

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
Richard S. Wortman

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2017

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Richard S. Wortman conducted by William McAllister on November 4, 2016. This interview is part of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Session #1 (audio)

Interviewee: Richard S. Wortman

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: William McAllister

Date: November 4, 2016

Q: My name is William McAllister. I'm a Senior Research Fellow at INCITE, the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Research and Empirics at Columbia University, and I'm here today on the 4th of November, 2016 to talk with Richard [S.] Wortman. At present, Professor Wortman is the James Bryce Professor Emeritus of European Legal History, specializing in the history of imperial Russia. Among his many books, professional articles and other publications is Professor Wortman's two-volume work, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, Volume I from Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* and the second volume *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. The latter was awarded the George L. Moss Prize of the American Historical Association and the two volumes were awarded the 2006 Efim Etkind prize of the St. Petersburg European University for the best Western work on Russian culture and literature.

In 2006, Princeton University Press published an abridged and revised one volume edition of *Scenarios: Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy: From Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. He has also published, two volumes of collected articles, *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule* and *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration: Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy* and continues his study of imperial Russia, imperial representation and political culture and these are only some of the works of Professor Wortman over the years.

Professor Wortman received his PhD from my doctoral alma mater, the University of Chicago. Welcome, Professor Wortman. I'd like to begin by asking you, where do you think that your interest in imperial Russia came from?

Wortman: It arose from the international scene when I graduated from Cornell [University] in 1958. The Soviet Union was opening up. Exciting things were happening. There was Sputnik. There were the various musical groups that came here, the great musicians. It just seemed a great efflorescence. I enjoyed several great Russian writers and was interested in intellectual history and Russia, of course, had an interest in intellectual history. So that was really the foundation. My major was French history, and I had a very fine professor, Edward [Whiting] Fox. I also took a course in Russian history with Marc Szeftel. But I didn't study Russian until I decided in my junior year to do so.

Q: You started in your junior year at Cornell, to kind of get interested in Russia.

Wortman: It came then, so it would be '56 to '58.

Q: Right. And was that because of a course with Szeftel that you took or—?

Wortman: No, no. He was a very fine historian, but it wasn't he who interested me. His focus was Medieval Russia, though I took not his Medieval Russia course, but his survey course. Then, I had a kind of a practical consideration and I figured, which turned out to be really prophetic.

Helpful as the study of France was, it had its own great historians and competing with them might be problematic. Russia had many fine historians, but they were bound by Marxist/Leninist ideology, and there would be a lot to do there, you see, and that thought proved right. Russian historians were limited in terms of the generalizations they were allowed to make.

The other aspect was that Russia was coming open and people realized that we didn't have any Russian experts and so money was coming available. Now this was not my main concern, but it turned out to be an important one because in my first year of graduate school, the first year of graduate school at Chicago, I had a Ford [Foundation] grant, but the Ford grant wasn't renewed, to my fury, and I was about ready to leave graduate school when the National Defense [Education] Act came through and I was taken care of through the whole graduate process very well, as well as my wife at the time. In addition, I was designated as vital for the national defense, so I was not open to the draft. I presume [Vladimir V.] Putin would say my cause would be to subvert Russia, which was not what I did there. Well, I'll talk about that later. Okay.

Q: I guess this was—not everything came under the National Defense [Education] Act at that time. When you were at Chicago, whom did you study with and who had kind of a—or even outside Chicago, who had an influence on your work?

Wortman: Well, Leopold [H.] Haimson was my mentor and he was very inspiring at that stage. His lectures were very good at Chicago, and they enthralled me. Later on he lost interest in lecturing and really focused much more on research seminars. He also became much narrower and focused more on the early twentieth century, and particularly 1905 to 1917, though not only.

But at any rate, at that time it was very loose; you could do whatever you wanted and I did. And in addition he kept running back to New York to take care of the Menshevik project, so he wasn't around very much. But he did teach courses and they were very good.

The other person who influenced me wasn't at Chicago at the time. See, when I graduated Cornell my advisor was Edward [Whiting] Fox, who had taught at Harvard [University]. When he had taught at Harvard, he had two students there from Russian history, who were doing French history as a minor: one was Haimson and the other was Marc Raeff. So I debated when I went to graduate school; I got into Clark [College]—Raeff was at Clark College at the time—and Haimson, and I decided to go with Haimson because Chicago had more standing, but I maintained my contact with Raeff and his works and his person and we maintained a correspondence, which was very fruitful. Actually I gave a remembrance of both at their memorial sessions and if anyone wants to read them, they're online. Both of them influenced me, in different ways.

Q: You mentioned that—well, let me just pick up on that last—how would you say that Haimson influenced you and how would you say that Raeff influenced you?

Wortman: Haimson influenced me in many, many ways. His book that he wrote when he was something like twenty-nine years old on the Russian Marxists, I read before I went to graduate school and I found it extremely inspiring. He combined psychology—at the time he was interested in anthropology—psychology, anthropology, intellectual history and it was written with a flare—a lot of people find it unreadable, but we didn't. It was very complex, evocative

and continental in its syntax rather than Anglo-Saxon, and that had an enormous impact on me. Also he gave a seminar at Chicago on Russian historiography, which I later taught at Chicago after he left and have here also though I think only once.

That course sort of laid out all the great Russian historians in the pre-Revolutionary and even post-Revolutionary period and focused attention on the big sweep, the big interpretations of history. And so you really got a sense that you were, you felt, part of the way history was made and that it could really mean something because when these people were writing, it did mean something, a lot. So that was very, very influential.

He was also very big in terms of socializing. We had nice parties there. With Haimson it was a quasi-friendship or avuncular relationship. With Raeff there was none of that. But Raeff I didn't really meet a lot personally until he came to Columbia and even then, I don't know if you heard about it, but he and Leopold Haimson were teaching together and they were friends, very close friends. At a certain stage, they had an enormous feud and by the time I got here in 1988, they weren't talking to each other, for years.

Q: And what was the feud about?

Wortman: I'm loath to talk about it.

Q: Intellectually, how did Raeff influence you? Or was there much influence?

Wortman: Raeff influenced me, yes, but through his books and also because my period was more his period than Leo's—not only that, he was a really true scholar and if he found anything that interested him or archives that he knew about, he would always write a note to me. Or if he read something I wrote and he didn't like something, he would make his opinion known. He didn't pull his punches and his handwritten notes were always completely honest and very helpful, extraordinarily helpful.

Q: You mentioned before that Haimson was coming back to New York to work on the Menshevik project. So this is a project that was going on at the Russian Institute at the time, or is this a Haimson project independent of the Russian Institute?

Wortman: I don't know if—I think it was at the Russian Institute. In fact, it was connected with Bakhmeteff Archive, which was downstairs in this building and held, I believe, the results of the Menshevik project, or does so today.

Q: And the idea of the project was to kind of record the experiences of the people who identified as Mensheviks?

Wortman: The Mensheviks, the old Mensheviks, they all lived around here. There's a whole colony near me on 110th Street, and so a lot of the leadership of the Mensheviks abroad was here, yes.

Q: And the archive was downstairs here, which—

Wortman: In the library.

Q: In the Lehman Library?

Wortman: Yes.

Q: Oh, I see, okay. Let me ask you a little bit about the Russian Institute or now the Harriman Institute, as you kind of experienced it from afar, before you came to Columbia in 1988. As we talked before, you—

Wortman: Well, in 1977 I moved from Chicago to Princeton. I always maintained contact after Haimson left Chicago. He must have left it in the mid to late '60s. There was a big blow up in the Chicago history department, and he and [Michael] Cherniavsky left and Cherniavsky went to [University of] Rochester, Haimson went to Columbia, and so I maintained my contacts when I came here. I participated not in the Institute, but in the Slavic Seminar. I used to come to New York, gave talks there. It was a much smaller group than it is now. So, yes. In addition, Haimson founded a workshop on social history at the Institute, which continues to meet today.

It used to meet, in [Room] 1219. Everything still happens in 1219. Haimson's teaching resembled that of a European scholar; he focused on specific subjects in Russian social history and when he came here he farmed them out. I picked my own thesis topic at Chicago. He okayed it and helped me, but he didn't prescribe or define it for me. At Columbia it was not like that.

This was the European, Herr Professor kind of thing. He had a big following and his students, many of them were outstanding. So I would come east for that and when I moved to Princeton, particularly, it was very easy. Then in 1985, I got a senior fellowship here. Now they don't give senior fellowships anymore. But I was at Princeton, you know, so it wasn't a big move and spent the year here. So I was quite familiar with it by the time I began teaching here in 1988. In fact, while I was here in '85-'86, Marc Raeff announced his retirement and I discussed the possibility of leaving Princeton with Leopold.

Q: Part of what I was interested in was how well you knew and how—from afar, if you will, from Chicago, for example, or from Princeton, which is much nearer—how you regarded the Russian Institute at the time, especially relative to maybe the growth of the Davis Center [for Russian and Eurasian Studies - Harvard University] or other competitors.

Wortman: Right. Well, I thought it was a marvelous institution. By the time I came here it was—the historical part was beginning to run down because of the feud between Haimson and Raeff. There were still good people coming and as it turned out, in the year that I came or even the year before it, Haimson succeeded in getting fellowships for a whole group of very good graduate students, in that year and the year after and when I came here, maybe it was because I came in, you know—and then Mark von Hagen was very active so things were really bubbling then. And the Russian field had its own political autonomy from the history department, which was across the street in Fayerweather, and the history department didn't like that.

So they had their own requirements. Some of them were pretty tough; the language requirements were pretty demanding, and the students became very well prepared. When I came, the first course I gave was historiography and I remember three of the students, three of the best students, all of whom have very good jobs and have published well, came in and protested. I was going to give the same historiography course I gave at Chicago because Princeton didn't really have a lot of Russian history graduate students at that time. The three of them came in and they said, "Look, we have this requirement, that requirement." The Russian history requirement was, particularly under Haimson, a very serious master's essay. People wrote master's essays of great length, of up to 500 pages. They got involved in it. Now the master's essay is simply a glorified seminar paper.

But at the time it was a major project and of course this slowed their progress. The history department, under pressure from all sorts of organizations, was trying to speed it up. So when I arrived I tried to minimize this and my lifetime friendship with Leopold for a while was strained because he regarded this as the way things were supposed to go. So that was really very—and the three of them actually said, "We don't have any time." I replied, "What am I going to do? I have to teach this seminar." In the end, all three turned in excellent papers, and they all proved excellent scholars.

The 1990s, more exactly '88 to '95, was really a period of efflorescence here. We had three and a half Russian historians at the time: myself, Leopold, Mark von Hagen and then there's another one whose name I can't recall, a junior person who covered East Europe as well as early Russia. He left after a while and went out west. By the time I retired in 2009 there were none. So that's a

major change. Then this was a really exciting place because you could not build a graduate program at the time at Princeton. I was used to the graduate program at the University of Chicago and found Princeton's undergraduate teaching not to my taste. So that among other reasons was why I moved. And here it was much better.

Q: So the Russian Institute really became the kind of—the graduate program in Russia history.

Wortman: Oh yes, absolutely. There were others, too, but I would say it was right at the top, right at the top.

Q: Talking about, just picking up on something you said about Haimson's 500-page theses not going over too well, and you're trying to come in and helping that process along, in terms of trying to rein it in a little bit, in terms of Russia history were there, aside from kind of reining in Haimson a little bit, other changes going on of that sort in terms of the Russian history program at Harriman?

Wortman: Shortly after I arrived, [Robert] Legvold was still the head of the Institute, which introduced a history requirement, which has since been removed. I remember, when I first came, I taught a very large lecture class including many students of political science, literature, and other fields. So this was really a very important part of the Institute's activity.

Q: Let me pick up on that a bit, in a somewhat different way is that the Russian Institute has had kind of a twin focus, which is to some extent on policy development, policy influence, that sort

of thing, as well as on knowledge development, scholarly work. And it had somewhat diverse student populations that reflected that in terms of the PhD students but also people who were here for the certificate program, that would help them in their other work, you know. Did you see any kind of—was there much tension between those two kinds of goals? Or did they, to your mind, did they seem synchronous?

Wortman: I had the feeling that the people in policy-oriented subjects did pick up something from taking the history class. But I didn't feel that the students co-mingled that much; they mingled with their own type. And there was a big difference because the people in the PhD program, let us say had higher standards for the most part. Now, and some of the standards for the certificate were unimpressive, though there were exceptions. I also see that in recent years, the various master's programs included some really good students in them, which made teaching worthwhile. So it changed over time.

Q: At that time, I mean speaking of the late '80s, early '90s, you described a difference, no co-mingling so much between the certificate programs and the PhD students, among the different kinds of PhD students who were, especially with the Russian Institute from political science, from history, perhaps from literature, did they kind of co-mingle? Or did they more departmentalize?

Wortman: Well, they co-mingled more. I have the feeling that they co-mingled more with the literature students than with the political scientists.

Q: And about the faculty, I mean, did they come together intellectually and/or socially across the disciplines? Or was that also, tended to be more kind of disciplinary-bound, if you will?

Wortman: Some. I think not as much as earlier. The institution for that was the Slavic Seminar, which was extremely exclusive in the '70s and '80s and then sort of opened its doors and many of the faculty stopped going, in fact. People from all over New York came in. They had some very good speakers and things. It became a different institution over time.

Q: So the Slavic Seminar, which is of the, sponsored by the Eastern European Institute? Was that, no? It was—

Wortman: No, no. That was a Columbia Seminar.

Q: Oh, the Columbia Seminars [University Seminars]. I see, I see.

Wortman: Robert Belknap was chair of the Slavic seminar. During the '70s when I came from, particularly from Chicago, you'd have faculty members mainly attending. Then later on it became more of a New York City seminar.

Q: In terms of this other policy focus of the Russian Institute, as well as the knowledge development part, aside from the certificate program and those kinds of people, did you experience yourself or did you see a lot of effort being put into trying to have influence with policymakers in Washington or even with people in the Soviet Union?

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Wortman: Yes, I mean I saw colleagues, Legvold and Marshall [D.] Shulman. Before I came, Shulman was in the [James Earl] Carter administration. He was replaced by his student, Legvold, and they, of course, yes, they were prominent and somewhat sympathetic to the Soviet Union, and Columbia in many quarters was identified and deplored for that reason. Haimson had very close connections with the Soviet historical profession and initiated a series of seminars in St. Petersburg, or Leningrad at the time. He also invited Soviet historians to appear here enabling us to meet leading figures in the profession.

The Harriman Institute was very welcoming, you know, and the Institute always has had good relations with Russia. Tim [Timothy M.] Frye has very good relations with Moscow and this continues that tradition. Haimson's social history viewpoint was closer to the Soviet viewpoint than many American scholars'. Many of the old Mensheviks regarded him as a Bolshevik and with some justification. But he was too sophisticated for that. Marc Raeff, on the other hand, was quite conservative. He had no part and his office—or you may have heard of Marc Raeff's letter. Did anyone refer to that?

Q: I don't think so. I do remember that there were—

Wortman: When Marshall Shulman was appointed. I wasn't here yet.

Q: And then the letter was—other people have been interviewing other people, so they may have, somebody else may have mentioned it.

Wortman: Okay, well let me tell you. That I can, because that I think was common knowledge. This was before I came, so I don't know exactly what year Shulman became director. He was brought in from Harvard after [Alexander] Dallin left for Stanford [University], and Raeff circulated a letter of protest, I think because Shulman—I mean, he saw [Joseph V.] Stalin moderating in his last years.

Q: The Raeff letter.

Wortman: Yes, the Raeff letter. So Raeff wrote a letter, which said that he could no longer continue to be a member of the faculty of the Harriman Institute.

Q: And this was a letter to the president or to the dean, probably, something like that.

Wortman: I don't know. It may have been to the chair of the history department, maybe to the dean of the faculty, I'm not sure.

Q: Now Haimson's setting up these seminars in St. Petersburg. But when did that happen?

Wortman: This happened during the '90s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They're still going on.

Q: As far as you know, was this the first attempt to kind of be—set up something more formal like that, between the Harriman Institute and the Russians? I'm thinking whether—is there a thought about whether Harriman could have done more in terms of, in the earlier years, before the collapse, of trying to kind of institute like a—have a formal office in Moscow or something like that, whether it could have done something more to kind of facilitate policy discourse and intellectual discourse?

Wortman: You know, since I came at the end of the '80s I don't know.

Q: Do you think that would have been a worthwhile effort or, for it to have done in terms of intellectual development as well as policy influence?

Wortman: I'm not sure. Because Haimson's was very much on a personal level of scholars he knew. The Soviet Union was extremely bureaucratized. He worked through the Academy of Sciences [of the USSR].

Q: Since we're talking about the late '80s, early '90s, obviously the big moment there is the collapse of the Soviet Union, both for Harriman, for the world. Thinking of the Russian Institute as an area studies place, did it, did people here, have a sense, from the different areas, different disciplines that comprised the area studies, were there differences in how they, whether they expected this collapse or not? Or whether they expected it to happen so fast or whether they kind of had a sense of the underlying weakness of the Soviet Union?

Wortman: I don't think anybody here at Columbia thought it was going to collapse. And I certainly didn't. You know, some of the more conservative people like [Martin E.] Malia and [Richard E.] Pipes claimed that they saw this coming, but it's not too clear they did.

Q: Aside from Malia and Pipes, were there other people who did kind of, did you think, did in fact, to your mind, kind of expect it to collapse; that they were that clear-eyed about it?

Wortman: No, to me it came as a kind of shock. Many in the field felt that it could not change. Jerry [F.] Hough, the political scientist at Duke, he wrote a well-regarded book about the prefects system, administrative system, in the Soviet Union. Gave a talk at the Slavic convention, I guess it must have been in early '90, at the AAASS [American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies] convention in Miami. This was when Gorbachev was collaborating with the group of army officers, and there were expectations of major reforms. He asserted that there would not be a great change. Gorbachev was merely threatening the population with a breakup of the Soviet Union, using the Yugoslav example to enhance his power.

So anyway, but certainly I'm a firm believer in not predicting the future, especially with the Soviet Union. Now anyone might say the same about the United States, but—

Q: As you were talking I was thinking that on the one hand there are the hardliners like Malia and Pipes, who might have expected that the Soviet Union would collapse and I was wondering if the people at Columbia, even though they didn't see that the Soviet Union would collapse, might have thought that in the '80s, I don't know whether there was discussion about Gorbachev,

for example, was for real and that perestroika and glasnost was for real, that they took that seriously. They didn't necessarily expect that it would collapse, but that there was something fundamentally happening there that the Houghs of the world would not have seen. Was there discourse like that at Columbia at the time?

Wortman: Well, I think this was in the air here, yes. I mean, I know that not Raeff, but Haimson believed in the emergence of a reform movement under Gorbachev. There was a feeling that it could evolve, the notion of a third way. Gorbachev represented that and the history of Russia has indicated that a third way is improbable. Gorbachev was more popular here than he was in Russia. In that respect the Russian hardliners were correct that once they let go, communism would collapse, which it did and Russia still hasn't found its way.

Q: I was wondering from your own studies about imperial Russia and kind of thinking about that in terms of what was going on in the Soviet Union at that time and since, were there lessons, are there lessons that we should be taking from your work on imperial Russia, to understand what Gorbachev was trying to do or what was happening in the Soviet Union then and/or what is happening now with Putin and especially, for example, the crisis in Ukraine or the move in Odessa and just his general policy towards Europe and towards the U.S.?

Wortman: Right. I think there are definitely lessons to learn. I was interviewed by a correspondent a few years ago from a web newspaper called *Ruskii Slon*. *Slon* in Russian means elephant, but this didn't mean elephant. It was an acronym for a society acting in behalf of the Solovetskii monastery. I was asked to give my solutions, which I did not, but I gave my

explanations, which did not please my Russian friends. First is the identification of authority with empire and the basing of foreign policy on a unified empire. Second is the lack of pluralistic institutions and one of the characteristics of the 1990s was the inability to build them.

They began to be built in the early twentieth century, but the Bolshevik Revolution put an end to this. I've written a book on nineteenth century legality, too, in the Judicial Reform of 1864 and articles on that subject. The failures of a system of rule of law in imperial Russia and the problems that engendered. But the situation is not simple. It's not that the Russians don't have a system of law, but they have a system of law in which law is not the ruling force, personality is. So all of the resulting difficulties are coming to the fore now, in addition to the nationalism and the authoritarianism that everybody talks about, which are germane to understanding Putin's experience.

For a while they said, well you know, Russia's going to become a Western country. There was going to be democratization. Now, with Putin's reassertion of power, the Carnegie Institution [Carnegie Corporation of New York] just gave us a million dollars to help us to understand Russia. Now, I hope we do, but it won't be by generating systems of transitology. I'm a firm believer in national exceptionalism, historically, and I've argued this in various historical papers. This is how I came into the field. People said Russia's our big opponent. We have to learn about Russia. American policies are a bit fickle, you know. Russia becomes nice. We don't have to know about Russia. Russia's going to be like France or more like Germany and Japan after World War II. Just like Iraq, you know, they're all going to become the same. I think, Okay, we

had Russian experts in the government in the 1990s who were trained, but they did not, I think, do us glory. Well, who was the one under [William Jefferson] Clinton?

Q: Strobe [Nelson Strobridge] Talbott [III]?

Wortman: Yes, Strobe Talbot, with the growth of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and everything like that and then we had Condi [Condoleezza] Rice, who was an expert. Then [Michael A.] McFaul, who was convinced that he'd go out in the streets and democratize Russia. These were our Russian experts. So there's no guarantee. I heard scholars at the Institute talking about experts advising on questions of policy. They observed that the advice reaches a certain level, then the politicians seek out someone who'll agree with them who might as well not know a thing, about political realities, like Paul [D.] Wolfowitz.

Q: I'm wondering, one of the things I wanted to ask you about was there seems to be perhaps a decline, speaking of the Russian Institute and policy influence, a decline, perhaps, of academic influence in policymaking, perhaps. But I was wondering if you, from your perspective, if you would say perhaps it's not so much a decline in policy influence, but it's maybe you want a different kind of basis for that policy influence.

Wortman: Yes, that's right. And more serious consideration, rather than vogues, you know; globalization, reset, the simple things that the layman can understand. Well, a layman can understand lots of things, but these things have political charisma, so they rely upon the slogans of the present.

Q: And from your own work it seems like you've identified some fundamental elements of Russia that are going to persist, whether it's an imperial Russia, Communist Party with an imperial—with an empire of sorts, or whether it's a post-Soviet Russia, that these fundamental things are going to persist and that those are the things that have to be paid attention to, the fundamental things you mentioned before like the identification with empire, lack of pluralist institutions, lack of a legal structure for a rule of law and a cult of personality that these seemed essential to Russia.

Wortman: Yes. They seem essentials of wielding authority in Russia, yes.

Q: Right. When the collapse happened, how did people here at the Russian Institute respond to that? Because here you've got, I should call it the Harriman Institute, but still it's kind of the Russian Institute in the sense that Russia is, the Soviet Union is its main focus and here its main focus, the Soviet Union, has kind of fallen apart. Did people quickly realize that this was an intellectual perhaps as well as a political problem and reorganize themselves or were there people thinking, Oh, it'll go back to being the Soviet Union and things just stay the same or—?

Wortman: People began thinking differently. No one knew exactly what to do. Everyone knows about the various attempts to change the economy and the political system. Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin have spoken at Columbia and here and I, of course, heard all three of them, under the auspices of the Institute. You really got a feeling of their different personalities. And in terms of the fields of history and political science, it was a complete change of focus. When I was a

graduate student and when I began teaching here—well, up until the late '80s, one didn't study nationality.

We had Edward [A.] Allworth here and I didn't even know what department he was in, but I almost never saw him. We had people who did geography in Central Asia, but as far as the history group was, no one was going to study nationality. I mean, you had this kind of universalistic, semi-Marxist—because nationality, you know, was as [Sigmund] Freud said, the narcissism of small differences, and Freud said this when Nazism was arising in, when the differences weren't so small. After the collapse of the Soviet Union we realized that this was an empire. A whole generation of students then studied the nationalities: the empire, including Central Asia, and that's why the name of the Harriman Institute changed from the Soviet Union—to just the Harriman Institute. So it sort of broadened the whole field of interest and the interest in Ukraine arising. Marc Raeff helped in this respect because he was interested in and wrote on Ukraine.

Q: I wanted to touch on nationality studies, which you acknowledge have become more important—

Wortman: Very important.

Q: —since the collapse of the Soviet Union, not only for the former Soviet states, but also for paying attention to Eastern European countries.

Wortman: Yes, and Mark von Hagen and I gave a seminar together over a few years on Empire and Nationalities.

Q: I was going to ask you if you participated in any development along these lines at—

Wortman: Yes, I did.

Q: —and so obviously you have. But the Harriman Institute is also an area studies place, and I was wondering if there's any—is there any kind of intellectual conflict between those two ideas? Or are they in sync? And the conflict they have in mind is that, potential conflict, is that nationality studies kind of say focus on this country, you know. Whereas area studies says, "No, let's focus, if you think of it spatially, geographically; let's focus on this region." So to me, what strikes me is the potential intellectual conflict between the two. I was wondering if you kind of see things in that way at all? Well, maybe that they feed one another.

Wortman: Now that's a very interesting question. I don't see it, as it emerged here, as an area of conflict, but I think of it as an intellectual tension in dealing with these questions that still run through the understanding of the relationship of Russia to Ukraine, which belonged to Russia and now won't belong to Russia and can't survive without Russia. But Ukraine won't join Russia and Russia will not be accommodating and won't work within that framework, and I think, it's an ongoing situation.

The conflict emerges particularly in regard to the émigrés, who often attended our meetings, and take the point of view of the nationalities. But I participated in a conference in Kazan in the early '90s where the Tatar movement was very active. A conflict erupted there between the Russians and Tatars, which was very interesting and disturbing. But they've kind of resolved that and now, of course, you have Chechnya, and these conflicts will go beyond my lifetime.

Q: Speaking of area studies, I counterposed it relative to nationality studies, but there's another counterpose, which is a threat, perhaps, to the Russian Institute or the Harriman Institute and that is the rise of functional programs and studies like security studies or to focus on environmental issues, that sort of thing, as opposed to area studies.

Wortman: This is a big problem, yes.

Q: How do you see the problem?

Wortman: When I was a student and in my early career it was considered obvious. I taught a course in Russian civilization at Chicago that was established mainly by anthropologists, who believed in civilizations and cultures. The courses in this program were all area-oriented and all undergraduates had to take a civilization course. Then it changed and the sea change—I don't know when it began, certainly particularly with the predominance of economics. So while there was a Soviet Union, you had Soviet economists, specialists in that. Once the Soviet Union is gone, well, then Russia operated according to everyone's economics. Why did you need to study Russian culture or civilization?

You have the same thing in history—and at one end of the spectrum, as I indicated, about exceptionality and specificity and universality and common grounds. I think maybe it's beginning to right itself. But I remember at Princeton, the economics department refused to hire even someone who was an economist expert in modeling, but specializing in Russia. I was the director of the Russian studies program for a while, and so this was an issue. At Princeton they also eliminated, for a time, Russian literature's graduate program. They restored it after I left.

William Bowen was a very fine president but made a bad mistake by eliminating it because once they didn't have a Russian literature graduate program department, we couldn't apply for government area grants. So this was biting the hand that fed you. George [F.] Kennan was there, by the way. I was in contact with him and he was a firm believer in area studies. He donated money to the Russia Studies program, program, not a department. In the history profession, the whole "historian's controversy," *Historikerstreit* in German, about the country's "special path," *Sonderweg*, influenced the Russian historical profession, whose members, like the liberal and leftist scholars in Germany rejected the notion of a "special past" and sought to study as reflections of universal trends. The notion of a distinctive past became suspect, to be avoided, though in Russia, I would argue, and in current circumstances, it seems indispensable.

Q: Pardon me, just for a second. The idea of a special path militated against area studies, because it's—

Wortman: No, no. It was the rejection of the idea of unique historical developments or indeed present, that militated against the area approach. For example, in regard to Middle East, the neglect of unique cultural and institutional peculiarities determined foreign policy under the [George Walker] Bush administration, with disastrous consequences. Now I think there is a move back to it. I can't gauge, really, but I think it's on the upswing now. But globalization has been one of the emphases of university curricula in the past decade and can provide the basis for success in academia.

Q: If I understand you correctly, it's kind of the excessive reliance that underlies this critique of the functionalist approach, specialist approach, things like globalization, is the emphasis on theory and universalizing?

Wortman: Yes.

Q: As opposed to kind of specification of knowledge of particular places.

Wortman: Right. And really it should be a debate of the interplay of the two.

Q: Do you have a sense, I don't know, right now at the Institute, or over its history, how that has played out? I mean, has there been much kind of a give and take on that, regarding universalizing versus—

Wortman: Well the Institute has been a bastion of the area program thing and we can particularly owe that to our late director, Cathy [Catharine Theimer] Nepomnyashchy, who would not stand for any subordination of the Institute to other needs. The Institute had and I think still has the largest endowment of any of the regional institutes. During her stay there were attempts to share the wealth, particularly by the European Institute but she was very protective of the funds. I remember at a meeting discussing this question with the head of the European Institute, who was very engaging, but Cathy was resolute and used our resources to expand our activities.

Q: Aside from the endowment, speaking of Cathy Nepomnyashchy, aside from her fending off the attempt to give up on area studies, or at least reduce it as an intellectual model, do you remember any other ways in which she tried to kind of resist this, aside from protecting the endowment institutionally, were there other intellectual things that she instituted or was able to do to kind of try and preserve the area studies focus in the—

Wortman: Well, by organizing a lot of activities, cultural activities in the area. For example, there was a [Pyotr Ilyich] Tchaikovsky Festival at Carnegie Hall. We got involved with that. The celebration of the anniversary of the founding of Petersburg, big things on that. There was always something, you see, and she was always tapping my door to do things that I didn't want to do and I always participated and they turned out much better than expected. She with Mark von Hagen initiated a course, Russian Cities, which I initially disbelieved in, but I got involved in it after von Hagen left and it turned out to be a really lively course. It involved sociology, history, art and politics. There was always doubt about when she would appear at lectures. She

always came but sometimes was a little late because she was with the Turkman ambassador or the Georgian ambassador. She was the Institute's live wire.

Q: Let me just touch on two other areas briefly before we close. One is, in addition to picking up on their nationality studies, in the last several decades, Russian Institute has been involved in the development of human rights.

Wortman: Regarding the replacement for Mark von Hagen when he left, and for me when I retired, she was active in goading the department, which wasn't moving fast enough in seeking replacements. It was a very difficult search. We were turned down by four or five candidates, for varying reasons and finally, the University said they would give one—the administration said there would be one senior person and two junior people. Well, it didn't really work out that way, you see, and they offered two middle level people the position, two very good people and both rejected it because of the cost of living in New York. At which point, the opening disappeared. Cathy was no longer director. The chair of the department said, "it'll come up, it'll come up." After a number of years, we hired a junior specialist in the Soviet period, Tarik [Cyril] Amar. But you're not going to be a big center without a senior figure. Finally, they hired my replacement, Catharine Evtuhov, but only if the Institute agreed to pay the difference between a junior salary and a senior salary for five years.

Q: That was under Cathy Nepomnyashchy.

Wortman: Yes, the agreement was made before she left, yes. We've had two very able directors after she stepped down and they more or less stand on her ground.

Q: As I was saying a moment ago, the Harriman Institute has also been picking up on kind of important and human—

Wortman: Human rights, yes.

Q: —rights studies, right. Is this an area that you think it's important for the Harriman Institute to be involved in and has pursued well? Or is it an area that perhaps should be left to other places at the University?

Wortman: I think we have a human rights institute here or something, that is very active and I think it's something that people who are interested in have collaborated with, what's his name? Peter—

Q: Peter Juviler, initially, yes.

Wortman: —Juviler, yes. He was active in that and Susan Heuman who, do you know Susan Heuman?

Q: We interviewed Susan Heuman.

Wortman: Susan Heuman, yes, she's very active. So individuals at the Institute are involved in human rights and the Institute collaborates with the human rights center but it hasn't been a principal concern of a research institute. The Institute is primarily devoted to research, and since before 1990 and now again, Russia has been our political foe and it would be hard to integrate human rights into an academic program without it becoming propaganda. It's quite clear that Russia violates human rights all the time and it is a valid area of study and political action. But an institution dedicated to the study of the government, society and culture should not be politically involved or take an advocacy position, which would throw doubt on its credibility.

Q: And you think that having an effort like that at the Russian Institute would be, would almost necessarily become advocacy because it's so entwined with the history and with the Soviet Union?

Wortman: Well, I mean, courses in human rights and human rights violations are fine, you know. But I think to establish it as a central goal of the Institute would damage its principal goals and would be a mistake. For example, somebody like [John F.] Kerry, for all his flaws, knew how to balance one and the other. But to act in a hostile manner to the ruling regime as did Michael McFaul, I think is self-defeating.

Q: Two final things to pick up on and pick up on them from names that you've mentioned. One is, you were talking about when George Kennan was contributing to your program in terms of area studies at Princeton. Did you have any interaction with him here? Or did you kind of notice from afar any interaction with him with the Harriman Institute or Russian Institute?

Wortman: I had my interaction with him totally at Princeton. He was very cordial and charming. He came to some of the talks of the Russian studies program, took us out to dinner and donated sums to it. But his hopes for a Russian studies department to replace the program were somewhat utopian. I did not share his views on this, first one, because I believed and believe in the primacy of disciplines in one's training. Second, because I was happy in the history department and had no desire to work more closely with the Russian studies contingent.

We did reach a kind of compromise with the administration. They introduced a master's program in Russian studies that was a way station to a PhD program. When the noted scholar Caryl Emerson came to Princeton she convinced the administration to establish a graduate program in Russian literature. That was after I left. As Russian Studies director I participated in the search that brought her to Princeton.

Q: And the last thing, I was, and this is, again, from afar, I interviewed Susan Heuman and we were talking about human rights and we were also talking about the 1960s here and I was wondering if, I know you were at Chicago at the time, but you obviously had some contacts through Heuman with the Russian Institute and given what was happening at Columbia at the time, there's a lot of Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement, but also the specific things that were happening in terms of the Vietnam War at Columbia, did you have any sense of, again, from afar, like what the Russian Institute was, how it was kind of situating itself, vis-à-vis the Vietnam War, either as an institution or individuals or was there much conflict within the Russian Institute about these issues?

Wortman: I knew just in general, not much about the Institute, about the conflict going on and the professors who were involved, but I heard more about the history department than I did about the Institute. I know that Leopold Haimson, had difficulty choosing sides. Several of his students were leaders of the movement and he was trying to protect them because he was afraid that would damage their careers, even though he was very much against the administration and the Vietnam war. Chicago had its own problems, which lifted the University's president Edward [H.] Levi into glory. The spirit of the history department changed greatly after the demonstrations there and the seizing of the administration building. Before that, it was very collegial, congenial, then became divided politically.

Q: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate this enormously. This has been a lot of fun for me. Thank you. I hope it was for you, too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]