

“On the 50th Anniversary: The Origins of the AAASS”

The Secretariat of the Central Committee in Boston asked that I give the presidential talk this year about the 50th anniversary of the founding of the AAASS. I was glad to take on the assignment because I have benefited greatly from an organization about whose history I knew next to nothing. I assume I am no different in this respect than most of you in the audience. Of course, there are more senior colleagues here who know a lot about the early years of the profession, and I hope you will send me your criticisms and emendations. But certainly for my generation and those younger in the audience, the AAASS simply put out a newsletter that listed jobs and grants and sponsored a convention where we gave our first papers, enjoyed reunions with old friends from IREX and Fulbright days, attended panels, reconnected with former professors and former students, met new colleagues, and schmoozed day and night. We knew about *Slavic Review* and vaguely about its association with AAASS. But here, too, we published our articles, read reviews, and enjoyed occasional polemics, without knowing much of anything about the journal's past.

So my task in the half hour I am given here tonight is to explore the origins of the AAASS and the association's inevitable links to the development in the United States of “Slavic studies,” recognizing all the problems that this term contains.

It will come as no surprise to historians of culture that the 50th anniversary is probably less interesting in and of itself than the fact that we are celebrating it. Moreover, it is not the real anniversary of AAASS as we know it. In 1948, the newly constituted Joint Committee on Slavic Studies of the ACLS/SSRC supported the formation of a small legal corporation—the AAASS—to publish *The American Slavic and East European Review*, the predecessor of *Slavic Review*. American scholars, led by Samuel Cross, had planned to publish a journal of Slavic studies already in 1940, but responded to the wartime pleas of Sir Bernard Pares and the British to take over publication of the London-based *Slavonic and East European Review*, which had been founded in 1922. After the war, when the British reclaimed the journal and the Americans sought to publish their own review, the editorial board formed the AAASS. Our real foundation, as a membership organization, took place in March 1960, when the Joint Committee and the old AAASS agreed to meet the growing needs for a professional interdisciplinary association by converting the charter into a membership organization. Simultaneously, under the leadership of Donald Treadgold, the association's journal was expanded, reorganized and, in the following year, renamed *Slavic Review*.

Your program also notes that this is the 30th National Convention of AAASS, and—what the heck—we can celebrate that anniversary too. But the first meeting, you should be aware, took place not thirty years ago but in April 1964 at the Hotel Commodore in New York. Even at that, conventions like this one were actually held initially by regional associations, the Far Western Slavic Conference and the Midwest Slavic Conference several years earlier. The Washington Unclassified Forum traces its history all the way back to 1945. The Far Western organization held its first convention at the Hoover Institution in 1958—a 40th anniversary. At the first Midwest conference in Madison, Wisconsin in April 1962, some 121 scholars attended,

and rooms were available at the university double and triple occupancy for (I cannot fail to mention here in Boca Raton) \$2.50 and \$1.75 per night; some singles were available for \$3.75. Registration cost \$1.50. All in all, the first national meetings were planned to feed off of the strength of the regional groups, overlapping with those meetings as they still do to some extent.

The AAASS's interest in anniversaries is complimented by other organizations in Slavic studies, as well. It is the season for commemorations. Last spring the Russian Research Center at Harvard, now the Kathryn W. and Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Russian Studies, celebrated its 50th anniversary in fine style, as did the Russian (now Harriman) Institute at Columbia, two years earlier. Cornell celebrated this year the 50th anniversary of Nabokov's arrival on campus. Even more venerably, the Slavic Collection of the New York Public Library is commemorating its 100th anniversary. IREX is celebrating its 30th anniversary as IREX, its 40th as the Interuniversity Committee on Travel Grants, which helped to administer the first exchange agreements between the U.S. and Soviet Union signed in 1958. (Aleksandr Iakovlev and Oleg Kalugin were among the first group of Soviet exchanges.) This is also the 60th anniversary of ACLS's Committee on Slavic Studies and the 50th of the Joint Committee. The National Council is celebrating its 20th anniversary. And I have certainly missed other important commemorations.

The point is that we are celebrating not just because we have a long, if little known, history, and that we have an organization of some 3,700 members, a journal with nearly 5,000 subscribers, and a convention that can attract more than a thousand attendees to Boca Raton even during Hurricane Georges. We are marking the anniversary, more importantly, because we have an uncertain future. We are facing multiple challenges from skeptical foundations, changing government, university, and public priorities, and from the disciplines themselves. This is not the place to try to answer those challenges. But I do want to explore the early history of our profession in the light of recent discussions of its future.

The origins of AAASS lie not so much in the history of the Cold War, as is often noted in these discussions, as they do in the dynamics of U.S. involvement in World War II. The country sorely lacked information on large and important parts of the world. As a result, college professors and their graduate students were recruited by the Research and Analysis (R&A) division of OSS to produce the knowledge necessary for wartime decisionmaking. The USSR division, led from 1941 by the Columbia historian Geroid Robinson, developed the area studies approach by bringing together historians, economists, geographers, anthropologists and other specialists to gauge issues having to do with the USSR's involvement in the war. By all accounts, the division performed exceptionally well, predicting, for example, that the Soviets would withstand the German invasion, when most Washington analysts forecast imminent collapse. Alexander Gershenkron has written that the first serious independent evaluations of Soviet economic data were also undertaken by R&A, as a way to evaluate the potential impact of Lend-Lease on the Soviet war effort. From the outset, Robinson, Abram Bergson, John Curtiss and others insisted on a rigorously “objective” approach to solving problems, founded on dispassionate social science criteria. This

approach was shared by other parts of R&A as well, including the Southeastern European section under the Balkanist Robert Lee Wolff.

The scholars who participated in these efforts had often studied in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s or had direct experience with interwar centers of Slavic studies in Prague, Berlin, and London. Many had traveled in the Balkans and considered themselves friends of the peoples of the region, including the Russians. These scholars from R&A were the founding fathers of our profession, and their goals had little or nothing to do with the Cold War. Gershenkron, for example, talked about putting together a group of academic economists who would evaluate what they thought would be the emerging prominent role of the Soviet Union in world trade and commerce. Beginning already in the fall of 1943, Robinson urged Columbia and the Rockefeller Foundation to establish an institute to carry on interdisciplinary work on the Soviet Union, which “would correspond . . . to a change that is rapidly developing in the distribution of world power.”

It is worth dwelling for a couple of minutes on the history of the Russian Institute at Columbia, in part because it was the first of its type in the United States and also because its first permanent faculty, Abram Bergson, John Hazard, Philip Mosely, Geroid Robinson, and Ernest Simmons played such important roles in the development of Slavic studies as an interdisciplinary field. Simmons and Hazard, for example, were the first two managing editors of *American Slavic and East European Review*. Mosely and Simmons were Chairman and Secretary of the Joint Committee, which spearheaded fundraising efforts to support the journal, publish the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (which began appearing in 1949), and build library collections.

Of the five scholars mentioned, four had served in the government during the war and the fifth, Simmons, developed an elaborate Russian language and area program at Cornell for government and military personnel. All shared the common belief, unambiguously (some would say dogmatically) articulated by Robinson--that interdisciplinary training in Slavic studies had to involve mastery of a single discipline and its methods, as well as a well-rounded area studies approach. The Institute opened its doors to the first class of students in September 1946, and there was every hope that cultural exchanges could be worked out involving Soviet and American scholars and students. Simmons went to Moscow in 1947 to negotiate an exchange, but—not surprisingly—came home empty-handed.

To summarize: the origins of the field and of the AAASS were bound to the interests of the United States as it emerged from its wartime alliance, but not necessarily to the Cold War itself. With that said, it would be foolish to ignore the important impact on the field of the growing rivalry with the Soviet Union. The Columbia Institute, for example, lobbied hard to get other selected Russian institutes founded in order to deflect criticism that Columbia was a center for Soviet infiltration. The founding of the Russian Research Center at Harvard in 1948 was in part a response to that need. Red-baiting and accusations of harboring fellow-travelers became a serious problem for Slavic studies in its early history. The postwar mood of the country changed quickly. For example, in 1946, William Henry Chamberlin, who had become a fierce critic of Soviet expansionism in Eastern

Europe, was forced to step down as editor of *The Russian Review* because of views that were perceived as excessively “anti-Soviet.” By 1948, H. Stuart Hughes, Associate Director of the Russian Research Center’s new research program, was forced to resign because of his support of Henry Wallace and Soviet-American cooperation. Things got even worse during the McCarthy period, when scholars exercised self-censorship and tried to avoid accusations of communist sympathies.

As some recent studies have shown, the Boston branch of the FBI and the CIA were constantly monitoring the work of the participants in the famous Harvard Interview Project, which was sponsored by the U.S. Air Force. Yet even taking into account contacts with what we now call the American intelligence community, the Harvard project continued the outstanding work of R&A and can be said to have “discovered” a Soviet society that operated according to principles distinct from the political-ideological pronouncements of the Soviet leadership. The close relationship of the totalitarian school with the emergence of the Cold War, explored in the recent work of Abbott Gleason, similarly should not detract from the quality and even suppleness of much of the scholarship on the Soviet system of this generation. Precisely because Slavic studies originated in the wartime needs of the developing “national security state”—in which intelligence and scholarly knowledge about friends and enemies combined—professors and their students continued to interact with government services, blurring the lines between national security interests, after 1948 of a clearly Cold War nature, and the development of scholarship.

The founding of the AAASS in 1948 was not free of some of these problems. Our name is even bound up in this history. John Hazard, the Columbia University law specialist and Russian Institute professor, drew up the legal charter of the corporation, and Hazard himself was sometimes accused of harboring an overly naive view of “the Russians.” I quote his memoirs (he speaks of himself in the third person):

At the formation meeting [of the AAASS and its Journal], held at the Harvard Club in New York, Robert Kerner of Berkeley insisted that the name “Russia” be omitted from any titles, and that the word “American” begin any title. He wanted it clear that this was not a front organization to insinuate Soviet propaganda into American scholarship. Consequently, the title of both the Association and the journal began with “American.” To avoid “Russia” in the title, the names of both became lengthy, so much so that Hazard’s former colleague in his law office questioned whether any organization could endure, without ridicule, a title of AAASS. Some people might get a sense that it was composed of asses.

There was also discussion at the meeting regarding the use of “Slavic studies” as an appropriate title of a journal that would include non-Slavic peoples in the region like Finns, Hungarians and Romanians. In this connection, my attentive East Europeanist colleagues in the audience will have already noticed that this brief history has been Russia-dominated, just as the early years of Slavic studies was considered primarily Russian Studies. This, too, had a lot to do with its origins in R&A, when Soviet affairs were initially combined with East European, Baltic, and Balkan. Robinson opposed this geographical diversity because he felt it impeded intense “area studies”

understanding of the USSR. As a result, the others were passed off to the European division and the USSR division came into its own, in Barry Katz's words, "as the only unit in the R&A authorized to practice social science in one country." Robinson made a similar argument at the founding of the Russian Institute. He thought that the interwar European Slavic studies institutes, for all their positive accomplishments, had weakened the intellectual rigor of their scholarship by stretching themselves too thin geographically. This reflected, as well, the interests of the institute's founders; with the exception of Mosely, a Balkan expert, few had any competence in Eastern Europe. Even the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies—at least until after 1956—paid scant attention to the needs of the East European field. Immediately after the war, of course, there were still hopes that at least parts of Eastern Europe would remain independent. The Poles provided Columbia with funding for the Adam Mickiewicz chair, held by Manfred Kridl, and the Czechs for the Thomas G. Masaryk chair, held by Roman Jakobson. But after the Czech coup in February 1948, both arrangements were cancelled and "mid-Europe" studies, as it was then called, suffered in comparison to the quickly growing Russian field. It is probably fair to say that in the first decade after the founding of the AAASS and the Joint Committee, Eastern Europe was something of a stepchild of Slavic studies, supported and nourished to its benefit in some cases, ignored and pushed off to the side to its detriment in others.

Especially from the perspective of 1998, the focus at the founding on Russia and Russians to the exclusion of the other peoples of the Soviet Union is also striking. There were a few voices in the academy and out who tried to bring Ukrainian, Baltic, and Belorussian concerns to the attention of the Slavic studies community, but with little success. Robinson and his contemporaries carried on the wartime habits of mind and language, equating Russia and Russians with the Soviet Union. The multi-national character of the Soviet Union, which did find its way into the Harvard Project, was nevertheless understudied and underappreciated. Imperial Russia was also considered a quintessentially Russian state. Neither the Joint Committee nor the journal did much to offset these misconceptions.

Russian émigrés—whether monarchist, liberals, or Mensheviks—also did little to alter this integral Russian focus. Despite the importance of the émigrés in the academy, they were for the most part isolated from the institutions related to interdisciplinary Slavic studies. As important as Michael Karpovich at Harvard was to the training of the first generation of postwar Russian historians, or Gleb Struve to literary studies at Berkeley, or Sergius Yakobson to collecting Slavic materials at the Library of Congress, the Russian Institute, the Russian Research Center, and the AAASS itself, at least in the early period, kept something of a distance. Despite their obvious erudition, the émigrés were perceived as lacking appropriate objectivity to their subject. Meanwhile, the first director of the Russian Research Center, the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, knew no Russian and had little understanding of Russian society. Associate Director Stuart Hughes had studied some Russian during the war, but was basically a historian of Western Europe. Of course, for many of the émigrés, Karpovich included, Russian history ended in 1917, and what followed was not a suitable academic subject. In any case, it is a source of immense pleasure to anyone involved in Slavic studies today

that there is so much interaction within the scholarly community between émigrés, children of émigrés, and non-émigrés, indeed between scholarly communities there and here, with nationality no longer serving as a criterion of objectivity.

To conclude this roundabout anniversary exploration of origins, I would like to address ever-so-briefly the recent criticism of interdisciplinary Slavic studies in particular and of area studies in general. The argument goes that we have lost intellectual vigor by having too easily accommodated to the interests of government and national security, while losing touch with the methodological innovations in our respective disciplines. There are really two parts to the problem. First of all, our field will continue to have direct relevance for American national security interests, defined differently to be sure from those of the Cold War, but still critical to the country's ever-growing role in world affairs. Perhaps we need to draw more clearly the boundaries between intelligence and scholarship than did the pioneers of the field. But the problems of the area we study—whether the travails of Bosnia and Kosovo or the economic meltdown of Russia—still require an interdisciplinary approach.

Secondly, just as our own disciplines become more demanding methodologically and technically, the part of the world we study is opening in myriad ways to new kinds of explorations and possibilities unimaginable a decade ago. To take appropriate advantage of these new opportunities for research, one simply has to have the kind of area training the founders envisaged. There is no way around it: culture, language, and society are key to understanding. But unless our work reflects *and* speaks to the innovations in the disciplines, we could suffer the kind of marginalization that some predict. In other words, we have a really tough job ahead, but no tougher than the one faced by the founders, who started out practically at ground zero. Over the course of fifty years, we have been given resources, cadres, and relatively well-funded and well-run organizations to help us. We can celebrate that fact tonight, and worry about the future tomorrow morning, first thing.

Notes:

1. See Dorothy Atkinson, "Understanding the Soviets: The Development of U.S. Expertise on the USSR," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 183-200. See also the unpublished manuscript: Ralph Fisher, "The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies: From its Origins to 1969," August 1970. Thanks to Ralph Fisher and the University of Illinois Archives for making this manuscript and other AAASS papers available to me. Thanks to Dorothy Atkinson for sharing her wisdom about the organization's history.

2. See "The Editors," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 23, no. 62 (January 1945): 1, and Ernest Simmons, "Editorial Foreword," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 7 (1948): 1-2.

3. For the important role of the ACLS in this early history, see Gordon B. Turner, "The Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, 1948-1971," *ACLS Newsletter*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 6-25.

4. There is considerable material on Treadgold's importance to the reorganization of *Slavic Review* in Edward

Brown's papers, located in the Special Collections of Green Library, Stanford University. "Edward Brown," SC 500, box 1.

5. Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HIA), Boris Nicolaevsky collection, box 483. Holland Hunter, program chairman of the first convention, invited Nicolaevsky to address the convention in Russian!

6. Fisher, "The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies," pp. 4-5.

7. Edward Brown, SC 500, box 1.

8. The area studies approach was pioneered in the main by the anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Clyde Kluckhohn to understand the military aspects of Japanese society, culture, and institutions. See Philip E. Mosely, "The Growth of Russian Studies," in Harold H. Fisher, ed., *American Research on Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), pp. 6-7.

9. See Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 144-145.

10. Alexander Gerschenkron, "The Study of the Soviet Economy in the USA," Walter Z. Laqueur and Leopold Labedz, eds., *The State of Soviet Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 44.

11. A partial list of important historians and social scientists in the Russian and East European field who worked for or with OSS as consultants includes: Abram Bergson, John Shelton Curtiss, Alexander Gerschenkron, Alexander Dragnich, John Hazard, Alex Inkeles, Wasily Leontief, Barrington Moore, Jr., Phillip Mosely, Michael Petrovich, Henry Roberts, Geroid Robinson, L. S. Stavrianos, Robert Tucker, Alexander Vucinich, Wayne Vucinich, and Robert Lee Wolff.

12. Gerschenkron, "The Study of the Soviet Economy," pp. 44-45.

13. [Geroid T. Robinson], "The Russian Institute," L. Gray Cowan, ed., *A History of the School of International Affairs and Associated Area Institutes, Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 44.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46. For a biography of Robinson, see Robert F. Byrnes, "Geroid T. Robinson: A Founder of Russian Studies in the United States," *A History of Russian and East European Studies in the United States: Selected Essays* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 199-217.

15. See, especially, Stephen F. Cohen's essay, "Sovietology as a Vocation," in his *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3-27. See also Alexander Dallin, "Bias and Blunders in American Studies on the USSR," *Slavic Review*, vol. 32, no. 3 (September 1973): 560-577.

16. John N. Hazard, *Recollections of a Pioneering Sovietologist* (New York, London, Rome: Oceana Publications, 1984), p. 91.

17. The Chamberlin question is well-documented in the papers of *The Russian Review*, located in the Hoover Institution Archives. As Dmitri von Mohrenschildt wrote to Chamberlin (October 28, 1946), much of the problem had to do with Chamberlin's sharp and unremitting attacks on Stalin's policies in the Hearst Press. HIA, Russian Review, Box 8.

18. *Gentleman Rebel: The Memoirs of H. Stuart Hughes* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990), pp. 207-208. See also Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 74-75.

19. See, for example, Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 339-340, and Lionel S. Lewis, *Cold War on Campus: A Study of the Politics of Organizational Control* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), pp. 267-272.

20. Diamond, *Compromised Campus*, pp. 50-110. Charles T. O'Connell, "The Munich Institute for the Study of the USSR: Origin and Social Composition," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 808 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1990). Diamond and particularly O'Connell overstate their cases.

21. Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). See especially his chapter, "'Totalitarianism' Among the Sovietologists," pp. 121-142.

22. There are interesting observations on the interaction between scholarship and intelligence scattered throughout Robin W. Winks's *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987). I am also grateful to Alexander Dallin for sharing his observations with me on the subject of postwar scholarship, contacts with intelligence agencies, and the Harvard Interview Project.

23. Hazard, *Recollections*, p. 94.

24. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence*, p. 142.

25. [Robinson], "The Russian Institute," p. 44.

26. Clarence Manning, *A History of Slavic Studies in the United States* (Milwaukee: The Marquette University Press), p. 73.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

28. Struve and Jakobson's papers are accessible at the Hoover Institution Archives. Both sets of papers contain interesting insights into the role of émigrés in the development of the field in the immediate postwar period. On Karpovich, see Terence Emmons, "Russia Then and Now in the Pages of the *American Historical Review* and Elsewhere: A Few Centennial Notes," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4 (October 1995): 1144, fn. 33.

29. Among some academics, it was thought that Slavic studies should be carried on only by "Anglo-Saxons." Thanks to Nicholas Riasanovsky for confirming this observation.

30. On the other hand Kluckhohn did have a great deal of experience with the area studies approach developed primarily by anthropologists during the war. Thanks to Joseph Berliner, former Associate Director of the Russian Research Center, for interesting remarks on this issue.

31. Some of this criticism is addressed in a recent volume sponsored by the Kennan Institute. Daniel Orlovsky, ed., *Beyond Soviet Studies* (Washington D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995).