

# Lessons from Second World War anthropology

## Peripheral, persuasive and ignored contributions

### DAVID PRICE

David Price is Associate Professor of Anthropology, St. Martin's College, Lacey, Washington, USA. A forthcoming essay examines some of the ways in which anthropological interactions with military and intelligence agencies in the Cold War became increasingly complicated and ignored. His email is [dprice@stmartin.edu](mailto:dprice@stmartin.edu).

I am grateful for comments from numerous anonymous AT referees.

1. For more on anthropology and warfare see: Bereman 1981, Goldschmidt 1979, Leighton 1949, Mabee 1987, Nader 1997a and 1997b, Ross 1999, Stocking 1976, Wakin 1992.

2. Boas was censured in 1919 not because the facts of his accusation were inaccurate – indeed contemporary research indicates the accuracy of his claim – but because the AAA disapproved of his position that there was something inherently wrong with anthropologists using their professional positions as a front for espionage (Price 2000, 2001).

3. During World War I Durkheim wrote propaganda pamphlets, Weber served as an officer in the German Army Reserve Corps, Westermarck considered and then declined espionage work, Veblen was a government analyst until he was fired for his support of the IWW. Others were affected in other ways, for example W.H.R. Rivers spent the war treating shell-shocked soldiers in British hospitals, Fritz Graebner was interned in Australia, while the war experiences of anthropologists such as Ralph Linton and Leslie White influenced their theoretical views of culture and the field of anthropology.

4. In analysing German anthropology during the war, Alfred Métraux referred to such strategies of passive resistance as 'playing possum' (Métraux 1948:717).

5. Proctor in fact establishes that 'The number of faculty in the fields of anthropology and prehistory at German universities increased from 150 in 1931 to 177 in 1940-41 – which contrasts, for example with the case of physics, which declined from 454 to 380, or medicine, which dropped from 3,303 to 2,362 over the same period' (Proctor 1988:166). For a list of German anthropologist members of the Nazi Party see

Anthropologists were largely called upon to contribute their specialized knowledge to the war effort. The nature of the contacts they had established with native peoples the world over and the methods they had developed for understanding varied modes of life permitted them to give realistic aid to intelligence units, or to those carrying on economic and psychological warfare and to advise concerning many types of postwar programs of rehabilitation.

'Anthropology 1944'  
*Britannica Book of the Year 1944*

The well established links between anthropologists and colonialism documented in the work of scholars like Talal Asad, Kathleen Gough, Dell Hymes, Adam Kuper and George Stocking stand in marked contrast with the sparse analysis of anthropological contributions to the wars of the 20th century. The latter reflects certain professional concerns of ethics, historically inevitable blind spots associated with the analysis of recent events, and the problems arising from critical evaluation of the actions of living and recently deceased anthropological elders.

While some anthropologists and historians have discussed various aspects of anthropological contributions to warfare, these periodic examinations tend to focus more on the specifics of particular military or intelligence campaigns, while the larger issues embedded in anthropological contributions to warfare are often downplayed.<sup>1</sup> But downplayed or not, these contributions raise serious questions concerning the ethical implications of using cultural knowledge and anthropological knowledge in the waging of war, and reveal fundamental symbiotic links between scholars and state.

Twentieth-century anthropologists applied their knowledge and ethnographic skills to warfare on many occasions, fighting with both books and guns. Such uses of anthropology in the past have been problematic, and the possibility of similar actions today raises a number of complex ethical and practical issues – issues that cannot be properly addressed until anthropologists confront the nature and scope of past anthropological contributions to warfare. America's sudden declaration of 'war on terror' finds most anthropologists with little understanding of the ways that anthropologists opposed or contributed to the wars of the last century. This article briefly describes the nature and scope of anthropological contributions to the Second World War in order to provide some critical historical basis for evaluating the meaning and dangers of current and future military-intelligence uses of anthropology. The applications of anthropology in Asia, Europe and the Americas during World War II raised fundamental ethical issues and led to a variety of intended and unintended outcomes. The discussion below describes some of the ways that anthropological analysis was used and ignored by the military, and how some of the most effective anthropological contributions to the war were directed not against foreign foes, but at the practices of military policy makers.

The decisions and actions of anthropologists during

World War II and other past wars must be viewed in the historical context of their times. The international anthropological community needs to be aware of past anthropological contributions to war, and we need to critically evaluate these past activities not in order to criticize past anthropologists, but to help provide a framework for coping with present and future pressures for anthropologists to contribute to military and intelligence operations. While past wartime anthropological decisions may be seen as appropriate for their times, the context of contemporary wars raises many more complex and problematic issues.

### WWII: Anthropological warfare comes of age

The First World War brought a significant anthropological showdown, with implications for the wars that followed. This was the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) censure of Franz Boas after he criticized four anthropologists who had used their professional positions

as covers for espionage in Central America (Stocking 1968). To this day a general discomfort and ambivalence remains among AAA policy bodies concerning the merging of anthropology, espionage, covert research and warfare.<sup>2</sup> While a number of anthropologists and sociologists applied their skills in support of the First World War,<sup>3</sup> it was the Second World War that brought the widespread application of anthropology to the practice of warfare.

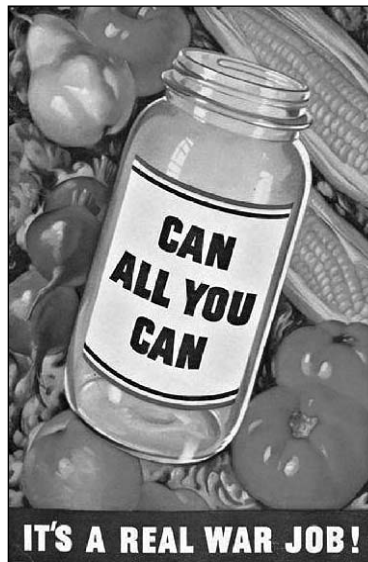
As the Second World War engulfed the world in a state of total war, motivations of nationalism, internationalism, racial supremacy and anti-totalitarianism led a variety of anthropologists into battle both as citizens and citizen-as-anthropologist-soldiers. In this war social scientists

were harnessed at new levels as analysts, propagandists, foot soldiers, officers and spies. They directed their efforts at populations both within and outside the boundaries of their nations.

The links between German anthropologists and the Nazi regime remain contested. After the war, some German anthropologists maintained that they had resisted contributing to Nazi goals. For example, in 1946 Franz Termer argued that during the war many German anthropologists had recognized that German anthropology

...was in danger of becoming a servant of colonial propaganda. The wisest among us saw the danger and protected themselves against it. They did their best to have museums and research overlooked as otherwise might not have been the case. (Termer, quoted in Métraux 1948:717)<sup>4</sup>

Robert Proctor's work on Nazi anthropology finds that 'anthropology as a profession fared rather well under the Nazis', and points out that there were few German anthropologists who opposed the officially sanctioned views of racial science (Proctor 1988:166).<sup>5</sup> With the exception of isolated individuals such as Karl Saller, few wartime German anthropologists opposed Nazi views of race and anthropology, and Proctor found 'disturbingly little evidence that anthropologists resisted the expulsion of Jews





Earnest A. Hooton (1887-1945)

Proctor 1988:158.

6. Hooton's FBI file records an interesting internal FBI memo in which FBI agent L.B. Nichols ridiculed Hooton for stating in a *Washington Daily News* interview dated 21 July 1943 that the US government should establish a centralized human breeding bureau that would determine which Americans should be allowed to breed and which should be sterilized (FBI WFO 62-73410).

7. Anthropologists serving in the OSS included: E. Wyllys Andrews IV, William Bascom, Gregory Bateson, Lloyd Cabot Briggs, Carleton Coon, Cora DuBois, Anne Fuller, Nelson Glueck, Gordon Hewes, Frederick Hulse, Felix Keesing, Alexander Lesser, Edwin Loeb, Alfred Métraux, George Murdock, David Rodrick, Morris Siegel, Richard Starr, David Stout and Morris Swadesh.

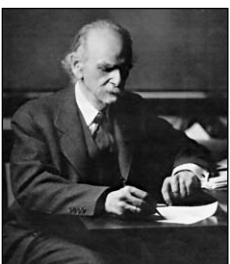
8. Taylor was hand-picked by Paul Linebarger to direct all operations in Asia: Paul Linebarger was a Johns Hopkins-trained political scientist who, at war's end, drew upon his experiences at OWI to write the book on what he termed 'psychological warfare' and to work covertly with the CIA (see Linebarger's 1948

*Psychological warfare*, Washington, DC: Infantry Press). Later Linebarger, publishing under the pen-name of Cordwainer Smith, became one of the most influential writers of science fiction's golden age.

9. David Price interview with George Taylor conducted 17 July 1996, Seattle, Washington.

10. The analysis of some contemporary scholars, however, suggests that the impact of American anthropologists on wartime and post-war Japan have been somewhat overstated (see Janssens 1995 and 1999, Neiburg and Goldman 1998).

Franz Boas (1858-1942)



from Germany' (Proctor 1988:164). As Michael Burleigh's study of the German Ostforscher's contributions to the Nazi campaigns established,

No one asked these scholars to put their knowledge at the service of the government: they did so willingly and enthusiastically... Deportations, resettlements, repatriations and mass murder were not sudden visitations from on high, requiring the adoption of some commensurate inscrutable, quasi-religious meta-language, but the result of the exact, modern, 'scientific' encompassing of persons with card indexes, card-sorting machines, charts, graphs, maps and diagrams. (Burleigh 1988:8)

In post-war Germany there was a rethinking of such science in the service of war. In 1950 W.E. Muhlmann 'cautioned against the use of anthropology by "the total state" for political purposes' – a concern that reaches beyond the circumstances of WWII Germany to all states engaged in struggles of total war (Proctor 1988:169).

There were also non-German anthropologists promoting racial hierarchies or eugenics that were aligned with Nazi views. Some continental and American anthropologists' support of eugenics and resistance to adapting a Boasian view of race can be seen within this continuum. E.A. Hooton went so far as to suggest that a national breeding bureau be established to determine who should reproduce with whom.<sup>6</sup> George H.L.F. Pitt-Rivers (grandson of General A.H.L.F. Pitt-Rivers) espoused pro-Nazi racial views and was 'held as a political prisoner by the [British] Home Office' during the war (Barkan 1988:193).

Numerous European scholars sought refuge from the war in the United States and elsewhere. In New York, the New School in Exile (founded by Columbia University professors who resigned in WWI after being censured by Columbia University's president for their pacifist opposition to America's entry into World War I) provided a haven for scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Karl Wittfogel. Some anthropologists were identified by name by the Nazis for apprehension and execution. Because of his Communist links and his explicit denunciations of Nazi Aryan racial myths, V. Gordon Childe was listed on Nazi apprehension manifests (Peace 1995).

Some European anthropologists applied their field skills in foreign lands to the needs of the war. In 1940 Evans-Pritchard joined the British Army's campaigns in Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya (Cyrenacia), where he combined military service with ethnography among the Sanusi. S.F. Nadel joined the Sudan Defence Force, then served in the British Army's East African Command in Eritrea and ended the war as a 'senior staff officer to the military government of Tripolitania' (Feilich 1968:2). Though there are many examples of such wartime applications of anthropology by Europeans, the United States saw an even more extensive application of anthropology as a weapon during the Second World War.

### American anthropology enters the war

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. For many anthropologists, any second thoughts concerning the ethics of using anthropology as cover for espionage were fleeting. Some anthropologists had experiences similar to those of Jack Harris, who went to West Africa with William Bascom under the cover of conducting anthropological research while actually gathering intelligence for the CIA's institutional predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). As Harris later noted, he did this with some reservations,

because during my days at Columbia I was told by associates of Boas that he violently opposed using our scientific reputation as a cover for intelligence activities in war. He based this on an incident in which a student of his had been involved in World War One.

However, our feelings were so strong, I felt that whatever capabilities I could lend to the war effort in this war against infamy, I was pleased to do so. (Edelman 1997:10)

This passage articulates the motivations of a heroic individual during a wartime crisis. Harris realized that the Nazis needed to be stopped. He also had some understanding that Boas had opposed using science as a cover for espionage. But the specifics of Boas' complaint, and the penalties resulting from his objections, do not seem to have been well understood or considered, especially in the face of the Nazis' overbearing threat to humanity. American anthropology's 1919 avoidance of confronting

the inherent problems of espionage in wartime eased the way for anthropologists to use fieldwork as cover for spying during this 'good war' that enjoyed widespread public support. American anthropology later revisited these issues during the 'bad wars' of Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 70s, but it has avoided more general considerations of the advisability or propriety of anthropological contributions to warfare. In any case, such considerations were pushed aside as new wartime military and intelligence agencies came into existence during the latter half of 1942. American anthropologists joined these agencies in increasing numbers, though initially there was some discussion concerning the propriety of committing the field and its organiza-

tions to the war effort (Patterson 2001).

### American wartime anthropology applications

Like other citizens, many American anthropologists enlisted in military and intelligence work out of a sense of patriotic duty combined with a belief that military action was the only way to stop the spread of Nazism, fascism and colonial militarism in Asia. That anthropology should be used to fight such a total war was a natural response for most anthropologists of this period.

Some American anthropologists were reluctant to use anthropology, or their professional associations, as instruments of war. Fred Eggan reported that in late 1941 some members of the AAA had unsuccessfully tried to use the Association to organize support for the war effort.

During this meeting, however, the council declined to set up a national committee on the use of anthropologists in World War II, which four members in Seattle had recommended, saying that centralization and government backing might lead many members to think the Association was an agent for propaganda (US National Anthropological Archives, Eggan to Ray, 25 January 1942).

But such reservations were easily overcome. Despite



to relate that Dr. MEAD is very highly educated, bears a most excellent reputation, is very well thought of by her associates, and bears an enviable reputation as an anthropologist. Dr. MEAD is very much alert and interested in everything that goes on but is not politically minded in connection with political parties and has never expressed any political views to her knowledge. [redacted] highly recommends Dr. MEAD as being a fine anthropologist and would not hesitate to say that she is a loyal and patriotic American and would do well at any task she undertook to accomplish. [redacted] volunteered the information that she is sure that Dr. MEAD belongs to no subversive organizations.

[redacted] Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, 2101 Constitution Avenue, with which division Dr. MEAD is associated, stated that Dr. MEAD has been employed by the National Research Council since February, 1942 as an anthropologist at a salary of \$6,000.00 per annum and that at the present time she is in England lecturing under the auspices of the Office of War Information, her expenses being paid by that organization. She states that Dr. MEAD is of good character, bears an excellent reputation as a scientist, is a splendid speaker and lecturer, well-educated, and makes a good impression. She is well-liked, loyal, and patriotic. Dr. MEAD spent some time in Samoa making first-hand comparative observations of the food situation there. Her book "Coming of Age in Samoa" is widely read. She further added that Dr. MEAD is a prolific writer, having written many books and articles which are widely published and read, one of her more recent books being "And Keep Your Powder Dry," dealing with American culture and background. [redacted] went on to say that Dr. MEAD is executive secretary of the Committee on Food Habits of the National Research Council and as such has been called upon frequently in connection with food problems in this country. She describes Dr. MEAD as a very capable and brilliant scientist with a well-established reputation as an anthropologist, and recommends Dr. MEAD very highly.

[redacted] advised that she has known Dr. MEAD since 1920 [redacted] who was acquainted with Dr. MEAD and that she has known her personally since Dr. MEAD came to Washington [redacted]

[redacted] She advised that Dr. MEAD is a very brilliant woman, having written many books, some of which she herself has read. She stated that Dr. MEAD is always very busy and sometimes is gone two and three weeks at a time in connection with her work. Her reputation and character are beyond question and she is very glad to have a person of Dr. MEAD'S calibre living in the apartment house. [redacted] stated that Dr. MEAD does not associate with anyone else in the building except her roommate, Miss BESSIE MCGREGOR, due to the fact that she is so busy and is only at the apartment long enough to rest. She recommends Dr. MEAD very highly as a loyal and patriotic American.



In 1998 the United States Postal Service issued a stamp commemorating Margaret Mead as part of the Celebrate the Century Collection for the 1920 series. Below: Ruth Benedict.



war some American anthropologists were extremely critical of anthropology's neo-colonialist role in the domination of the underdeveloped world, and questioned the ethical propriety of employing anthropology as a weapon against other cultures. Before the war Melville Herskovits recognized that when anthropologists used knowledge gained from fieldwork *against* peoples studied, unique ethical issues were raised. He wrote:

Though as any other scientist, [the anthropologist] must repay his debt to his own society, he can not forget what he owes to the primitive peoples who give him the information without which his discipline could not exist. And in this, his situation is unique. The subject matter of the ethnologist is the human being; to obtain his data he must make friends of the primitives he studies, and only to the extent that he does gain their confidence will his research be of value. Yet often he belongs to a political entity which has taken away the right of self-direction from the very people he is studying. (Herskovits 1936:217)

While the Second World War found American anthropologists working to oppose these rights 'of self-direction' and working against the proclaimed interests of cultures that had hosted them and their research, these issues were rarely framed in this way. Some anthropologists, like Laura Thompson, raised questions regarding the legitimacy of wartime anthropology for the 'highest bidder', while John Embree and others questioned the methods and reliability of military anthropology (see Embree 1945, Stocking 1976). But during the war, these objections were mostly ignored.

### American anthropology brings the war back home

In 1942 United States military social scientists determined that most American soldiers didn't even seem to know who they were fighting, much less why – though this seemed to matter little as most American soldiers were willing to fight without specific clarifications. New techniques of quantitative social sciences were devoted to studying the knowledge and attitudes of the American military and public.

When soldiers were surveyed with open-ended questions about the war's aim, an astonishing 36 percent chose not to answer at all and only a handful ever mentioned fighting fascism or defending democracy. According to the Research Branch studies, the number of men who viewed the war 'from a consistent and favorable intellectual position' was somewhere between 10 and 20 percent. 'Why we are fighting the war' was typically on the bottom of the list of things that soldiers wanted the Army to teach them. In dismay, [Samuel] Stouffer concluded that 'the war was without a context... simply a vast detour made from the main course of life... It may be said that except for a very limited number of men, little feeling of personal commitment to the war emerged.' (Herman 1995:69-70).

W. Lloyd Warner studied the impact of World War II on a Midwestern conservative town, where he discovered that small American communities were frightened by the war, yet were invigorated by the intense social solidarity that

some members' reservations, the Association later passed a resolution placing 'itself and its resources and the specialized skills and knowledge of its members at the disposal of the country for the successful prosecution of the war' (Patterson 2001:96).

The war led to the cancellation of the 1942 annual meeting of the AAA, but a cluster of some 50 anthropologists conducting military and intelligence work near Washington, DC, met as a less-than-official representation of the Association and discussed developments and anthropological contributions to the war. AAA Secretary Fred Eggan reported to the American Association for the Advancement of Science that by 1943,

Over one half of the professional anthropologists in this country are directly concerned in the war effort, and most of the rest are doing part-time war work. The comprehensive knowledge of the peoples and cultures of the world which anthropologists have gathered through field research has proved of great value to both the Army and the Navy, and to the various war agencies. The Association has cooperated in setting up the Ethnogeographic Board, the Committees on the Anthropology of Oceania and Africa and the Committee for Latin American Studies. (Eggan 1943)

Later that year the AAA created a 'Committee on Anthropology and the War Effort', with anthropologists Ralph Beals (chairman), Margaret Mead and David Mandelbaum leading the coordination of anthropological warfare at home and abroad (Frantz 1973).

As the majority of American anthropologists joined the war effort, a minority – some vocal, some silent – were troubled by the implications of these applications of anthropological methods and the use of bogus research fronts for warfare. The records of these dissenting views run counter to the common misconception that 'it was only after World War II that a few anthropologists seemed to become conscious of their real [ethical] responsibilities and this led gradually to a more general change of attitude' (Condominas 1979:189). In fact, before and during the

A portion of Margaret Mead's WWII-era loyalty background investigation conducted by the FBI. Mead's FBI file spans the years from 1941 until her death in 1978 and is 992 pages in length.

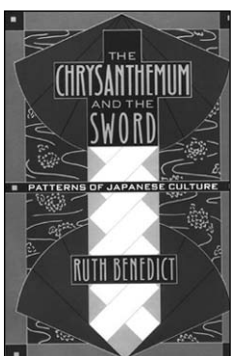
Asad, T. (ed.) 1973. *Anthropology and the colonial encounter*. London: Ithaca Press.

Barkan, E. 1988. Mobilizing scientists against Nazi racism, 1933-1939. In G.W. Stocking (ed.) *History of Anthropology*, Vol. 5, p. 193. University of Wisconsin Press.

Benedict, R. 1946. *The chrysanthemum and the sword*. New York: C.E. Tuttle, Co.

Bereman, G.D. 1981. *The politics of truth*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers.

Burleigh, M. 1988. *Germany turns eastwards*. Cambridge



Coon, Carleton Stevens  
NAME

Major 0925129 AUS  
RANK ASH BRANCH  
490 7-17-43

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF RANK 7-17-43

REG. NO. Wash. ASGD TO: 50

REMARKS:  
39 June 23, 1904  
AGE DATE OF BIRTH

Temp apt Major AUS per Ltr AG 201 Coon, Carleton Stevens (16 Jul 43)  
PR-A sub "Temporary Appointment" dtd 7-16-43. Ordered on AB with OSS  
Wash. DC per P 20 SO 198 WD dtd 7-17-43. Joined 7-17-43.  
Reid fr asgt & duty OSS Wash. DC & asgd to station outside cont lim  
of US, Cairo, Egypt. Will proc fr Wash. DC and/or NY and/or Miami,  
Fla to Cairo. per Ltr O AG 210.51 (31 Jul 43) PO-A subject "Movement  
Orders" dtd 6-7-43. Departed on DS 8-11-43.  
Fr DS Cario to duty 12-18-43  
Fr duty to sk lv o/a 12-19-43, 15 days, P 10 SO 290 Hq & Hq Det OSS  
dtd 12-18-43. Departed 12-19-43

Left: Carleton Coon's OSS duty assignment card.  
Right: OSS Director William 'Wild Bill' Donovan's letter requesting the assistance of the State Department in establishing a front for Carleton Coon's espionage work in North Africa.

accompanied the prospect of war (Warner 1949).

American anthropologists contributed to domestic propaganda programmes that kept the populace on a steady war footing. The inability of Americans to state why they were at war led to the creation of a variety of propaganda agencies to indoctrinate soldiers and the public about the evils of totalitarian governments. In fact,

Congress was rather touchy about making it widely known that the army was engaged in such explicit propaganda during a war directed against exactly such efforts, and only one of Frank Capra's [propaganda] films was ever shown to civilians, who also knew nothing of the military's other experiments in direct indoctrination. (Herman 1995:69-70)

Margaret Mead helped reshape American dietary habits for the wartime national Research Council's Committee on Food Habits (Mabee 1987). In 1943 Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish combated prevailing racist attitudes among US troops by drafting a pamphlet on race originally intended to be distributed by the US Army to officers and enlisted men. However, because the pamphlet clearly stated the scientific case against claims of racial superiority it was seen as too controversial, and the Army and the United Service Organization banned its distribution (see Price forthcoming).

While some American anthropologists aimed their war efforts at the American people, most applied their skills to fighting the war abroad, working for agencies like the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Ethnogeographic Board, the Office of War Information and the War Relocation Authority.

### American anthropology fighting the war abroad

Dozens of anthropologists worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the War.<sup>7</sup> These anthropologists undertook a variety of tasks ranging from policy analysis to covert missions in which they used their anthropological credentials as cover for clandestine operations.

In the early 1940s OSS agent Carleton Coon 'smuggled firearms and explosives to French resistance groups' and 'collected vital intelligence' in Morocco (Coon 1980:137-138). Coon brought his anthropological training to this task. When the OSS assigned him the task of compiling a 40-page text on Moroccan propaganda, he simply borrowed from his textbook *Principles of anthropology* and padded it with enough technical terms to make it ponderous and mysterious, since [he] had found out in the academic world that people will express much more awe and admiration for something complicated which they do not quite understand than for something simple and clear' (Coon 1980:12).

Other anthropologists were recruited by the

University Press.  
Condominas, G. 1979. Notes on the present-day state of anthropology in the Third World. In G. Huizer and B. Mannheim (eds) *The politics of anthropology*, p. 189. The Hague: Mouton.  
Coon, C. 1980. *A North Africa story: The anthropologist as OSS agent, 1941-1943*. Ipswich, MA: Gambit.  
Edelman, M. 1997. Anthropologist, secret agent, witch-hunt victim, entrepreneur: An interview with Jack Harris ('40). *Anthropowatch* 5:8-14.  
Eggan, F. 1943. [Report on] The American Anthropological Association's American Association for the Advancement of Science Bulletin 2(5):38.  
Embree, J.F. 1945. Applied anthropology and its relationship to anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 47: 635-637.  
Feilich, M. 1968. S.F. Nadel. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, pp. 1-3. New York: Crowell Collier.  
Fluehr-Lobban, C. 1994. Informed consent in anthropological research. *Human Organization* 53(1):1-10.  
Frantz, C. 1974. 'Structuring and restructuring of the American Anthropological Association'. Paper read at Annual Meeting of the AAA, 22 November 1974.  
Goldschmidt, W. (ed.) 1979. *The uses of anthropology*. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.  
Gough, K. 1968. Anthropology and imperialism. *Monthly Review* April: 12-27.  
Herman, E. 1995. *The romance of American psychology*. Berkeley: University of

April 10, 1942

Honorable C. Howland Shaw  
Assistant Secretary of State  
State Department  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Shaw:

In connection with the work of this office, we should appreciate the appointment of Dr. Carleton S. Coon of Sudbury, Massachusetts, as Special Assistant at the American Legation at Tangier.

In order to facilitate Dr. Coon's activities, it is requested that arrangements be made which will authorize the proper officials of the Legation to honor all salary, travel and other expense vouchers submitted by Dr. Coon.

His salary will be \$4800 and his per diem allowance is to be \$6 a day. This office will reimburse the State Department in accordance with Section V-45 of Foreign Service Regulations of the Department for all payments made by the Legation in his behalf.

We should appreciate it if you will notify the American Legation at Tangier about Dr. Coon's status and the approximate date of his arrival.

Very truly yours,  
William J. Donovan

FC:mc  
cc: Colonel Donovan  
Mr. Strom (State)  
Mr. Rehs

APPROVED DATE: JUL 2  
APPROVED FOR RELEASE DATE: JUL 2000  
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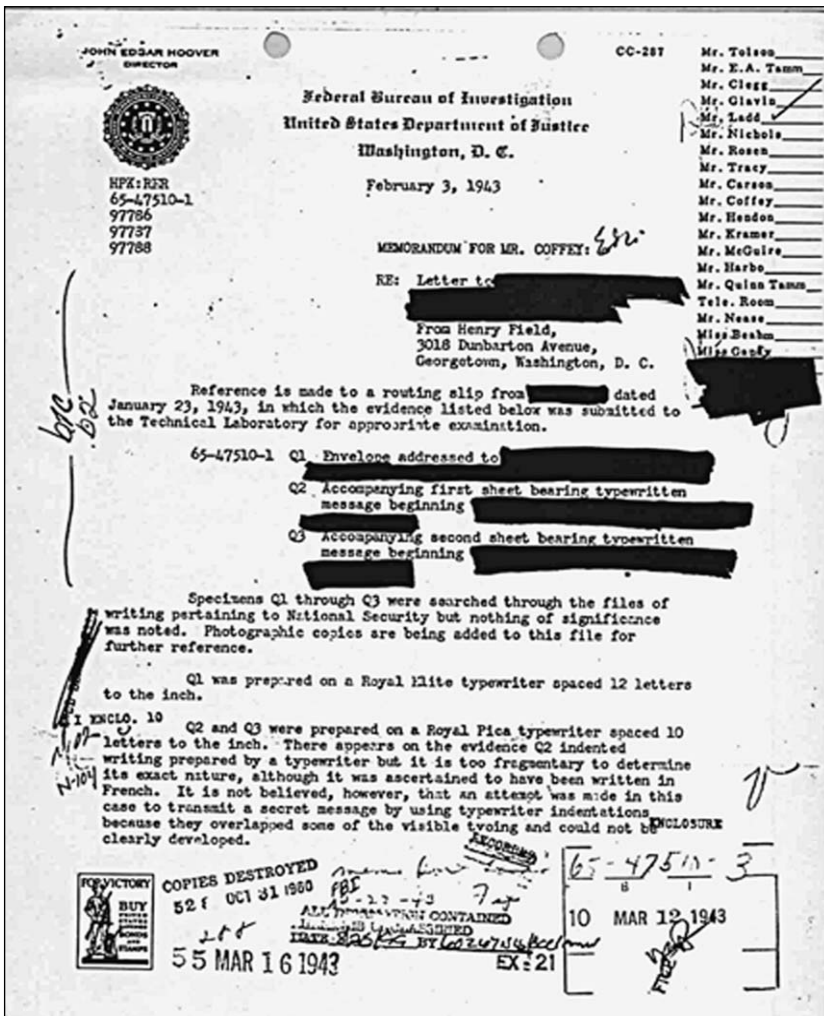
Ethnogeographic Board, a wartime think tank that pooled anthropologists, linguists, and cultural geographers to generate cultural information of relevance to anticipated theatres of war. As director, William Duncan Strong helped collect its braintrust of such diverse anthropologists as Elizabeth Bacon, Homer Barnett, Ralph Beals, Wendell Bennett, Henry Collins, William Fenton, Robert Hall, Melville Herskovits, Ray Kennedy, George Murdock, Frank Roberts and Douglas Whitaker.

There were dozens of other agencies that used anthropology in the war. These included the Office of Naval Intelligence, where some anthropologists like Richard Francis Strong Starr used their experiences as a stepping-stone for a post-war career transition to the newly created Central Intelligence Agency (*Anthropology News*, May 1994:45). At the Office of Economic Warfare anthropologists like Clellan Ford worked under the directorship of future CIA Assistant DCI Max Millikan (see Price 1998b). Others applied anthropology at agencies such as the Army Intelligence Division (Wesley Bliss), the Army Special Training Program (Mortimer Graves), Air Force Intelligence (Hallam Movius), or worked as presidential advisers on issues of racism and warfare (Philleo Nash).

### The Office of War Information: Fighting foreign and domestic foes

There are about two dozen World War II-era military and intelligence agencies that could be used to examine American anthropological applications during the war. This brief summary of some of the key dynamics and undertakings by anthropologists at the Office of War Information (OWI) is but one of many examples that sheds light on the uses and conflicts of anthropological wartime service.

My views on these issues have been textured by an ongoing examination of military and intelligence documents recording the actions of anthropologists working with various military agencies. Anthropological contributions to warfare have revealed repressed connections to our colonial and neocolonial roots, and these actions have also betrayed the very cultures studied by anthropologists.



A 1943 FBI memo detailing the FBI's investigation into anthropologist Henry Field's personal correspondence during WWII.

California Press.  
 Herskovits, M.J. 1936. Applied anthropology and the American anthropologist. *Science* 83:215-222.  
 Hymes, D. 1972. *Reinventing anthropology*. New York: Pantheon.  
 Janssens, R.V.A. 1995. 'What future for Japan?' U.S. wartime planning for the postwar era, 1942-1945. University of Amsterdam Monographs in American Studies No. 5.  
 Janssens, R.V.A. 1999. Toilet training, shame, and the influence of alien cultures'. In J. van Bremen and A. Shimizu (eds), *Anthropology and colonialism in Asia and Oceania*, pp. 285-304. London: Curzon.  
 Kuper, A. 1973. Anthropology and colonialism. In *Anthropology and anthropologists*. London: Allen Lane.  
 Leighton, A. 1949. *Human relations in a changing world*.

Left: Chiang Kai-Shek and General Joseph Stilwell.

Right: General Joseph Stilwell commemorative postage stamp.

But anthropological applications during World War II also found anthropologists fighting against their own government's policies, attitudes and strategies in support of principles of justice and peaceful stability that reached beyond nationalism. One of the most striking instances of this can be seen in the actions of anthropologists at OWI, where their most important work consisted of fighting attitudes of racial reductionism within the US War Department.

When I began studying the work of Ruth Benedict and other anthropologists at the OWI, my own views reflected the strong statements made by John Embree when he observed in 1945 that these culture and per-



sonality studies were largely comprised of 'The writings of the national character structure group [that had] been largely in the form of 'confidential' mimeographed pamphlets and so not subject to scientific criticisms; nonetheless their conclusions are presented to government agencies as the findings and methods of "anthropology"' (Embree 1945:635). While I remain critical of the validity of these culture and personality studies, I have come to see the efforts of anthropologists at OWI in a much more complex and sympathetic light.

Once America entered the war, the British historian of China George Taylor was appointed Deputy Director for the Far East at the OWI.<sup>8</sup> Because Taylor believed that an understanding of culture was vital to the success of his OWI team he recruited over a dozen anthropologists to work on his Japanese analysis and propaganda campaigns. He hired some thirty top-notch social scientists, including anthropologists Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn, Alexander Leighton, Dorothea C. Leighton, Alexander Lesser, Geoffrey Gorer, Ruth Benedict, Morris Opler, John Embree, Royal Hassrick, Fred Hulse and Kathrine Spencer (Leighton 1949).

Taylor directed his staff anthropologists to answer basic questions concerning the nature of Japanese national character, and to analyse the likely impact of various military strategies against the Japanese. In a 1996 interview Taylor recounted how he had initially viewed his psychological warfare programmes as a means of ending the war and helping the Japanese to overcome all the obstacles preventing their surrender. However, with time he came to see his job as being to convince the US military that they did not have to engage in acts of genocidal annihilation to end the war.<sup>9</sup> Early on, he was shocked by the crudeness of the military's propaganda leaflets which were dropped on Japanese troops and villages. Taylor recognized that an understanding of cultural nuance could change the effectiveness of such pamphlets, and using anthropologists and Nisei (second-generation Japanese American citizens) members of his staff he redesigned these pamphlets, leading to increased Japanese soldier surrender rates.

Taylor recognized that his OWI team had a drastically different comprehension of Japanese culture from that of military and White House decision-makers. He saw a danger in this knowledge gap. In an effort to educate the military in the complexities of the situation, he moved his entire operation over to the Pentagon so that his staff would be closer to the military decision-makers.

Taylor said military leaders and President Roosevelt and his advisers were convinced that the Japanese were 'culturally incapable of surrender' and that they would have to fight to the very last Japanese citizen. As the war progressed, Taylor and his staff found themselves fighting this mindset more than they were fighting the Japanese.

When I interviewed Taylor he called General Joseph Stilwell a 'maniac', and recounted a disturbing story of how he (Taylor) had flown to China to meet with Stilwell and discuss what he and his team of anthropologists at OWI had learned about the Japanese and the uses of psychological warfare. Stilwell would listen to none of this, scoffing at the claim that academicians were needed to tell him how to fight his enemy or how to engage in effective psychological warfare. Stilwell then instructed one of his

Right: OSS, East Asian Division anthropologist Edwin M. Loeb's appointment record as intelligence analyst.

Below: OSS Intelligence Analyst resignation record for anthropologist Felix Keesing.

New York: E.P. Dutton.  
 Mabee, C. 1987. Margaret Mead and behavioral scientists in World War II. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 23:3-12.  
 Métraux, A. 1948. Anthropology in Germany. *American Anthropologist* 50:717.  
 Nader, L. 1997a. The phantom factor: Impact of the Cold War on anthropology. In N. Chomsky (ed.) *The Cold War and the university*, pp. 107-146. New York: New Press.  
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 Neiburg, F. and Goldman, M. 1998. Anthropology and politics in studies of national character. *Cultural Anthropology* 13(1):56-81.  
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 Petersen, G. 1999. Politics in postwar Micronesia. In R. Kiste et al. (eds) *American anthropology in Micronesia*,

col.

Far East Division

30 May 1944

Dr. W. L. Langer

Charles B. Fahs  
 CBU  
 Appointment of Dr. Edwin M. Loeb

**It is recommended that Dr. Edwin M. Loeb be appointed for a period of three months as a temporary research analyst in the Pacific Islands Section, at a P-4 (\$3800) classification.**

**Dr. Loeb, an American citizen by birth, is the author of a work, Sumatra, its History and its People. He did field research in Sumatra and the Mentawai Islands in 1926-1927, and has good knowledge of the Dutch and Malay languages which enables him to consult all important source materials. In addition, he knows German, French, and Spanish. He has a Ph.B. from Yale, and a Ph.D. from Yale Graduate School, and is now lecturing on anthropology for the University of California. His graduate work in ethnology, sociology, and economics, together with his regional specialization in islands of the Netherlands East Indies, provides excellent qualifications for research on peoples in that region.**

**It is intended that Dr. Loeb take charge of background studies and reports relating to Sumatra and its adjacent islands. These reports are needed for current R & A projects and for projects undertaken jointly with MO and SO. Dr. Loeb's services are also needed for the organization of current information for situation reports.**

soldiers to take the next five captured Japanese soldiers; right in front of Professor Taylor he was to take his sidearm and make one of the soldiers shoot the other four in their heads. The fifth prisoner was then to be flown behind enemy lines and set loose so that he could tell his countrymen what his enemy had made him do. Stilwell

reportedly ended his display of disdain for Taylor by exclaiming, 'Now that is what I call psychological warfare!' While Taylor left before any such act could be carried out, he had no doubt Stilwell was capable of such deeds. Taylor gave up on trying to change Stilwell's limited way of thinking, and focused instead on changing the mentality of others in the War Department and White House. As part of this effort, Taylor asked Ruth Benedict and other OWI anthropologists to study the importance of the Emperor in Japanese society, and the position papers that came from this work eventually allowed Taylor to convince President Roosevelt to leave the Emperor out of any conditions of surrender at the inevitable end of the war - a point that Taylor said he did not have to reargue with Harry Truman once he became President.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the war Taylor and many of his staff viewed their efforts as having accomplished mixed results. They had brought about some desired changes in military decision-making, yet they found their advice to be frequently ignored. In the spring of 1945 Taylor sent a memo to President Truman stating that he and his staff were convinced that the Japanese were ready to surrender, and the pressures coming from Russian forces on the Asian front made it obvious to the Japanese that the war could not continue. But even as these arguments were made, American military and political leaders were developing plans to employ not one, but two nuclear weapons against Japanese civilian targets, actions that were seen as politically and militarily unnecessary by anthropologists and other staff members at OWI.

**Implications**

Wars raise the stakes for anthropologists, exposing the nature of our commitments and principles, and as past wars and colonial campaigns have shown, anthropologists as a group have served both the oppressed and the oppressors. Many aspects of our field's relationship with power remain unresolved, but even if anthropologists were to somehow agree upon shared goals of serving the oppressed of the

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OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

REC'D  
 MAY 25 1943  
 PERSONNEL OFFICE  
 Research and Analysis Branch

FOR USE OF EXECUTIVE BRANCH ONLY

APPROVED BY: [Signature] DATE: MAY 23 1943  
 BUDGET OFFICE: [Signature] DATE: MAY 23 1943  
 APPROPRIATION: [Signature] DATE: 6/1/43  
 CLASSIFICATION: [Signature] DATE: 6/1/43  
 NEW  VICE  12 000  
 REFERENCE: [Signature] DATE: 4/2/43  
 EMPLOYMENT AUTHORITY: [Signature] DATE: 4/2/43  
 DIRECTOR: [Signature] DATE: 4/2/43

PERSONNEL ACTION REQUEST

NATURE OF ACTION: Resignation

NAME: Felix M. Keesing

EFFECTIVE DATE: June 29, 1943 3:00pm.  
 (June 5, 1943 plus accrued leave)

FROM	TO
TITLE OF POSITION	Sr. Research Analyst Bu#1344(u) CSC#15
GRADE & SALARY	P-5 \$4600 per annum
BRANCH	Research & Analysis
DIVISION	Far East
SECTION	Pacific Islands
OFFICIAL STATION	Washington, D. C.
HEADQUARTERS	" "
DEPARTMENTAL OR FIELD	Departmental

RECOMMENDED BY: William L. Langer DATE: May 25, 1943  
 Director, Branch R & A

Left: A 1944 Secret OSS memo declassified and released by the CIA. This memo reports on some of Carleton Coon's actions for the OSS in North Africa.

Right: FBI Assistant Director Nichols, writing to Clyde Tolson (Hoover's right-hand man and reputed lover) derides Hooton's federal eugenics plan as that of 'a first rate fool'.

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Cool  
**SECRET**

DSC

MAJOR CARLETON S. COON

From May 1942 to November 42, Major Carleton S. Coon in the role of Special Assistant at the U. S. Legation at Tangier was occupied in enlisting the services of various native organizations in Spanish Morocco. This was an extremely delicate operation, and he acted at great personal risk to his life. The object was to create a revolution in that territory in the event the Spanish should move against the U. S. Torch Forces, or the Germans should move against us through Spain.

Major Coon also smuggled grenades, and other arms into French Morocco for the use of resistance groups.

In January, February 1943, he was engaged in the Brandon Operation with members of British SOE at Cap Serrat and the Kassarine Pass. During these operations a small picked group, of which he was a member, covered an extraordinary length of front under combat conditions at the imminent risk of being captured or wiped out, thus convincing the Germans it was held in force. Major Coon during this period trained two Arabs and sent them through the enemy lines to blow up a train full of German troops between Tindja and Ferryville. This operation was successfully carried out and the Arabs returned.

During these operations, Major Coon suffered concussion and injuries to his head when a building into which he had gone after the aerial machine-gunning was dive-bombed.

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world, the question of how such goals were to be achieved would still be unresolved, and issues of anthropology as an instrument of warfare would remain to be settled. However, unsettled or not, the use of anthropology in World War II and other wars is a fertile field of study, raising many questions with implications for our current predicament.

The use of anthropology and anthropologists in Nazi Germany was neither unusual nor exotic, though Muhlmann's warning concerning the political uses of anthropology by 'total states' tends to be interpreted as applying primarily to such obviously depraved policies as those implemented by the Nazi administration. Yet less totalitarian state-managed anthropological research programmes in other hot and cold wars have impacted indigenous cultures in other devastating ways (see Petersen 1999, Price 1998a). As social scientists are now being recruited to assist in ethnic and racial 'terrorist profiling' campaigns, the stakes of ignoring such warnings intensifies. It is not enough to resist these developments; we have a professional duty to speak out against the futility and bigotry of such abuses of the social sciences.

The unresolved problems faced by George Taylor and his staff at OWI in World War II still have a fundamental importance in our present situation *vis-à-vis* policy makers' (mis)understanding of 'terrorism'. Today many military and governmental officials have limited conceptual frameworks for approaching the relativistic concept of terrorism, but the lessons of Taylor and others at OWI are less than clear. As with any applied anthropological venture, there is no guarantee that our recommendations will be heard, much less adopted, but in times of war we have a fundamental duty as scholars and citizens to counter the limited views of American and allied policy makers. We

Mr. Tolson ✓  
Mr. E. A. Tamm ✓  
Mr. Clegg ✓  
Mr. Coffey ✓  
Mr. Glavin ✓  
Mr. Ladd ✓  
Mr. Nichols ✓  
Mr. Rosen ✓  
Mr. Tracy ✓  
Mr. Acers ✓  
Mr. Carson ✓  
Mr. Harbo ✓  
Mr. Hendon ✓  
Mr. Mumford ✓  
Mr. Quinn Tamm ✓  
Mr. Nease ✓  
Miss Gandy ✓

LBN:RC July 27, 1943

**MEMORANDUM FOR MR. TOLSON**

You will recall Dr. Hooton has always been a first-rate fool. His latest, on scientific child breeding as set forth in the attached clipping, is one for the books.

It is too bad that some epidemic cannot strike a lot of our college professors.

Respectfully,  
L. B. Nichols

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15 AUG 23 1943  
(INFORMATIVE MEMORANDUM - NOT TO BE SENT TO FILES)  
57 AUG 27 1943

have our own Stilwells to educate, and if they prove uneducable, to circumvent – though there is ample evidence to suggest that efforts in this direction would be most effective if we operate as citizen-scholars outside of governmental agencies.

Some of the decisions to be made by anthropologists in times of war are personal, while others are professional. Decisions to join or not join a war in any capacity are in the end always personal decisions, but decisions concerning the use of anthropology in the waging of war are fundamentally professional decisions. While it is not for me or anyone else to demand that others join or resist a particular military campaign, national and international professional anthropological associations have a duty to monitor and evaluate the uses to which anthropology is put in times of war. This duty springs from the basic responsibility of anthropologists to serve, rather than fight or oppress, those we study. If anthropologists will not take action to limit the wartime applications of their discipline, then we do not deserve the trust of those we study in the field.

Using cultural knowledge to fight other cultures raises serious questions involving conflict of interest, protecting the welfare of research subjects and basic issues of consent (Fluehr-Lobban 1994). While interpretation of past interactions during wartime is problematic, consideration of the ethical implications can help prevent future misapplications of anthropology in times of war. As the American President seems intent on committing his nation to a prolonged war against the ill-defined concept of terrorism – and many of his citizens seem suddenly frightened into supporting this quest – anthropologists have new reasons to focus on the issues embedded in their discipline's militaristically mobilized past. ●