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Spartans in Vietnam: Michigan State University's Experience in South Vietnam

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On May 8th, 1957, in Washington D.C, President Dwight D. Eisenhower waited for the arrival of the president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem. Oddly enough, only a few years prior, Diem, an anonymous exile from Indochina, visited Washington hoping to find a sympathetic audience to listen to his views on Vietnam. Upon Diem's arrival, Eisenhower praised him for being America's bastion of defense against communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Eisenhower said, "You have exemplified in your part of the world patriotism of the highest order." Diem replied by thanking the Eisenhower administration for creating what he called the "miracle of Vietnam." Diem said that the combination of the Vietnamese people's bravery and the faith the administration had in South Vietnam made the miracle possible.¹

While in America on his 1957 trip, Diem stopped to personally thank the faculty at Michigan State University (MSU).² Increased collegiate assistance with the United States government began to take shape throughout the cold war era. Diem's visit to MSU in 1957 is the epitome of government and collegiate relations. Universities such as Pennsylvania State University, The State University of New York (SUNY) in Buffalo, and Michigan State University took part in federally funded activities to provide technical-assistance to third world countries, with Michigan State's technical assistance group being the largest.

Michigan State University's technical-assistance program, the Michigan State University Group (MSUG), achieved the status that it did in Vietnam due to John Hannah and Wesley Fishel; Hannah's dream of becoming a global university and Fishel's relationship with Diem cultivated the perfect environment for the MSUG. John Ernst describes this program as, "The most significant project the school undertook with the Federal Government."³ Even though the MSUG appeared to have an influence in South Vietnam they actually saw minimal success, which caused the MSUG to be deemed as a failure. Their lack of success stemmed from various factors, but the most important was Diem's reluctance to enact meaningful reforms. By the end of the MSUG, Diem believed that the Michigan-based college outlived its usefulness. Instead of listening to MSU advisers, paranoia and resentment towards the university clouded his judgment causing the MSUG to eventually disband. Four years after the MSUG disbanded, an article in Michigan State University's *Ramparts* magazine brought MSU-CIA relations during the MSUG to light. The "*Ramparts* controversy" made

¹ Russell Baker, "Eisenhower Greets Vietnam President, Extols Patriotism," *New York Times*, May 1957.

² John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 1.

³ Ernst, 1-2.

allegations that MSU helped in the establishment of an undemocratic government in Saigon, which only added to the flame of the anti-war movement.⁴

Prior to 1945, Vietnam had consistently been ruled by foreign powers. For most of their history the Chinese had political power, and in the late nineteenth century the French imposed their presence in Vietnam by making it a French colony. France's colonial rule over Vietnam existed for over half a century, but during World War II Germany conquered France, which forced France to relinquish their colonial authority, making them unable to prevent a Japanese takeover of the country. However, after World War II, the Japanese allowed the French colonial authorities to retain titular power.⁵

Since the Japanese established control so easily, the Vietnamese discredited French authority. Due to this, Ho Chi Minh, a communist revolutionary leader in Vietnam, and his Vietminh, a political organization founded by Minh based off of communistic ideals and intense nationalism, mobilized an army and forced Japan to surrender their control over Vietnam. The United States Office of Strategic Service (OSS) supplied limited assistance to push the Japanese out of Vietnam. This allowed the Vietminh to fill the power vacuum that existed in the war torn country, and on September 2nd Ho Chi Minh declared independence for his country. This event became known as the August Revolution. George Herring describes the August Revolution as, "one of history's most bitter ironies."⁶

The United States played a major role in establishing Ho's regime in Vietnam in 1945, but by 1947 the two nations would view each other through "badly distorted lenses." The Vietminh believed that the friendly demeanors of the OSS operatives represented U.S. attitudes towards Vietnam, and the U.S. would be willing to sustain the nation they helped liberate. Unfortunately, this turned out to be untrue. After the August Revolution, American foreign policy sided more with the French, who wanted to regain their colonial control over Vietnam. Roosevelt at first showed reluctance in allowing the French to regain their power in Vietnam, because he believed for over half a century France exploited their land, and the Indochinese deserved better living conditions. Roosevelt's initial plan was to make Indochina a United Nations trust under the watchful eyes of America and China, but before his death in April 1945, his policies changed due to pressures to retain his allies in Europe. He felt obligated to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his French counterpart, Charles

⁴ Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 138.

⁵ George C. Herring, *American's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 1-7.

⁶ Herring. 1-7.

De Gaulle.⁷ Roosevelt frowned upon colonialism, and genuinely wished for an international administration that would lead to independence, but he was also concerned about the inhabitants of Vietnam.⁸ Roosevelt wanted to create a better living environment for the Vietnamese, which is a theme that resonates in the MSUG.

Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, did not know too much about Indochina, and he cared little about it.⁹ Instead of looking into the political realities of the situation, his administration was guided by "global concerns and misperceptions about communist expansion." Truman faced a perceived communist threat from the east, which led him to give into French demands to regain control of Vietnam. By 1947, Truman took a sharper stance on this perceived communist threat. He outlined the Truman doctrine, which pledged to assist any nation that communist takeover threatened. Anti-communist ideals like those in the Truman Doctrine are what dictated American foreign policy in Vietnam for decades to come.¹⁰

The Truman Doctrine represents the ideology of George Kennan, who David Levy describes as, "A former ambassador and probably the most thoughtful, articulate, and highly regarded analyst of American foreign policy in the period after World War II."¹¹ Kennan argued that Soviet ideology pushed expansionism, and they would continue to expand unless outside forces stopped them. He insisted that Soviet behavior assumed that "there can be no compromise with rival power and that constructive work can start only when Communist power is dominant."¹² American foreign policy makers then turned their attentions to a seemingly urgent Soviet expansion into Asia, which caused U.S. involvement in Vietnam to increase. The U.S. wanted to contain communism, and during the 1950s a new "modernization" school of thought began to emerge among American social scientists. The U.S. assisted Asian leaders both financially and technologically who appeared to want to modernize their countries. After the battle at Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. would put their modernization techniques to the test on Vietnam.¹³

After the battle at Dien Bien Phu, the French wanted out of Vietnam, and luckily for them, they could appeal their case during the Geneva Conference,

⁷ Herring 1-12.

⁸ David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam 2nd Edition* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 29.

⁹ David G. Marr, "The United States in Vietnam: A Study in Futility," *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* 397, 1971, 16.

¹⁰ Ernst, 2.

¹¹ Levy, 73.

¹² Ernst, 2.

¹³ Herring, 31-33 and Marr, 17.

which was ongoing. Even before the Conference had began, the United States already stepped into the shoes of the French, trying to create a position south of the sixteenth parallel in the name of worldwide anti-communism. The U.S. already gave substantial funds to prevent Vietnam's fall to communism.¹⁴ The way the French handled the situation in Vietnam caused U.S. foreign policy makers to be "enthused by the demise of French colonialism."¹⁵

The 1954 Geneva Accords brought major changes in Vietnam—most notable, the temporary splitting of the country along the sixteenth parallel. In the summer of 1956, in accordance with the Geneva Accords, a public election was held to reunite the country. The Eisenhower administration wanted to create in South Vietnam a nation that would stand as the pillar of patriotism and democracy to fight against communism in Southeast Asia. American foreign policy turned to nation building.¹⁶

In light of nation building, various social scientists created many different theories, but all of them had a common element: to create a new South Vietnam based off of the American political and military structure, while minimizing Vietnamese cultural disruption.¹⁷ Rostow takes this idea one step further, referring to the threat of communist expansion "as a modernization problem."¹⁸ United States foreign policy makers agreed with Rostow. They believed that, in order to stop the spread of communism, various countries must be brought into the modern world. In order to do that, they had to bolster the nation's economy and create political stability. American foreign policy makers turned to technical assistance, in order to help with nation building and to help combat communism.

American foreign policy makers found it pivotal that South Vietnam remain non-communist. With the upcoming 1956 elections enacted by the Geneva Accords, the Eisenhower administration needed to find a ruler to stand as their pillar of anti-communism; thus, he put his faith in a man named Ngo Dinh Diem. The Eisenhower administration gained faith in Diem's anti-communist stance, as he unearthed a communist uprising in Central Vietnam in 1929 when he was a village supervisor, severely punishing their leaders.¹⁹

Diem was a staunch anti-communist, which made him appealing in the eyes of American foreign policy makers. One of nine sons of Ngo Dinh Kha, Diem attended French Catholic schools in his youth. Later in his life, Diem attended the school of public administration in Hanoi, and finished at the top of

¹⁴ Marr, 17.

¹⁵ Herring, 45 -51.

¹⁶ Herring, 45 -51.

¹⁷ Ernst, 4.

¹⁸ Ernst, 3-4.

¹⁹ Herring, 59.

his class. After the aforementioned events of 1929, the French appointed Diem as minister of the interior, which was the highest position in their colonial government. He retained a meaningful relationship with the French government until the 1930s, when the French refused to enact the reforms that he proposed. This caused Diem to put himself into a self-imposed exile.²⁰ American foreign policy makers came to know Diem during his self-imposed exile, which Diem spent engineering his rise to power.²¹

Diem lacked the charisma of his political rival, Ho Chi Minh, and also lacked many of the qualities required for the challenges he faced as president of Vietnam. However, he did have a few noteworthy characteristics, his most admirable being his stubborn determination to never give up, even against the worst odds. But he also lacked in some areas too: he was an all-or-nothing kind of guy, which meant that he lacked the flexibility needed for the situations he would encounter, and that he comported himself as an elitist who could not relate to the needs of the average Vietnamese person. His biggest fault was that, “He had no blueprint for building a modern nation or mobilizing his people.” Diem, being a traditionalist, constantly looked back to traditional Vietnam and its political process—a Vietnam that could no longer exist.²²

Diem cemented his relationship with United States policy makers and his position in South Vietnam, due to a Michigan State political science professor, Wesley Fishel. When they first met in Japan in 1950, they found that they shared extreme anti-communistic ideals and a love of intellectual debate. Fishel became the first American to take interest in Diem.²³

Wesley Fishel was born in Cleveland and graduated from Northwestern University in 1941. He served in the Second World War as a military language specialist. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1948 in international relations. From there, he joined the faculty at the University of California, and went to Japan to teach American servicemen.²⁴ At the same time, Diem was living in Japan during his self-imposed exile, and this is when the two men met.

Fishel and Diem’s fateful encounter happened in July 1950, and, more than any other event, facilitated Diem’s rise to power. Fishel always had ideals of grandeur; he wanted to advise top politicians in Southeast Asia. At the age of 31, Fishel began to establish himself as an expert on East Asian politics, because

²⁰ Herring, 58-59.

²¹ Edward Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency: the Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-1954,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Issue 35, 2004, 434.

²² Herring, 58-63.

²³ Phillip E. Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas), 9.

²⁴ Ernst, 8-9.

much of his research dealt with East Asian politics, including his dissertation, *The End of Extraterritoriality in China*. For Fishel, studying the political elites in East Asia did not suffice; he also wanted to advise them. One of his colleagues said, “Fishel made a habit from early in his career of cultivating personal connections with Asian leaders whom he deemed like to acquire power in the future.”²⁵ Diem was no exception. In his book, *Campus Wars*, Kenneth Heineman describes Wesley Fishel as roaming around the halls of Michigan State University telling his colleagues that his friend, Ngo Dinh Diem, would someday be the president of Vietnam.²⁶

Even before Diem met Fishel, he tried to use American anti-colonial sentiments to his advantage. But Diem met failure upon his first visit into America. He tried to play upon American religious sentiment, but American foreign policy theorists deemed him to be too concerned with his own personal ambitions and believed he would not be able to solve the complex problems Vietnam currently faced. Diem soon realized that he could not appeal to the Americans on a religious basis, but he could appeal to their beliefs about development, modernization, and the meaningful impact U.S. technology could make on a society.²⁷ Diem turned to American beliefs on technical assistance in the third world, which had become an academically charged field of politics.

During the 1950s and 1960s, academia took an active role in nation building in South Vietnam. This started after World War II when colleges across the United States became actively involved in federally sponsored programs in order to stay in front of the Soviet Union technologically. The threat of communist expansion cemented the relationship between the government and academia.²⁸ Michigan State University President John Hannah said, “The University...was by its very nature an instrument of national policy, whether that entailed providing mass education to the citizenry or accepting defense related contracts.”²⁹ Many schools shared this philosophy during the cold war, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University, Michigan State University, and the University of Kentucky. Universities such as MIT and Stanford were used as weapon labs during this time in order to gain federally funded grants. Universities such as MSU and Kentucky sent political advisors out around the world to assist politically troubled and developing countries that communism threatened; MSU sent the most political advisors to Indochina.³⁰

²⁵ Miller, 442.

²⁶ Heineman, 46.

²⁷ Miller, 442 - 445.

²⁸ Ernst, 4.

²⁹ Heineman, 40.

³⁰ Ernst, 4.

In order to understand why Michigan State University had such a prevalent role in South Vietnam, one must understand John Hannah. John Hannah was president of Michigan State University for twenty-eight years—a charismatic and persuasive man who could “charm the birds out of the trees.”³¹ John Ernst describes Hannah as “an institution builder both at home and abroad.” Hannah worked feverishly on creating a better public life for people in Michigan by allowing more people to attend college. Michigan State University advocated practical education, and Hannah enjoyed the phrase, “the State is our campus.” Hannah embraced the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862, which took public land in each state to create colleges that taught agricultural and mechanical arts in order to allow more people to attend college. But Hannah, like other early land-grant leaders, wanted closer ties to the federal government; he wanted the world to be his campus. His ambition and zeal attracted many policy makers throughout his long career at Michigan State University.³²

Truman appointed Hannah to be part of the International Development Advisory Board, which created policies for the Point Four program of American diplomatic, economic, military, and technical assistance to the Third World. Hannah believed that, “Our colleges and universities must be regarded as bastions of our defense, as essential to the preservation of our country and our way of life as supersonic bombers, nuclear powered submarines, and intercontinental ballistic missiles.”³³ Due to Hannah’s previous ties to the government, his anti-communist stance, and his love of institution building, Michigan State University became one of the schools to undertake in a technical assistance program in South Vietnam.³⁴

When Fishel joined the MSU faculty in 1951, his relationship with Diem, coupled with Hannah’s fervent anti-communistic stance, created the perfect environment for the creation of the Michigan State University Group as a technical assistance program in Vietnam. In 1954, Diem requested technical assistance from Michigan State, due to Vietnam’s volatile state. The Vietnamese administration was dealing with enormous problems following the end of the Indochinese War, which included the splitting of the country from the Geneva Accords, and the massive amount of communist refugees coming from North Vietnam.³⁵ Hannah sent over political scientist Edward W. Weidner, chairman of the police administration department Arthur F. Brandstatter, economist Charles C.

³¹ John A. Hannah, *A Memoir* (United States: Michigan State University Press, 1980), 67. And Ernst, 5-6.

³² Ernst, 5-6.

³³ Heineman, 22.

³⁴ Heineman, 20-22.

³⁵ Robert Scigliano and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), 1.

Killingsworth, and James H. Dennison, who was Hannah's administrative assistant. The group of four decided, after a two-week visit to Vietnam, that the country was in a state of emergency and a project to help should be started right away. The advisory group also noted that the rushed circumstances could create problems, but they noted it critical for MSU to start their technical assistance program immediately.³⁶

The report called for Michigan State University to provide massive programs of technical assistance to Vietnam in four major areas: public administration, police administration, public information, and economics. Both Hannah and Fishel made the grand scale of the MSUG possible; Fishel's relationship with Diem allowed the group to start, and Hannah's love of institution building, and anti-communistic stance, allowed the group to attain the size that it did.³⁷ Scigliano and Fox, two former members of the MSUG, described MSUG's activity in their book *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* in three distinct phases. Each phase represents a contract renewal of two years: phase one - 1955-1957, phase two - 1957-1959, and phase three - 1959-1962.

Upon Michigan State's arrival into South Vietnam in 1955, an atmosphere of crisis existed. Just two weeks prior, a critical showdown between the Vietnamese government and dissident troops had taken place, with government soldiers thereafter combing the countryside to pursue the remaining dissidents. Scigliano and Fox describe the first few weeks in Vietnam by saying, "The explosion of plastic bombs was a fairly frequent occurrence in the early months." They even mention that in July 1955, several riots took place, killing MSUG families. Due to the violent and chaotic atmosphere the MSUG encountered upon entering South Vietnam, they were much more willing to assume the unusual chores they would have to do in the coming years.³⁸

MSUG operatives involved themselves in non-academic activities during the first phase of the program. Early into the program, the American ambassador in Vietnam asked the MSUG to focus on police services and the refugee resettlement administration. More importantly, the Embassy also asked the MSUG to include the civil guard (50,000 man civil police) within the scope of police administration, with the intent of reorganization.³⁹

Advisors of the MSUG were drawing up plans to reorganize different government agencies, including: the Office of the Presidency, the Department of National Education, several agencies involved in agricultural matters, the entire

³⁶ Ernst, 11-12.

³⁷ Ernst, 142-143.

³⁸ Scigliano and Fox, 5.

³⁹ Scigliano and Fox, 6.

police and security systems, and the structure of the local government itself. The MSUG's biggest commitment was the police field, as Scigliano and Fox say,

In the police field, particularly, they became deeply immersed in programming equipment needs and in developing and conducting training programs of various kinds. They gave firearms instruction, taught courses in fingerprinting, worked on traffic problems, and gave advice on the location of training camps and detention centers.

But this was not all the MSUG accomplished during its first phase. They began to show academic support in South Vietnam by helping establish the National Institute of Administration in Saigon. They also gave curriculum advice and helped start a library. However, the work in police administration over-shadowed the educational work that MSUG did.⁴⁰

By mid-1957, Diem solidified his regime, all of the troubles during phase one faded into the background, and American assistance made substantial progress in rehabilitating South Vietnam. During phase two, Vietnam entered a period of perceived normalcy. The MSUG focused on the development of the economy and of modern political and administrative institutions. But, another problem lay under the surface of Vietnam's appeared normalcy: the government's concern of internal security. An example would be Diem's "human buffer" between and against the communist threat of the north. Diem transported tens of thousands of people to the Central Vietnamese Highlands, close to both Laos and North Vietnam. The security concern strongly influenced the way the South Vietnamese government perceived some of the MSUG's programs.⁴¹

The MSUG's second phase showed contrary tendencies. They tried to increase the academic scope of the project to better balance their activities, but the group also increased its commitment in non-academic fields, mainly in the security field. The result was "the period of ubiquitous Michiganders," since the MSUG were scattered amongst many different activities and parts of South Vietnam. Even though the MSUG had increased in scope, they had less influence in public administration. MSU's operations in Vietnam began to steer away from direct involvement with various government agencies, and the MSUG planned for this. By mid-1958, MSUG operatives were talking about renewing the operation with fewer programs, and began to reduce its staff in Vietnam. But they did want to continue their educational programs.⁴²

In 1959, the Vietnamese government devoted itself to fighting the guerrilla war launched by the communist-led military. While the warfare did not

⁴⁰ Scigliano and Fox, 6-7.

⁴¹ Scigliano and Fox, 7-8.

⁴² Scigliano and Fox, 8-10.

cause serious damage to the basic economic installations, it did take a toll on both economic and social development. Under the threat of communist invasion, the government curtailed most of its regular economic development programs, and diverted their attention mainly to security measures. There were also scares of coup d'états against their civil leaders. The Diem regime was operating under extreme tensions during the third phase.⁴³

For the MSUG, the third phase marked a phase-down as they tried to concentrate on academic ventures. One of the most important decisions of the third phase was to forfeit control of the civil guard mid-1959. MSUG advisers did not like the direction the civil guard was heading—it was developing along the lines of a paramilitary instead of the civil police, and by early 1959, the American government agreed to provide the civil guard with large-scale equipment and a training program on military terms. The United States Operation Mission (USOM) wanted MSUG to retain their control of the civil guard, but the MSUG wanted no part in a paramilitary training program. In 1959, USOM obtained the civil guard. The rest of the third phase showed a phasing down of MSUG personnel in Vietnam. MSUG's third contract ended in June 1962, and Diem did not want to allow the group another contract renewal period.⁴⁴

MSUG ended due to three main reasons: MSU's abandoning of the civil guard, Diem's unwillingness to implement reforms set by the MSUG, and a few articles written in *The New Republic Magazine*. In Diem's mind, the university had outlived its usefulness. Diem made up his mind when the MSUG refused to train the civil guard as a paramilitary unit. After this, Diem believed that Vietnam no longer needed the MSUG. The MSUG began to resent Diem, because he would not listen to suggestions made by the MSUG.⁴⁵

Diem's unwillingness to implement any reforms suggested by the MSUG ultimately caused Wesley Fishel's departure. Fishel talks about the hard handlings of Diem in his article, "The Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem." Fishel explains how the United States commanded a great amount of leverage, but they were rarely able to intervene in important economic and political questions due to Diem's unwillingness to implement reforms suggested by the MSUG. The constant pressure from American officials in the day-to-day proceedings of business with the Saigon government caused a lot of resentment from Diem and the Vietnamese government. Diem constantly looked for hidden motives behind the American positions. The Vietnamese government believed that the Americans misguided pressure was a reflection of a lack of understanding of Vietnamese culture, and it also indicated a lack of sincerity on the part of the

⁴³ Scigliano and Fox, 10.

⁴⁴ Scigliano and Fox, 11-12.

⁴⁵ Ernst, 80.

Americans. Growing disillusionment caused Fishel to leave Vietnam and return to America in 1958.⁴⁶

Several articles released in *The New Republic* caused Diem to have ill attitudes towards the MSUG. These articles discussed common perceptions of Diem's regime in South Vietnam. Seth Jacobs describes Diem's regime by saying, "From 1954, when he became premier, to 1963, when he was assassinated, Diem ran South Vietnam as a police state while the United States bankrolled his tyranny."⁴⁷ Diem's oppressive regime caused rifts not just amongst the Vietnamese, but also in America and how people viewed the MSUG.

One article that affected Diem's regime was titled, "A Crumbling Bastion: Flattery and Lies Won't Save Vietnam," written by Adrian Jaffe and Milton C. Taylor. Jaffe and Taylor made outrageous claims about Diem's regime and American involvement in it. They argued, "The Vietnamese Government is not viable, except insofar as it uses connivance and force to prolong its life." They made the accusation that Diem's regime was not democratic, which was the whole reason why America was there—to create a democratic nation in the south. Jaffe and Taylor insist, "It maintains a secret police, encourages Vietnamese to inform one another, and detains some 40,000 political prisoners in concentration camps." Jaffe and Taylor do not mention MSU or Wesley Fishel by name, but they do make accusations that major universities and a university PhD. helped entrench Diem's regime.⁴⁸ Jaffe and Taylor were highly critical of Diem's regime, and they were only one part of a series of critical articles dealing with Diem's regime.

In December 1961, a former advisor of numerous Vietnamese and U.S. agencies wrote another article in *The New Republic*, "Vietnam – The Eleventh Hour." The author, Frank C. Child, insisted that Vietnam showed little development towards democracy, and he asserted that Vietnam was a police state. Child says, "From the standpoint of stated US policy, the shortcoming of Diem's regime is not that it is undemocratic; it is that it is a failure. It has neither of the two saving graces of an 'acceptable' dictatorship: it is neither benevolent nor efficient." Child's article openly criticized Diem's regime, and called for a coup d'état as the only way to success.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ William Henderson and Welsey R. Fishel, "The Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," in *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict* ed. Wesley R. Fishel (Itasca, Illinois: Peacock Publishers Inc, 1968), 217.

⁴⁷ Seth Jacobs. *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 185.

⁴⁸ Adrian Jaffe, and Milton C. Taylor, "A Crumbling Bastion: Flattery and Lies Won't Save Vietnam," *The New Republic*, 19 June 1961.

⁴⁹ Frank C. Child, "Vietnam – The Eleventh Hour," *The New Republic*, 4 December 1961.

These two articles had a major impact on Diem's attitudes towards the American foreign policy makers. Diem resented articles like these; he insisted that articles written by returning group members be "scholarly, scientific studies and no sensational, journalistic articles." The way Jaffe, Taylor, and Child presented Diem caused the South Vietnamese president to resent the MSUG. Diem said, "He could not... understand why those he considered to be his friends treated him the way they did in print, nor why the University failed to control the writing of its faculty."⁵⁰ The MSUG ended due to a variety of reasons, but the group would live on, as fuel to the anti-war movement.

Building upon the previous articles in *The New Republic*, former MSUG member Stanley K. Sheinbaum published in *Ramparts* magazine a scathing exposé of Michigan State's intervention in Vietnam four years after the MSUG disbanded. Sheinbaum made accusations that "the University had provided cover for CIA activities in Vietnam," that MSUG members cemented Diem's dictatorship by turning his police force into a paramilitary, and that they kept Diem's oppressive rule quiet. Sheinbaum implied that the MSUG operatives had done so to keep the status they held overseas.⁵¹ Before examining the article, it is important to understand the time period surrounding the article's publication.

1965 turned out to be a heated year for the anti-war movement. The draft had increased exponentially, which forced more people to enlist in the army. Tensions were high amongst anti-war advocates, and they started to take action against pro-war advocates. One case in particular takes place on the MSU campus, with the MSU Students for Democratic Society (SDS). The MSU SDS started to focus on court cases, particularly a case surrounding the incarceration of five anti-war advocates in October 1965. The ruling went as followed: "Circuit Court judge Marvin Salmon increased their fines, sentenced the activists to ten-to-thirty day jail terms, and denied them bail despite their expressed intention to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court." Directly after this ruling, 28 students camped out in front of the Cowles House, where Hannah lived. They stayed out there for three nights, while fasting, protesting the avoidance of due process. The anti-war movement gained huge momentum due to the controversy surrounding the trials. Hannah undermined his image as the champion for civil rights after denying any dialogue with the campers.⁵²

It was directly after this controversy began to subside that Robert Scheer and Stanley Sheinbaum published "The University on the Make" in *Ramparts* magazine. The main accusation this article made was the MSU-CIA ties in the failed Vietnam project.⁵³

⁵⁰ Scigliano and Fox, 53.

⁵¹ Ernst, 122.

⁵² Heineman, 135.

⁵³ Heineman, 135.

Sheinbaum began teaching economics at MSU in the mid-1950s, and he eventually became the MSUG campus coordinator. He involved himself deeply in the MSUG, but the alleged CIA connections disturbed him, and in 1959 he quit when he did not receive a raise within the MSUG. With ill will towards the MSUG, he joined forces with muckraking journalist Robert Scheer, and the two of them quickly moved to the forefront of the anti-war movement. The duo produced many critical articles of Fishel and his policies in Vietnam. An example is a pamphlet by Scheer, "How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam," which accused Fishel and the MSUG of CIA connections, which Fishel denied. There were many articles of this nature, but the most important one was written in 1966.⁵⁴

In 1966, hoping to reach a wide audience, Scheer and Sheinbaum wrote an exposé in *Ramparts* magazine about MSU's Vietnam project, with a sensational doctored cover photo of Diem's wife, Madame Nhu, in a MSU cheerleader outfit with the title, "The University on the Make." Their article, which is heavily based on the book *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State Experience*, did not incorporate a majority of the material that Scigliano and Fox mentioned in their book, including any academic material that Scigliano and Fox discussed, but instead focused on sensationalized actions of MSUG in Vietnam. Scheer and Sheinbaum implied that MSU faculty had connections with the CIA and that the MSUG was a paramilitary training program.⁵⁵

Scheer and Sheinbaum stated that the MSUG acted under a "hear-no CIA, see-no CIA basis." They assert that, the "Central Intelligence Agency men were hidden within the ranks of the Michigan State University professors...Several of the CIA men were given academic rank and were paid by the University project." They believed that their cover was within the police administration division of the MSUG. The article summed up Michigan State's activity in Vietnam with one simple sentence, "What the hell is a university doing buying guns, anyway?"⁵⁶

The fallout from this article acted as a bombshell over the MSU campus. News outlets such as *Free Press*, *New York Times*, and the three national television networks all centered their focus on MSU's campus. Major people involved in the project, including John Hannah and Wesley Fishel, denied alleged MSU-CIA connections. Fishel referred to the allegations as silly slander, and he defended the Vietnam project by saying: "It was necessary to build a modern police force for a modern state, which is nothing to be ashamed of."⁵⁷ Both Hannah and Fishel denied claims of CIA intervention in the MSUG, but Ralph

⁵⁴ Ernst, 123-124.

⁵⁵ Ernst, 126.

⁵⁶ Warren Hinckle and Robert Scheer and Sol Stern and Stanley Sheinbaum, "The University on the Make," *Ramparts Magazine*, April 1966.

⁵⁷ Heineman, 136.

Smucker, former head of the MSUG, confirmed the existence of the CIA in the MSUG.⁵⁸

Anti-war protestors' concerns dealt with the 25 million dollars MSU had earned during the Vietnam project, and that the MSUG sent over armaments and ammunitions to South Vietnam. Scigliano and Fox say in *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State Experience* that MSU earned 25 million dollars for their role in Vietnam.⁵⁹ Even though the amount of money the MSUG gained from their Vietnam Project was accurate in Sheinbaum's article, that does not mean that everything they put in the article was true. According to Scigliano and Fox, the MSUG disbanded the civil guard when its direction headed towards a paramilitary training program.⁶⁰ Sheinbaum wrote a sensational article that distorted the truth of MSU's role in Vietnam.

Amidst the *Ramparts* controversy, new anti-war groups began to emerge along side the MSU SDS, which caused the anti-war movement to become more prevalent on Michigan State's campus. Protestors would interrupt Fishel during his classes, and he was demonized for the role that he played in the MSUG. After the *Ramparts* scandal, Fishel became physically broken by constantly having to defend his actions in Vietnam.⁶¹

Even though Michigan State University's actions in Vietnam were not successful, and they fueled the anti-war movement, Hannah still believed they did the right thing. Hannah wrote in his memoirs:

I think that if Michigan State were to face the same choice again in the same context, it might well agree to assist the U.S. Government as we did then. Having been in Vietnam as the administrator of U.S.A.I.D. several times since leaving M.S.U., and having had contact with the Vietnamese before and after the war, I think, by and large, the Vietnamese who understood the situation were grateful for what the university tried to do for them.⁶²

The work the MSUG did is a reflection of nation building as a whole. The complex problems that Vietnam faced were glossed over, and the excitement to contain communism overshadowed this fact. Nation building failed, and resulted in Diem's death and the introduction of American combat forces in Vietnam. No one could convince Diem to alter existing governmental and military structures,

⁵⁸ Max Frankel, "College Project Cloaked Role of C.I.A. In Saigon, 1955-59," *The New York Times*, 14 April 1966.

⁵⁹ Heineman, 137.

⁶⁰ Scigliano and Fox, 11-12.

⁶¹ Ernst, 131-133.

⁶² Hannah, 132.

and despite the suggestions of Fishel and other U.S. advisors, Diem refused to initiate any reforms. South Vietnam was never able to develop the way that MSUG wished it would.⁶³

The Michigan State University Group stands as a testimony to nation building ideals in South Vietnam. The overly ambitious university went overseas to provide a massive technical assistance program, and to help establish a democratic nation in South Vietnam. Diem's unwillingness to implement reforms caused the MSUG and nation building efforts to fail. The MSUG was later slandered by the anti-war movement, and became fuel for the anti-war movement. The U.S. Government's commitment to the Diem regime stands as one of the most fundamental decisions of the pre-Vietnam War era, with Michigan State University fully supporting Diem until the end.

⁶³

Ernst, 142.

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