.

As the generation of 1960s and 1970s activists retires and dies off, universities increasingly find themselves without a generation of professors who know firsthand the history of CIA and Pentagon intrusions on our campuses and in our disciplines. With the loss of this institutional memory, the remaining generations of scholars need to study this history to understand why these relationships endanger prospects of free inquiry. Those who bother learning this history will struggle against an incoming tide, as three decades of neoliberal programs’ impacts on student loan debt, campus austerity programs, and new enticements of military funding converge to transform American universities into even greater extensions of military and intelligence programs, as increasingly the remaining tenured faculty respond with silence.

Today’s anthropology students face increasing student debt, with new funding opportunities carrying direct or indirect links to military and intelligence
projects. Programs like the National Security Education Program, the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program, and the Intelligence Community Scholars Program now fund undergraduate and graduate students (in some instances, secretly) while requiring recipients to work in national security sectors at some future date (D. H. Price 2011f: 33–90). Some older funding programs without mandated future payback stipulations, like the former National Defense Foreign Language Fellowships, now renamed the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, continue to fund students studying “strategic languages” that are assumed to have importance in military, intelligence, and policy circles. While these programs exist as part of the broader national security apparatus, the lack of restrictions on participants’ work raises more passive than active forms of dual use issues and does not tie students to future work for governmental agencies.

Biologists’ and other researchers’ awareness of dual use issues at times forces them to consider potential unintended dual use outcomes for their research as part of their research design process. Anthropologists can follow these examples and develop protocols for considering how our work can be weaponized by others at later dates. There is too much history of such interactions to ignore these possibilities. Anthropology needs to develop historical and contemporary critiques of how its research interfaces with the political economy in which it is embedded. American anthropologists cannot proceed as if disciplinary links with military and intelligence agencies are not part of the social milieu in which we work; there can be no ignorance that such agencies (and industry) have made unintended uses of our work. But what this awareness means and how we use this knowledge to proceed is unclear beyond maintaining a heightened awareness to consider how such agencies may selectively harvest the analysis we produce. In some instances it may mean that anthropologists withhold material from publication if we have reason to believe work can be used against studied populations. In other instances it may mean that the discipline’s professional associations identify, confront, and try to alter the ways that knowledge informs military and intelligence agencies.

It is not that anthropology can or should disengage from political issues. As anthropologists’ journalistic and academic writings clarify, the discipline has a lot to offer international policy discussions (see González 2004; Besteman and Gusterson 2005). And while anthropologists have contributed to policy developments, historically, military operations have looked to anthropology for assistance with the cultural problems that arise with conquest, occupation, and counterinsurgency. While current militarization trends render unlikely
any significant anthropological contributions to national policy decisions in
the United States in the near future, anthropology and American policy would
be strengthened by renewed efforts to establish the forms of independent so-
cial science research funding advocated by Senator Fred Harris in the 1960s.
Such an independent funding source could focus on problems of domestic and
global poverty, stratification, health care, police brutality, education reform,
participatory democracy, peace studies that are something other than war stud-
ies by another name, racism, sustainable agriculture, and many other social
issues. Yet under a political economy so devoted to warfare, such independence
often remains a distant yet worthy goal.

The contradictions of working within a political economic system operating
in a state of perpetual warfare create difficulties for those who do not want to
produce work that may inadvertently feed back into this system. The dominance
of the militarized backdrop creates conditions in which even humanitarian
efforts to assist war victims increasingly become tools of counterinsurgency or
control (see Feldman 2007; D. H. Price 2014a).

The solutions to these problems are not simple, but acknowledging their ex-
istence is a vital step. Anthropology needs metanarratives of power relations
that expose recurrent episodes of the weaponization of the field. Part of this
metanarrative includes explicit understanding that funds for language and
area specialization study have historically been granted with expectations that
gained expertise and knowledge will later be available for national militarized
projects, often directed against the people anthropologists study, and those they
are generally ethically committed to not harm. Anthropologists must come to
grips with the limits of individual agency, acknowledging the unlikelihood
that individuals working within agencies devoted to warfare and conquest can
meaningfully alter the core functions of these organizations.

At a minimum, anthropology must develop dual use research protocols, iden-
tifying harm that may come from work should others use research findings,
and disengage from research or publications that present significant prospects
of such harmful outcomes. As the AAA’s current code of ethics argues: “Anthro-
pologists should not only avoid causing direct and immediate harm but also
should weigh carefully the potential consequences and inadvertent impacts of
their work. When it conflicts with other responsibilities, this primary obliga-
tion can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge and can lead to decisions
to not undertake or to discontinue a project” (PPR 2012). I see these processes as
broad and far-reaching, and do not remove my own work, including this book,
from such considerations. 4 While such measures are imperfect and incomplete,
they are necessary as a minimal step connecting our work with the world we study, inhabit, share, and inevitably alter.

Revisiting the Gift

During the Cold War, foundations and governmental agencies were able to “decide which problem areas merited their support and reward those scholars whose research fits the approved categories. The impetus for new directions that formerly came from collegial discussions now came from directives issued by the agencies” (Denich 1980: 173). It is surprising that a discipline that embraced Marcel Mauss’s (1925) notion that gifts necessarily entail obligations paid so little attention to the obligations accompanying the precious gifts it received and became increasingly reliant upon. Instead, these gifts were widely sought and welcomed on university campuses with little concern about these matters. As Sigmund Diamond observed, during the early Cold War years, the U.S. government became an “invited guest in campuses and quadrangles, and there is precious little evidence that the universities objected to, or even thought much about, the price that was being exacted for the benefits they sought. In a sense, a great potlatch was being celebrated: the government brought gifts, highly visible ones; the universities also brought gifts, research results in permissible areas” (1992: 275). Participants in the kula ring, potlatches, or other gift exchange systems generally reject nontraditional explanations for failing to recognize the meanings of these transactions to participants, and anthropological explanations focusing on the counterflow of goods, other economic functions, or created social relations generate greater interest among outsiders than among members of these cultures. Such analysis tends to strike participants as crass, claiming participants are following cultural illusions and reducing complex personal motivations to unidimensional mercenary transactions removing individual autonomy.

Anthropology has its own gifts to offer the world. Even with fundamental epistemological disagreements in the discipline, we produce unique knowledge and ways of understanding our species, the human condition, the nature of culture, and humanity’s place in the universe. Anthropologists’ contributions to studies of language, culture, primatology, human prehistory, gender, hominid evolution, stratification, political economy, power relations, warfare, peace, culture contact, kinship, social movements, the cultural construction of race, culture change, biocultural interactions, and a long list of other topics have been significant and remarkably different from those of any other discipline. Cold
War anthropologists made tremendously important contributions to these and other areas of inquiry, yet many still lost sight of how, while the discipline accomplished its half of the dual use bargain, some disciplinary gaze was selectively diverted.

In 1972, Radical Caucus leader Jack Stauder described some of the direct links between social science funding and the work produced, observing that anthropologists’ belief in political “semi-autonomy” from the government funding their research was “an illusion.” Stauder predicted that “to the degree they are dependent on government money, anthropologists will be increasingly pressed into service to do work more relevant to short-term imperialist interests. The pressures are likely to be subtle, mainly taking the form of selective funding and the greater availability of money for ‘relevant’ research. The appeal of ‘relevance’ capitalizes on the ambiguity of the term to enlist students and faculty who, often from different interests, also want ‘relevance’” (1972: 78). While not specifying a time scale, Stauder accurately described the coming shift in funding opportunities that would develop in the next four decades, with a decline in traditional graduate funding opportunities, reduced state and federal tuition subsidies, and the expansion of new “payback” programs (such as the National Security Education Program) linking graduate funds to future national security work (see D. H. Price 2011f).

In 1973, Gerald Berreman summarized the AAA’s Vietnam War era ethics conflicts, detailing efforts to prohibit anthropologists from conducting secret research. Because the struggle within the association had been largely waged along generational lines, he predicted that the generational “reverberations will be felt for many years for the demand that anthropological research be relevant and socially responsible is increasing. The age structure of the Association and the mortality of its members virtually assure that these demands will win out in the end” (Berreman 1973: 8). Berreman’s optimism was understandable, but history finds that he misjudged the power of economic forces to shape the attitudes not of some distant unborn generation but of his own generation and the academic generation to follow. A decade and a half later, the AAA revised its ethics code, once again opening the doors for anthropologists to do covert research and to produce secret proprietary reports that studied populations could not access (D. H. Price 2011f: 11–31). The motivations for these changes had everything to do with market forces leading anthropologists to increasingly conduct proprietary corporate research, and little to do with seeking employment with the Pentagon or the CIA. But once they were propped open, these doors would be used soon enough by anthropologists seeking validation for
their work in military and intelligence agencies. Berreman failed to realize just how powerful the economic forces of America’s military-industrial complex would be in shaping the attitudes of anthropologists needing to eat and pay off student loans in an era of limited employment possibilities.

While the economic contingencies governing university departments favor the careers of successful grant writers, there remains an elusive rare freedom for those who find ways to pursue unfunded, or alternatively funded, research programs. Anthropologists need to consider the high price of surrendering intellectual independence for the projects of others with agendas both known and unknown. The luxuries of remaining independent and free to keep our own company have immeasurable value.

Anthropologists can learn from this history. We can develop standards to maintain some independence from militarized agendas and remain aware of how our work can be abused. I don’t know if we can learn that attempting to mitigate harm by joining and trying to change military and intelligence organizations has little chance of even limited success (see Hastings 2015; Price 2011f: 155–72). Some steps toward the demilitarization of the discipline may be easy to identify; others are fraught with complexities. It is not that lines of participation or disengagement can always be clearly drawn— if anything, this history shows the difficulties in understanding when knowledge production has links to militarized projects. Yet, if anthropologists do not try to disambiguate these lines, there is no hope of not contributing to the militarization of the discipline with these endemic dual use relationships.

Resistance is not futile. There is much in the history of anthropologists’ efforts to confront the militarization of the discipline that can inform campaigns to limit such encroachments. One important lesson is that organized resistance matters. This resistance can occur both within and outside of professional organizations like the AAA. The successes in the 1960s and 1970s of Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, the AAA’s Radical Caucus, the Committee of Concerned Anthropologists, and groups like the Union of Concerned Scientists were models for the formation of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, in 2007, as an organizational tool for pressuring the AAA to limit military and intelligence incursions into the discipline (see NCA 2009). While far from a panacea, the formation of the NCA as a loose collective pressed the AAA to address concerns of militarization, and as an identifiable organization, it gave the AAA’s bureaucratic structure a body to approach when addressing relevant association policy changes.
In 2009, pressure from AAA members concerned about increased uses of anthropological knowledge by military and intelligence agencies led the association to reinstate bans on secret research, which itself led to an overhaul of the AAA’s ethics code (DeSantis 2012; Jaschik 2009; D. H. Price 2011f: 11–31). Along with the renewed prohibition against producing reports that studied populations cannot access, the AAA’s new code (the Principles of Professional Responsibility) contains new language that stresses the importance of considering unintended uses of research, and a new focus on the ethical problems of compartmentalized research, stating: “Compartmented research by design will not allow the anthropologist to know the full scope or purpose of a project; it is therefore ethically problematic, since by definition the anthropologist cannot communicate transparently with participants, nor ensure fully informed consent. Anthropologists have an ethical obligation to consider the potential impact of both their research and the communication or dissemination of the results of their research. Anthropologists must consider this issue prior to beginning research as well as throughout the research process” (PPR 2012). Although it remains difficult for researchers to definitively know how others may use their work, this insistence that anthropologists avoid research projects that compartmentalize and repurpose their field research is a meaningful step toward addressing some of the historical abuses of anthropological research by military and intelligence agencies. While institutional efforts to address dangers of militarization are important, many of the most important efforts to resist come from individuals.

In 2013, Marshall Sahlins resigned from the National Academy of Sciences over objections that the NAS was using its anthropologist members to seek applicants for research projects to be funded by the Army Research Institute. In his resignation letter, Sahlins described his growing awareness of the ways that the NAS contributed to the legitimization of militarized social science, which had led him to a point where he did not “wish to be a party to the aid, comfort, and support the NAS is giving to social science research on improving the combat performance of the US military, given the toll that military has taken on the blood, treasure, and happiness of American people, and the suffering it has imposed on other peoples in the unnecessary wars of this century” (D. H. Price 2013a). With the post-2001 shifts to normalize militarized uses of anthropology, such principled resignations are rare occurrences, yet this is the sort of stance anthropologists need to take to mark the appropriate uses of the discipline.

The outrage and hope expressed in writings by members of the Radical Caucus and Anthropologists for Radical Political Action mark the moral conscience
of a generation resisting militarized political uses of disciplinary knowledge. These reactions were rooted in social movements outside the discipline, but these were specific anthropological expressions of critical resistance that offer hope to other generations of anthropologists facing new abuses of our work. Most of these discipline-specific elements grew from bonds of responsibility linking anthropologists to the individuals and communities that share their lives with them.

While the challenges facing current and future generations of anthropologists differ from those faced by past generations, there remain important connections concerning questions of what is to be done with the fruits of anthropologists’ labors—questions whose answers must acknowledge, as Cora Du Bois expressed after the Second World War, that “there is no end to the intricate chain of responsibility and guilt that the pursuit of even the most arcane social research involves” (1960: iv–v).