

WHY DR. JOHNNY WON'T GO TO WAR:

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

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Once called “the handmaiden of colonialism,” anthropology has had a long, fruitful relationship with various elements of national power, which ended suddenly following the Vietnam War. The strange story of anthropology’s birth as a warfighting discipline, and its sudden plunge into the abyss of postmodernism, is intertwined with the U.S. failure in Vietnam.

– Dr. Montgomery McFate

It is imperative that anthropologists critically evaluate and speak out about the dangers the war on terrorism will present to native and minority populations around the world if the governments managing them and their lands are given a new international legitimacy to repress them as ‘terrorists’.

– Dr. David Price

Anyone who has read Dr. Montgomery McFate’s *Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship* will, inevitably, get a somewhat skewed view of the relationship between Anthropology and the military. This viewpoint will, quite naturally, come out of two subtle misperceptions contained in her article. First, there is a belief that Anthropology was a unified discipline at its start – something that is not true: in fact, what we today call “Anthropology” is an amalgam of different disciplines operating under different philosophical assumptions which developed to serve different interests.¹

The second misperception has to do with how the “military” is seen by many Anthropologists. As with any word, there will be subtly different interpretations by varying audiences. McFate, writing for a military audience, does not explain what the term “military” means for many Anthropologists even though this is crucial to understand the current positions held by many in the field.

If we want to understand the current reactions of many Anthropologists towards working with the military, then we have to look at some of the history and at the nature of the discipline itself and, at the same time, examine how the “military” has been constructed within the discipline of North American Anthropology.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

The term “Anthropology” literally means “the science of Man” (or “Humanity”). In North America, the discipline of Anthropology stems from three separate points of origin: Jefferson’s original establishment of the discipline in the early 1800’s; Wilson’s development of Ethnography in the 1850’s,

¹ Introductory quotes from:

Montgomery McFate, *Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship* March -April 2005, *Military Review*, 24-38
David Price, *Anthropology Today*, Vol 18(1), February 2002 page 3

and Boas' recreation of the discipline in the late 1800's and early 1900's. All three of these models involved Archaeology, Linguistics, Physical Anthropology and Ethnography, but had different emphases in basic philosophy and goals.¹

For Jefferson, the emphasis was on everything relating to Native Americans, including military intelligence, and was very much in the same vein as the classical military ethnographies of Tacitus.² This led to the institutional formation of the Corps of Discovery, the Bureau of American Ethnography and the founding of the American Ethnological Society. The clear concern of all of these groups was dealing with the immediacy of Native groups in political, military and economic situations as the United States expanded across the continent.

Wilson's version of Anthropology was somewhat different. Inspired first by history and archaeology, and later by Darwinian evolutionary theory, Wilson simply defined Anthropology as "the natural history of Mankind".³ Unlike the pragmatic, intelligence-oriented Anthropology of Jefferson, Wilson's vision was strongly rooted in history, biology and the lived reality of the British Empire. As with later British Social Anthropology, Wilson's models were aimed at the integration and "enlightening" of "savage" groups, after their conquest – a view that came to be synonymous with the British tradition of "indirect rule."

The final "founding" of Anthropology in North America can be traced back to the arrival of Franz Boas. Boas, who was trained as a Geographer in Germany, based his re-organization of North American Anthropology on three main points:

1. Wilhelm von Humbolt's concept of *Volkesgeist* as it was filtered through the philosophy of Dilthey and psychology. This concept combines a study of the cultural history of a people, along with their "psychology" broadly construed.⁴
2. A strong opposition to the unilinear evolutionary theories dominating most 19th century Anthropology, especially when these were combined with eugenics movements. More than anyone else, Boas "created" the concept of Cultural Relativism that dominates most modern Anthropology.
3. A strong belief in going out into the field, collecting all the data it is possible to collect, learning to speak the local language, and living with the group you are studying.

Boas combined very strong methodologies and a sound theoretical basis with a ruthless political outlook in his drive to "professionalize" North American Anthropology – a discipline that he and his students ended up controlling (except for Archaeology), by the end of World War I. This institutional control, coupled with an increasing emphasis on empathizing with the people being studied and tied into the closing of the American Frontier and decreased importance of Anthropology as an intelligence source, led to a total reformatting of the ethics of research.

¹ For an excellent discussion of the founding of early Anthropology, see A. Riving Hallowell, *The Beginings of Anthropology in America*, in "Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist: 1888 – 1920", Frederica de Laguna (ed.), Row, Peterson & Co., 1976

² See, for example, Alexander F. Chamberlain *Thomas Jefferson's Ethnological Opinions and Activities*, American Anthropologist, New Series, Vol. 9(3), 1907 pp. 499-509

³ Sir Daniel Wilson, "Anthropology", 1885

⁴ George Stoking, "*Volksgeist* as Method and Ethic", History of Anthropology Series, Vol 8, 1996, University of Wisconsin Press. See especially *Franz Boas and the Humboltian Tradition*, Matti Bunzl, pp 17-78. See also Regna Darnell, "Invisible Genealogies", University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

RESEARCH ETHICS AMONGST ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN NORTH AMERICA

For the culture of American Anthropology, the key event in solidifying its ethical vector is Boas' letter in *The Nation* on December 20, 1919 and his censure by the American Anthropological Association 10 days later.¹ Boas, basing his argument on the moral obligations of a scientist, was by no means a “friend” of the military, and drew stark distinctions between people whose morality grew out of their social roles and those who were “scientists”:

A soldier whose business is murder as a fine art, a diplomat whose calling is based on deception and secretiveness, a politician whose very life consists in compromises with his conscience, a business man whose aim is personal profit within the limits allowed by a lenient law -- such may be excused if they set patriotic deception above common everyday decency and perform services as spies. They merely accept the code of morality to which modern society still conforms. Not so the scientist. The very essence of his life is the service of truth. We all know scientists who in private life do not come up to the standard of truthfulness, but who, nevertheless, would not consciously falsify the results of their researches. It is bad enough if we have to put up with these, because they reveal a lack of strength of character that is liable to distort the results of their work. A person, however, who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demeans himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist.²

For Boas, the construction of Anthropology as a “science” was crucial to his drive to professionalize the discipline. As such, Anthropologists must needs meet the “highest ethical standards” held for scientists including their expulsion for certain “heretical” acts of which “spying” is amongst the “worst”.³ One point that is crucial to note is that certain key words are used in opposition to “ethics” – “spying”, “deception”, and “falsification” stand out in particular. The reason for this is that the event that prompted this letter had to do with Boas’ indictment of four Anthropologists who had spied for the US government for military intelligence; a “reversion” to the Jeffersonian model of Anthropology that Boas would not countenance.

This obligation or, rather, interpretation of an ethical obligation, has been maintained to this day. It is quite interesting to see that this obligation to the “truth” has, at least for Anthropologists, been modified over time. Let us consider the Statement of Ethics from the American Anthropology Association.⁴

1. Relations with those studied

In research, anthropologists' paramount responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied.

¹ It should be noted that 3 of the 5 members of the executive council that issued the censure had themselves been involved with military intelligence operations in World War I.

² Franz Boas, “Scientists as Spies”, letter to *The Nation*, December 20th, 1919 quoted at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Boas#Scientist_as_Activist. See also, “Anthropologists as Spies”, David Price, letter to *The Nation*, November 20th, 2000 available at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20001120/price>

³ This standard is actually based on a 19th century conception of what a “true” scientist does and how they act. Twentieth century philosophy of science has significantly altered this rather rigid code: see, for example, Karl Popper “The Logic of Scientific Discovery”, Basic Books, New York, 1959 and Thomas Kuhn “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”, 2nd Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

⁴ Available at <http://aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm>

- a. Where research involves the acquisition of material and information transferred on the assumption of trust between persons, it is axiomatic that the rights, interests, and sensitivities of those studied must be safeguarded.
- b. The aims of the investigation should be communicated as well as possible to the informant.
- c. Informants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected both where it has been promised explicitly and where no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. These strictures apply to the collection of data by means of cameras, tape recorders, and other data-gathering devices, as well as to data collected in face-to-face interviews or in participant observation. Those being studied should understand the capacities of such devices; they should be free to reject them if they wish; and if they accept them, the results obtained should be consonant with the informant's right to welfare, dignity and privacy.

In general, these principles have been used as the basis for using pseudonyms for both individuals and organizations, including purposefully changing some data to make it harder to identify individuals. The basis for this position is twofold: first in Boas' conceptions of the ethical system which has dominated the discipline for the past 90 years and second for a very pragmatic reason having to do with how Anthropologists gather their data.

ETHICS, FIELDWORK AND KNOWLEDGE

Fieldwork, for a cultural Anthropologist, is a lot more than going to bars and watching people. The North American tradition is to spend a "decent" amount of time, e.g. a minimum of nine months, living with the group you are studying, and time periods, on and off, of twenty to thirty years working with the same group are not that uncommon. Officially, this time is required to gather data and gain a good understanding of the more subtle and hidden aspects of the culture.

This "understanding" is much more than a surface familiarity, and draws on Dilthey's distinction between two types of knowledge: *verstehen* or "empathic/intuitive understanding" and *erklaren* or "explanatory knowledge". Today, few use Dilthey's terms preferring to use the terms "emic" and "etic" respectively. Regardless of which set of terms we use, there is a clear distinction between the method of acquisition, the product, and the effects on the individual of gaining each type of knowledge.

Most people have little difficulty understanding "explanatory knowledge" (aka *erklaren* or the etic perspective) and it may be generally interpreted as "scientific knowledge", "facts", etc. In its most basic form, it is an "explanation" that "makes sense" of a set of raw sense perceptions; basically a series of rules for selecting sensory data, ordering it in importance and assigning a "meaning" to that ordered data.

This type of knowledge works best in unambiguous situations such as, for example, in manipulating physical reality and is the basis of most of the physical sciences. It also works fairly well in ambiguous situations where the same basic "model of reality" ("culture" in one sense of the word) is shared by all people involved. Thus, by way of example, Soviet and American military personnel shared the same "language" during the Cold War. *Erklaren*, however, breaks down completely when there is little shared basis of interpretations of reality. For example, the Coalition forces in Iraq do not speak the same "language" as the insurgents or the general populace.

Unlike *erklaren*, *verstehen* is somewhat more difficult for many people to grasp. Translating it as “empathic or intuitive knowledge” doesn’t really help to explain what it is or how it is used by cultural Anthropologists in conducting fieldwork. To understand what it is and how it is used, we have to draw on some different material.

The methodology used by most cultural Anthropologists conducting fieldwork is called “Participant Observation”. While the specifics of how to conduct this type of fieldwork vary, most agree that it requires a fairly long time (9+ months) “living” with the group you are studying. The ideal established by Malinowski was to drop your tent in the middle of the village and stay for a year. While you are there, you talk with people, conduct formal and informal interviews, “hang around”, record social interactions, watch people at work and play, take lots of pictures and video, make maps, etc. Obviously, in order to conduct good fieldwork, there has to be a high degree of mutual trust.

In some cases, notably when it is impossible to physically go to a field site, other versions of the same “immersion” type of research may be conducted. For example, most active “fieldwork” conducted by American Anthropologists involved in World War II military operations was of a form known as *The Study of Culture at a Distance*¹. It involved immersing oneself in the artifacts of the culture: food, language, movies, media, books, clothing, etc., at least as much as was possible. The actual methodology, at least as it is described by Mead and Metraux and, also, by Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*², is very similar to that described by Stanislavski as *The System* or by Lee Strasberg as *The Method*.

In an essay entitled *Resonance in Imagery* from 1953, Rhoda Metraux, discusses how we build an “image” in our minds of a “typical” member of the groups we study. If you read the essay closely, you will notice that what she is really talking about is creating a “persona” or a “character” (in the sense of method acting) in our minds.³ Or, to put it another way, we create a personality that is different from our “self” that we can access at will and “switch” into.

All of these methods involve a total immersion into either the culture or the role and the described results are similar – there is an “intuitive understanding” (*verstehen*). Achieving this intuitive understanding is crucial, since the end goal of most ethnographic research is to reformulate the explanatory models (*erklaren*) used in communicating findings. In many cases, the explanatory models of the “natives” have a higher predictive validity than do the explanatory models used by “us”. This is most obvious in any model designed to predict what a given group of people will do, but there have also been examples in the natural sciences (ecological resource management and indigenous medical knowledge systems are two examples).

The “problem” is that the form of *verstehen* developed by these methodologies relies on the creation of a persona of the “other” within “our” own psyches. So what does this mean in terms of the debate over Anthropology being involved with the military, and why are Anthropologists so hung up on the idea of “spying”? Put simply, the very act of applying these methodologies to the study of an

¹ Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux (editors), *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, University of Chicago Press, 1953.

² Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Houghton Mifflin, 1946

³ Rhoda Metraux, *Resonance in Imagery* in *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, Mead and Metraux (eds), pages 343-362

"enemy" creates a persona of that "enemy" in our own minds. In effect, "we" would be "spying" on ourselves if we were to conduct fieldwork on a group with the specific purpose of "pacification".

WHEN IS "SPYING" NOT "SPYING"?

Anthropology actually evolved as an intellectual tool to consolidate imperial power at the margins of empire.¹

The decisions and actions of anthropologists during World War II and other times must be viewed in the historical context of their times.... While past wartime anthropological decisions may be seen as appropriate for their times, the context of contemporary war raises many more complex and problematic issues.²

While ethnography for the purpose of pacification and/or direct attack has been done in the past, most notably during the inter-war period by British Social Anthropologists and in World War II, it requires an ideological framework that can justify that work as for the greater good for both the group studied and the group doing the studying. We have two, major, historical examples of successful ideological frameworks that allow for this type of ethnography.

This first ideological framework, often couched in terms of the direct vs. indirect rule debate, allowed many British Social Anthropologist to believe that their work would lead to a "greater good" for the groups being studied. This was expressed very nicely by Malinowski:³

The real difference between 'direct rule' and 'indirect or dependant rule' consists in the fact that direct rule assumes you can create at one go an entirely new order, that you can transform Africans into semi-civilized pseudo-European citizens within a few years. Indirect rule, on the other hand, recognizes that no such magical rapid transformation can take place, that in reality all social development is very slow, and that it is infinitely preferable to achieve it by a slow and gradual change coming from within.

While the situation today is obviously different in that the debate is not centered on the most effective means of "civilizing" the peoples of colonial possessions, there are obvious analogs in both the current political and military debates. However, unlike the inter-war colonial period, the social justifications for current operations in Iraq are both constrained as military operations (i.e. the "pre-emptive strike" rhetoric) and have been dismissed by many as unjustified (e.g. accusations of slanting intelligence reports to meet policy requirements). The final telling point concerning the social justification for OIF is that, unlike operations in Afghanistan, the United States did not receive a final imprimatur from the United Nations.⁴

The second ideological framework that has successfully mobilized Anthropologists to conduct military work came out of World War II and the general belief that this was a "just war". It was also a war in which the primary opponent, Nazi Germany, held an ideological position that was directly opposed to that of American Anthropology. As David Price notes:⁵

¹ McFate, *op. cit.* page 28

² David Price, Lessons from Second World War anthropology, *Anthropology Today*, Vol 18(3), June 2002

³ Bronislaw Malinowski, Practical Anthropology, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January, 1929) pp. 22-38

⁴ While there are many different views on the efficacy of the United Nations, few would deny that, if nothing else, it is the primary venue for achieving an international moral justification for inter-state actions.

⁵ David Price, 2002, *op. cit.*, page 15

Because American Anthropology's most significant scientific and political contribution during the first half of the 20th century was the development of the Boasian critique of the concept of race, many American anthropologists found the Nazis to be an enemy of the core principles of anthropology.

The situation in World War II presented a unique combination of factors – a “just war” and an opponent who also opposed some of the core tenets of American Anthropology. While this is not the place to detail the contributions of Anthropologists in World War II, suffice it to say that by 1943, over 60% of Anthropology Ph.D.s in the United States were employed in positions directly relating to the war effort including DoD and the OSS.¹

While there certainly has been an attempt to make a symbolic equation² between OIF and World War II by many members of the US Administration, notably by ex-Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and both President Bush and Vice-President Cheney, this has not been generally accepted.³ Indeed, the use of this rhetoric may well have backfired causing an increasing discontent with the Coalition presence in Iraq and shifting the public debate from the effects of a pull-out on the Global War on Terror, to one of “we should / shouldn’t have started it” which is more reminiscent of Vietnam than World War II.

The symbolic equation between OIF and Vietnam is especially important for many Anthropologists. In the post-World War II era, a significant proportion of Anthropological research was subtly guided by government agencies, primarily by the selective use of funding, a situation that led to increasing concern within the discipline.⁴ This concern spilled out into the open as a result of two Vietnam era scandals: Project Camelot and the Thai Scandal, both of which implicated Anthropologists as being complicit in ethically questionable activities.⁵ These two scandals, combined with a growing unease over sources of funding and a growing anti-war protest movement led the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to a position of banning “secret research” in 1971.

While the specific restrictions, as listed in the AAA Code of Ethics, have loosened somewhat since the 1971 ban⁶ the disciplinary cultural reactions have, if anything, increased. Price⁷ notes an interesting example of this from 1996:

The sensitivity of even discussing past links between anthropologists and the intelligence community can be seen in the brouhaha that erupted after archaeologist Anna Roosevelt noted in passing that the American archaeologists and cultural anthropologists working in South America in the post-war era 'first fanned out in Latin America, often with close ties to the US government and its foreign policies, through the OSS (later to become the CIA) and the State Department... For this simple observation, Roosevelt became the target of a vitriolic protest letter denouncing her statements as 'not only highly irresponsible, but also dangerous', published in the official

¹ For detailed discussions of the role of Anthropologists in World War II, see George W. Stocking, ‘Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Toward a History of the Interwar Period’, in G.W. Stocking (ed.) *Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist*, pp. 1–54. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1976; Robert F. Murphy, ‘Introduction: A Quarter Century of American Anthropology’, in R. Murphy (ed.) *Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist*, pp. 1–22. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1976; and David Price, 2002 *op. cit.*

² The term “symbolic equation” refers to the creation of a perceptual analogy between one symbol and another symbol such that the second symbol takes on the emotional connotations of the first symbol.

³ See, for example, Ricks *Fiasco*.

⁴ See David Price, *Subtle Means and Enticing Carrots*, *Critique of Anthropology*, 23(4): 373-401, 2003

⁵ See McFate, 2005 *op. cit.* pp 35-37.

⁶ See David Price, *Anthropologists as Spies*, *The Nation*, November 20th, 2000 available at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20001120/price>

⁷ David Price, *Interloperas and Invited Guests*, *Anthropology Today*, 18(6) December, 2002 page 17

organ of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), and bearing the signatures of 188 prominent archaeologists.

The important point from this is that the culture of Anthropology has, at least in the recent past, conflated all relationships with the military into the singular relationship of "spying". Even before McFate published her article in 2005, the issue of spying had entered the public discourse. The event that brought the issue to a head was the creation of the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP)¹ and the Intelligence Community Scholars Program (ICSP) in December, 2003. While an original version of PRISP had been supported by University of Kansas Anthropologist Felix Moos, a quick, and highly negative reaction, was soon posted on the American Anthropological Associations' web site entitled "Spies in our Midst" authored by Hugh Gusterson and David Price.² The crux of their objections to these programs is quite obviously spying.

PRISP and ICSP use current fears to turn back the clock on these developments, reestablishing a beachhead of government secrecy in the academy. Such conditions of secrecy stand to undermine the quality of academic knowledge and intelligence produced because they preclude honest debate. We are particularly concerned that while universities seek to inculcate honesty among students, many PRISP and ICSP students will be expected to concoct fraudulent narratives about themselves, systematically deceiving faculty and fellow students about commitments their sponsors want kept secret. While we have little control over the secretive actions of others, as anthropologists we need to be open and clear about who we are, who we work for, and what is to be done with our research. Any involvement or passive support of PRISP undermines the reputation of anthropology in the US and abroad, for if anthropology becomes indirectly tied, no matter how involuntarily, to US foreign policy decisions through the training of intelligence agents, it could put some anthropologists and those with whom we work in danger.

There are two points I want to highlight. First, consider the following sentence "While we have little control over the secretive actions of others, as anthropologists we need to be open and clear about who we are, who we work for, and what is to be done with our research." This clearly hearkens back to Boas' 1919 differentiation of "Scientist" ("pure") vs. "non-Scientist" ("impure") an "us-them" dichotomy. McFate (2005:36-37), in discussing the status of the "secret", notes that

As a result of Project Camelot and the Thai scandal, government funding and use of social science research became suspect. Anthropologists feared that, were such research to continue, the indigenous people they studied would assume they were all spies, closing off future field opportunities abroad. Many anthropologists also believed the information would be used to control, enslave, and even annihilate many of the communities studied. The result of these debates is the determination that for anthropologists to give secret briefings is ethically unacceptable. The AAA's current "Statement of Professional Responsibility" says: "Anthropologists should undertake no secret research or any research whose results cannot be freely derived and publicly reported. . . . No secret research, no secret reports or debriefings of any kind should be agreed to or given." These guidelines reflect a widespread view among anthropologists that any research undertaken for the military is de facto evil and ethically unacceptable.

Where the dichotomy constructed by Gusterson and Price becomes operational is in the next sentence – "Any involvement or passive support of PRISP undermines the reputation of anthropology", therefore anyone who does not speak out against PRISP is committing the professional "crime" of

¹ For information on PRISP, see <http://www.intelligence.gov/0-prisp.shtml> , <http://www.aaanet.org/press/an/infocus/prisp/nuti-faqs.htm> ,

² Available at <http://www.aaanet.org/press/an/infocus/prisp/gusterson.htm>

“undermining the reputation of Anthropology”. Obviously, anyone who does this cannot be one of “us” by their own choice and actions, since these actions “...could put some anthropologists and those with whom we work in danger.”

While the Gustafson and Price article is clearly a “civilized” warning to the community of Anthropologists it draws a not too subtle line in the sand. By using a rhetoric of “you are with us or against us”, they are clearly attempting to establish the parameters of any debate in the discipline where the “discussion” takes place only in questions of how extreme the penalty for supporting “them” should be.

This is beautifully exemplified in the reactions by the general community of Anthropologists in North America to McFates (2005) article taking place on the *Savage Minds* blog.¹ For example, posting on *Savage Minds*, Jack McBride² says

In response to McFate’s article I must preface that I am quite familiar with her work and her own personal former ethical delimitations in their presentation. She for instance refused to publish her doctoral thesis from Yale on Military Insurgency in Northern Ireland for fear that it would be used to destroy the IRA, having been allowed into their covert world, as an observer and a supposed sympathizer. She was torn as to what end the information she had gathered would be used. I am disheartened to see that for her the cost is simply that, how much she is willing to be paid to “spy” for the military. Something that she does and has done often in her personal life, having been previously employed as a corporate spy. Curious times indeed. Sad to see when your friends turn into neo cons over night for a pay check. [spelling errors in original]

Continuing the rhetorical vector of exclusion, Boas' comments about prostituting science have increasingly come to be applied to any research that does not support the “rights” of the “politically oppressed”. The degree to which the moral value of Anthropology as a search for “truth” has shifted into Anthropology as the “defender of the oppressed” is evident in some of the other reaction to McFate’s (2005) article. One clear illustration of this is a comment made by Paul McDowell in the *Savage Minds* comments section³:

As damnable as McFate’s compromise with the military is, it seems to me that there is an even more insidious ethics compromise among practicing anthropologists: working for multinational corporations. Like the government and its military, corporations don’t care a rat’s posterior about the so-called target population studied by anthropologists on the behalf of their corporate patron.

Outside of the personal slanders, one of the things I find most interesting about this comment is that it actually doesn’t address any issues raised in the McFate article. Since McFate’s work was with the IRA and her article talks about dealing with Iraq, I fail to see how the issue of “spying” comes up unless the term “spying” has been warped to include having anything to do with the military or intelligence communities. Indeed, McFate (2005:37) states that:

Successful counterinsurgency depends on attaining a holistic, total understanding of local culture. This cultural understanding must be thorough and deep if it is to have any practical benefit at all. This fact is not lost on the Army. In the language of interim FM 3–07.22: “The center of gravity in counterinsurgency operations is the population. Therefore, understanding the

¹ Available at <http://savage minds.org/2005/05/19/anthropologists-as-counter-insurgents>

² <http://savage minds.org/2005/05/19/anthropologists-as-counter-insurgents/#comment-318> Posted June 16th, 2005.

³ <http://savage minds.org/2005/05/19/anthropologists-as-counter-insurgents/#comment-1063> Posted August 4th, 2005.

local society and gaining its support is critical to success. For U.S. forces to operate effectively among a local population and gain and maintain their support, it is important to develop a thorough understanding of the society and its culture, including its history, tribal/ family/social structure, values, religions, customs, and needs.”

Nowhere do I see her advocating using Anthropologists or Archaeologists as spies in the sense used by Boas. Rather, it appears to me that her desire is to see Anthropological *analytic* techniques and understandings applied to the counter-insurgency operations. Despite this, the debate, at least in the public forums, seems to have been clearly established as dealing with how far to go in cutting off a “heretic” and open, above board, examinations of the merits, and dangers, of Anthropologists operating with the Military and Intelligence communities languishes covered in a shroud of moral rectitude.

AAA RESOLUTIONS AGAINST THE WAR IN IRAQ

On November 18th, 2006 two resolutions were passed at the business meeting of the AAA. As Price notes:

The first resolution condemns the American occupation of Iraq; calls for an immediate withdrawal of troops, the payment of reparations, and it asks that all individuals committing war crimes against Iraqis be prosecuted. This statement passed with little debate or dissent.

The second resolution condemns not only the use of torture by the Bush administration, but it denounces the use of anthropological knowledge in torture and extreme interrogations.... One of the concerns underlying this resolution comes from reports by Seymour Hersh that CIA interrogators consulted anthropological works such as Raphael Patai's book, *The Arab Mind*, to better design culture-specific means of torture and interrogation. This resolution passed unanimously with little debate.¹

The first resolution appears to have generated little debate either at the business meeting or online <http://jimcassidy.ca/moodle/mod/forum/post.php?delete=269>. The second, however, has generated quite a storm online and has brought out the equation between the military, spying and, now, “torture” to a head over the question of the “misuse” of Anthropological knowledge. Gerald Sider, a professor emeritus at CUNY, described the intent of the second motion as

We're trying to do something against mealy-mouthed policies that don't hold responsible those scum with Ph.D.'s who stand beside torturers²

The addition of “torture” to the symbolic equation was also mentioned by Price when he noted that

Obviously each of these motions will likely have no direct impact on the Bush Administration, Congress, rogue anthropologists, or CIA contract torturers, but the events of Saturday's meeting do represent a noteworthy democratic moment in the history of American anthropology and in higher academia's struggle to retain some control over the knowledge it produces.³

¹ David H. Price *American Anthropologists Stand Up against Torture and the Occupation of Iraq*. Counterpunch, November 20th, 2006 available at <http://www.counterpunch.com/price11202006.html>

² *Torture and Social Scientists*, Inside Higher Ed, November 22nd, 2006 available at <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/11/22/anthro>

³ David H. Price *American Anthropologists Stand Up against Torture and the Occupation of Iraq*. Counterpunch, November 20th, 2006 available at <http://www.counterpunch.com/price11202006.html>

Of equal, albeit less acrimonious, interest is what may be the start of a backlash against this rhetoric. In some of the debate on Savage Minds following the resolutions, Ed Liebow made some interesting observations. First, in speaking of the general “feel” of the business meeting, Liebow notes that

My own sense, however, is that had anyone had the temerity to point out that the sweeping generalizations in the language of the two resolutions actually serves to undermine the Association’s credibility, they would have been shouted down by the “coercive harmony” (to use the phrase David Price borrows from Laura Nader) of angry activists wanting to turn back the clock to the glory days of campus protests.¹

Liebow also notes several substantive issues with the resolutions.

We also simultaneously called for the withdrawal of all US troops and the establishment of a UN peace-keeping force – that I guess would have to limp along without the US since its troops are to be withdrawn.

I find such high-temperature rhetoric to be self-defeating, as it undermines the Association’s credibility and allows its intended audience to discount a deeply felt and widely held sense of the Association.²

Similar concerns, although of a broader scope, were expressed by Riall W. Nolan, Dean of International Programs at Purdue in response to *Torture and Social Science* posted on *Inside HigherEd.com*

I’m wholeheartedly against the notion of anthropologists getting involved with torture, and I’m glad folks in the AAA finally spoke up. But the wider question, not yet addressed, is what role anthropology should or could play in matters of national security....

My worry is that anthropology may have become too self-marginalized as a discipline, increasingly irrelevant to the big questions of the day in our world, content to snipe from the sidelines as soon as it seems safe.

But we actually have a great deal to contribute to a national debate on the morality of our current conduct around the world, and on the question of how to use our disciplinary insights to move us beyond the “us and them” paradigm that’s currently fashionable in Washington.

It would be nice if anthropologists could be among those leading this discussion, rather than merely following it at a safe distance.³

The reverberations within American Anthropology of these two motions will continue for, at a minimum, the next sixth months as the AAA must now send out paper ballots to all members for ratification. Nor is it likely to end there, as both the national debate over the Coalition presence in Iraq and the disciplinary debate over any association with the military will, in all probability, intensify.

CONCLUSIONS

... unfortunately, anthropologists, whose assistance is urgently needed in time of war, entirely neglect U.S. forces. Despite the fact that military applications of cultural knowledge might be distasteful to ethically inclined anthropologists, their assistance is necessary.¹

¹ Ed Liebow, comment on AAA *Democracy*, available at <http://savageminds.org/2006/11/20/aaa-democracy/#comment-40686>

² *ibid*

³ *Op. cit.*

McFate's conclusion, quoted above, is in many ways incorrect: American Anthropology has not neglected the US military, it has condemned it. This condemnation does not arise out of a reasoned analysis of the issues surrounding any individual conflict but, rather, out of an extreme distaste for the military and the lack of a clear ideological justification for Operation Iraqi Freedom that has spilled over into any operation in the Global War on Terror. It is interesting to note that all of the condemnation centers on operations in Iraq rather than operations in Afghanistan where there was some semblance of an ideological justification via the UN.

The roots of this "extreme distaste for the military" are quite deep in the modern discipline, going back to the end of World War I, and reinforced during both the Cold War and Vietnam. American Anthropology, as a discipline, does not trust either the military or the intelligence community.

Certainly for the present and immediate future, it appears that the more vocal members of the discipline prefer the use of highly polarized rhetoric to a reasoned analysis and debate. As Nolan commented,

It would be nice if anthropologists could be among those leading this discussion, rather than merely following it at a safe distance.²

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¹ McFate, 2005 *op. cit.*

² *Op. cit.*