

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Loren R. Graham

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Loren R. Graham conducted by Christina Pae on January 23 and 24, 2017. These interviews are 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

Interviewee: Loren R. Graham

Location: Cambridge, MA

Interviewer: Christina Pae

Date: January 23, 2017

Q: Today is January 23, 2017. I'm here in Cambridge, Massachusetts with Professor Loren R. Graham, who is the Professor Emeritus of the History of Science in the Program of Science, Technology and Society at MIT [The Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and Professor Emeritus of the History of Science at Harvard University. He is on the Executive Committee and is a research associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard. Thanks for meeting with me.

Graham: It's very pleasant to be here.

Q: Thank you. So, as we discussed, we'll just start a little bit with your early influences. If you could just start by telling me a little bit about how you became interested in studying the Soviet Union and the history of science?

Graham: The path was a little unusual for a specialist on Russia. I actually have an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering, and I started out working as a research chemical engineer at the Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan. In the course of that experience I found out that while I love science and technology, and I still do, I didn't really want to do it. Life in the laboratory wasn't exactly the life that I envisioned for myself. I wanted something

broader. And, as I made inquiries about how one could retain an interest in science and technology but still write about and talk about broader things having to do with society and history, the history of science was a natural path to go. So, I went back to graduate school.

In those days—we're talking about the late 1950s—in those days, Russia was still a pretty exotic place to Americans and the Russian language was pretty exotic. Furthermore, in 1957, just before I began graduate school, the Soviet Union had launched Sputnik. And so there was a lot of interest in science and technology in Russia at that moment. So, here I come along and I think, Hmmm, I've got to—if I'm an historian of science, I've got to take some foreign languages and I've got to develop some special interests. Why not Russia? So I took—at that time at Columbia—that's where I was in graduate school—you had to have two foreign languages, and I took French and Russian. And although I could read French pretty well, and still do read French well, I found out that my Midwestern tongue was not built for French [laughter], but that when I studied Russian, somehow my tongue was built for Russian. I loved Russian as a language, and I loved Russian culture and Russian literature. Still do. So Russia became my thing. And so I got a PhD in history actually, at Columbia, but my special interest was the history of science in Russia.

Q: So can you tell me—I think that you got a certificate from the Russian Institute, if that's correct?

Graham: I did.

Q: So can you tell me a little bit about how—did that happen after you started—matriculated at Harvard to study history, and then—

Graham: No, I matriculated at Columbia.

Q: I meant Columbia. I'm sorry.

Graham: Yes. Yes. Coming from chemical engineering—although I'd been in the Navy for three years and seen a little bit of the world—nonetheless, coming with a background like chemical engineering, I felt that if I were going to look at Russia, I needed to look at it broadly, I needed to learn a lot about it. So I was interested not only in Russian history but in Russian literature and everything. So the way to get a broad introduction to Russian studies at that time at Columbia was to get a certificate from the Russian Institute, which required you to take courses not just in history, but in literature and other subjects. And I had a wonderful professor of Russian literature there named Rufus [W.] Mathewson—and Bob [Robert L.] Belknap was there, too.

But anyway, getting a certificate from the Russian Institute was a way to enter Russian studies broadly and not just in one discipline. So I did that. And then after I got my certificate—which I got simultaneously with my master's degree—then I went for a PhD in just straight history.

Q: And so, can you talk a little bit about your experiences with Sputnik and what happened?

Graham: I was in the Navy at the time. I was a communications officer on a destroyer in the Mediterranean Sea. As communications officer I was the first person to see all messages coming in, and I remember that I got a—it seems funny but—got an encrypted message—it was in code. And since I was also cryptographic officer, I went into the cryptographic shack—there was such a little closet where the coding machines were—and decoded a message that we had just received, and the message said something like this: “Intelligence sources inform us [laughs]—Intelligence sources inform us that within the next few days, the Soviet Union is likely to launch an artificial satellite.” And sure enough, a few days later they did and again, as communications officer, I went up to the radio shack, tuned to the right frequency, and I soon heard that beep-beep-beep of Sputnik as it went around the globe. So that was—I wouldn’t say that’s the main reason I went into the history of Russian science, but it was certainly one of the reasons.

Q: And so you received your certificate and then you—how did that first trip to Russia come about? Was it in connection with your dissertation research?

Graham: Yes. But it’s important to realize that studying in Russia for an American was a very new possibility then and still very narrow possibility. I went to the Soviet Union on an exchange program, and while I was there I did research on my dissertation, in 1960-’61. That was the second year that it had been possible. And there were only about—I don’t remember exactly—twelve or fifteen of us who went, so it was a pretty small group. But I studied at Moscow University and did research on my dissertation, which was on the history of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Q: So what were your first impressions of the Soviet Union back then, 1960?

Graham: Well it's important to remember that 1960-'61—even though you would say that's the height of the Cold War—was not the worst of times because [Joseph V.] Stalin had died seven years earlier. [Nikita S.] Khrushchev had come in. There was talk of a thaw, and there was a relative thaw. So things, when I got there, were not as bad as maybe I envisioned it. They got worse later on and they had been worse earlier, but it was not a bad time to be there, although there were plenty of controls.

So, I was surprised at how eagerly Russian students in my dormitory wanted to talk to me. They wanted to talk to me all the time. It was almost impossible to do anything except talk to them. And so I made lots of friends and I found out that this totalitarian society was not so totalitarian if you were a student there with other students. Students are irrepressible in all societies. And so, we had a great time together.

Q: Can you tell me some stories from that time when you were there?

Graham: There are so many. I don't know which one to choose.

Q: I know, I know. How about, about the Pineapple Man?

Graham: Oh, the Pineapple Man. Okay. Most of the students I made friends with weren't overtly political. They asked lots of questions. They were interested in the American way of life and that

sort of thing. But it was all pretty comfortable conversation. I answered truthfully to the best of my ability and we had nice conversations, and I never felt that there was a sharp political edge in most of my conversations. But there was this one man—Iurii Dimitrev was his name—who really was on a political search. He hated the Soviet Union. He hated the Communist Party. He wanted to leave the Soviet Union—I found all those things out gradually—but he noticed when he came to my room, that I had on the shelf the History of the Soviet Communist Party [*The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*], written by [Leonard] Schapiro, and it was at that time—nobody talks too much about it now, but at that time it was sort of the standard of the history of the Soviet Community Party, written from a Western point of view. I'd been allowed to bring it in. It was an absolutely forbidden book in the Soviet Union. You couldn't get it anywhere. Libraries didn't even list it in their catalogues. So it was, from his standpoint, an absolutely illicit book, but it was a book he desperately, desperately wanted.

Now, one of the ways we had been told that you can get in trouble—Americans could get in trouble in the Soviet Union was by giving Soviet citizens anti-Soviet literature. Well, this book was very definitely anti-Soviet from their standpoint. So I didn't want to give it to him. He kept asking for it, kept asking for it, kept asking for it. And he would come late at night, no matter how long I would stay out, the subway stopped running at 1:00 A.M. I always had to get back just a little before that time if I was out in the city someplace. I'd come in, you know, at five minutes to one. Go into my room. The whole dormitory is dark and quiet. I wouldn't be in my room more than five minutes and knock, knock, knock: it would be the Iurii Dimitrev at my door. And in order to try to get my goodwill he would give me pineapples, which was strange because I never



saw pineapples for sale anywhere in Moscow, and yet he somehow was getting pineapples.

Where was he getting them?

And so, he would come in, give me a pineapple, and beg to look at the book. I was a little bit worried that he was basically a KGB [*Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*] agent trying to trap me, so at first I always said, “No, no. I can’t do it.” And finally he said, “Well you know, if you give this to me and you get in trouble, the worst that’s going to happen to you is you get kicked out of the Soviet Union. It would be my neck; I’ll be thrown in prison. So I am asking you to take a lot less risk than I am, and aren’t you a loyal American citizen, believe in freedom of the press and freedom of speech? How can you tell me, a Soviet citizen, that I can’t read this?” So he appealed to me at every level he could think of. Some of his arguments made sense to me, but I still didn’t know who he was.

So finally I said, “I’ll give it to you on one condition. That you sign this—I wrote out on a piece of paper in Russian—“I, Iurii Dimitrev, borrow this book from Loren Graham, even though he didn’t want to give it to me, and I take full responsibility for this act.” I said, “Sign this.” He read it and he said, “I can’t sign that. It’d be my neck if that ever comes to light. I’d probably be executed or at least I’d be thrown in prison.” He said, “I can’t sign that.” I said, “Well if you don’t sign it you can’t have the book.” So finally he said, “Okay, I’ll sign it.” So he signed it. And then, after he signed it, I took the paper he’d signed, wadded it up, took a match, lit a match, burned the paper, ground the ashes down to small pieces and threw it out the window. When he saw me do that, he just broke down. He threw his arms around my neck, he sobbed like a baby

and then told me how much he wanted to get out of the Soviet Union and so forth. So that's the story of the Pineapple Man.

Q: So you met a lot of interesting characters while you were in the Soviet Union. Did it ever make you think twice about, Oh here I am, I've decided to study the history of science and I'm specializing in Russia, the Soviet Union. Did you ever think like, Oh, wouldn't it have been easier if I had studied a different language or gone a different direction, or were you happy given what you were learning from the people around you?

Graham: Well, I love France from the standpoint of food and scenery and so forth, so if the question is, "Wouldn't you have been happier in France than in Russia in terms of what you ate and what you saw and what you did?" Yes. But if the question is, "Did you ever doubt that you should go the way you were going?" No, I didn't. I found it fascinating. I still find Russia fascinating. I'm very interested in questions such as, How do science and technology work out differently in different societies. And Russia is certainly a different society. So many of my written works have been about how science and technology are a little different there because of that society. That's still very interesting to me, seventy years later—not seventy, sixty years later, I'm still interested in it.

Q: Great. So, after that one year in Russia, you went back to Columbia to do your work on your dissertation. Can you tell me about some of the people around you during those times? Maybe some of the professors you had?

Graham: Yes. Professors at the Russian Institute under whom I studied and whom I got to know—because I later ended up teaching there—got to know quite well—including people like Geroid Tanquary Robinson, Alexander Dallin, Henry [L.] Roberts, Alexander Erlich, John [N.] Hazard, Rufus Mathewson. I remember all these people very well. Robinson was a very austere man and almost wrecked the careers of a number of graduate students by being so persnickety, and not allowing their dissertations to be presented for defense until they had met Robinson's criteria for what a finished dissertation has to be. And I think he was far too rigorous. Some graduate students there studying with Robinson spent seven, eight, nine, ten years writing their dissertations, which was, I think, ridiculous. I didn't write my dissertation under him, thank goodness.

Q: He was a historian, right?

Graham: He was a historian and when I first arrived there he was my advisor, but thank goodness he retired and I then went to Henry Roberts, who was a very different kind of man. A very kind and thoughtful person, and I got along with him great. I never had any clash with Robinson, but if I had stayed there working under him, either there would have been a clash or I would have become less the human being than I am now, I hope. [Laughs]

So there were other things. Another thing I'll tell you about the Russian Institute in those days—the two leading centers of Russian studies, the first two such centers in the United States, were the Russian Institute at Columbia and the Russian Research Center at Harvard, which is where we're sitting right now, except it's now called the Davis Center For Russian and Eurasian

Studies. But it's the old Russian Research Center. Those were the two centers. The Soviet press was very aware of this and we were often called—both centers—as centers of anti-Soviet, proto-fascist propaganda. Not only do I think that was false, but an amazing thing about the Russian Institute—in the early years of the Russian Institute that I think is often not discussed—is that it was left politically. Not communist, but left. Let me just point out a few reasons why that might be so.

Alexander Erlich taught economics. His father, Henry Ehrlich, was the head of the Jewish Bund in Poland, which was a social democratic party. He had been a member of the Petrograd Soviet; in other words, a communist legislature—so-called legislature—at the beginning of the Russian revolution. Alexander Dallin's father was David Dallin, who was the head, or a head, of the Menshevik party, a Marxist party. John Hazard, not so much on the left as the previous two, but he was hauled before the House [Un-]American Activities Committee and roasted for his left-wing sympathies. He had studied law in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s, and he had some left-wing sympathies. When I was a student at the Russian Institute, we students always thought that the two leading centers for Russian studies in the United States were Harvard and Columbia, and that Harvard was a little bit on the right, and Columbia was a little bit on the left, politically speaking.

Q: Interesting. So, when you chose to study at Columbia, had you also considered Harvard or did you—

Graham: I was in the United States Navy when I applied for graduate school, and I was admitted to—and I applied for Russian history—and I was admitted to both Harvard and Columbia.

Harvard said I had to come and take a Russian language course in the summer before I would be admitted, but I was still in the Navy and I couldn't do that. I didn't get out of the Navy until the end of the summer—September first, I think it was—and that meant I could only go to Columbia. But I'm glad I went to Columbia. Very, very glad.

Q: Tell me why.

Graham: Columbia and New York City had a tremendous impact on me, and the Russian Institute also. Tremendous impact. Even though I had been in the Navy for three years and had seen quite a bit of the world, I was still an immature, rather naive, Midwestern boy. I wasn't quite a boy anymore, I was a young man, but I had a lot to learn and New York was the place to do it. Living in Manhattan—and I ended up living there for twenty years because I ended up on the faculty, too—living in Manhattan, going to the Russian Institute, studying at Columbia, all of that had an enormous impact on me in terms of making me more aware of the issues of the world. I don't think I could have pulled that off as successfully at Harvard. Cambridge is a little bit more of a rarified place; many of the problems of the world don't stare you in the face in Cambridge. They do stare you in the face in Manhattan. It's hard to live in Manhattan for twenty years and still be naive. [Laughs] There's a reality there that just really jerks you and makes you more knowledgeable. And of course, I was at Columbia during—I was on the faculty at Columbia during the revolt in 1968.

So all of that had a great, great impact on me and made me more aware, more sensitive, I think, to vast differences of opinion, more greeting of an open, diverse, multiethnic society living in Manhattan. All of that was terribly important to me. It wasn't just the Russian Institute—although the Russian Institute was very important to me, too—it was all the part of an education of a rather naive person and the transformation of that person into something more knowledgeable, more aware and hopefully better.

Q: So what was it about the Russian Institute in particular that you thought was so—that you remember the most, say, influenced you the most in those early days? Was it the faculty? Was it courses? Just learning Russian?

Graham: The faculty—Alexander Dallin, Henry Roberts and John Hazard all had very real influences on me. They were all not only very bright scholars, but they were human beings. As Russians would say: *nastoiashchii chelovek*, a real human. And, they became interested in me and I became interested in them on a level that was greater than just scholarship. They helped me tremendously in scholarship; they told me what to read, what to study, what to do. But they also asked me about myself and what I wanted to do, and they played important roles in bringing me to Columbia. So, it was both a scholarly experience, the Russian Institute, and a human experience. I remember it very, very fondly. I'm not going so far as to say that I love Columbia. Columbia is not a very loveable place. It's too rooted in the city. You can love Columbia, but Columbia probably won't love you back. I mean, it's in its own orbit, and I could make lots of criticisms of Columbia and I certainly did before '68, and I still could. It's a kind of an anonymous, unthoughtful place as a whole. So I loved the experience of Columbia more than I

loved the institution of Columbia. But there were these people—the ones I just named—who were real human beings and meant a lot to me and helped me lot.

Q: And do you think that—you mentioned a few people, but would you say the Russian Institute as a whole stood out to you as being less—maybe less cold or anonymous, or was it really the individuals?

Graham: No, it was less cold and less anonymous. There was—we had our own little coterie, the students there, the faculty. We had a little society within a much larger society. And then it probably impacted me more than it might some of my fellow students there because, again, you have to remember where I came from: U.S. Navy, chemical engineer. So I was studying history and literature and all kinds of subjects that I hadn't really paid much attention to before. So whereas many of my colleagues, fellow students, they had come out of history or literature as undergraduates. So this wasn't as big a change to them as it was to me. It was a big change to me.

Q: So now take me back to—you finished your PhD. You went to Indiana.

Graham: I did.

Q: And did you know from the time that you left Columbia that you wanted to come back and be on the faculty, or was that—you left thinking you were going to Indiana and that was—

Graham: See, I grew up in Indiana, and everybody said to me at Columbia—I can remember Henry Roberts saying, “You’ve got to go there. It’s really a good university, Indiana University, a good Russian studies center,” and it was. “You’ve got to go there.” I said, “You know, I just got out of there. I don’t want to go back there.” [Laughs] But they said, “You’ve got to go.” So I went. But I only taught there three years before I got called back to Columbia. So I never lost contact before I was back at Columbia.

Q: So there was never a time—when Columbia asked you to come back, you didn’t say, like, “Oh, wait. I’m enjoying my time in Indiana.”

Graham: No. The truth is, that when Columbia asked me to come back, I jumped.

Q: So then you were at Columbia then from 1966 to ’78 again?

Graham: That’s right. Twelve years on the faculty, after five years as a student.

Q: Twelve years.

Graham: In the history department, I got tenure at Columbia.

Q: So tell me about that time and what you were working on.



Graham: I was hired at Columbia to teach Russian history, but I was already at Indiana—in the couple years I was there—I taught not only in the history department, but the history of science department. I was already going down a history of science track. I wasn't hired at Columbia to teach history of science. In fact, Columbia didn't have anybody teaching the history of science. It was the only one of the great research universities on the East Coast that didn't have anybody doing the history of science. So there was an opportunity for me there. So I started offering courses in the history of science. Marc Raeff and Leo [Leopold H.] Haimson, who were also teaching Russian history at Columbia, didn't like that. They thought that I was not living up to the unwritten contract that had brought me there—because the unwritten contract was Russian history. So until I got tenure, I taught the survey course in Russian history. The rule at Columbia then was—and I imagine there's something like it—if you teach one course that is more or less required, like Russian history, then you're given the freedom to teach another course that's more or less what you want to do. So that meant that I would teach the survey course in Russian history—I did for years—and then I would teach a course in the history of science. But then when I got tenure, I expanded the history of science and cut down a little bit on the Russian history, and that made Marc and Leo, my colleagues, unhappy with me. So there were some strains. I was tenured; they couldn't kick me out. But there were some strains. I don't know whether I answered your question or not. What was the question? [Laughter]

Q: Well I think that was an interesting answer anyway. So I guess that Raeff and Haimson were other history professors as well.

Graham: Yes, and they couldn't stand each other.

Q: Right. So I think—

Graham: You know that?

Q: I do. But I think that they started out actually being very close.

Graham: You've got it.

Q: And then—yes, so—

Graham: Not only—so close they taught courses together. But then they split.

Q: Do you know why? Do you know what happened there?

Graham: They each had very rigid views of how Russian history should be taught. They were both friends of mine even though we had these tensions. But we were pretty close for a while. Marc thought there wasn't such a thing as Soviet history or twentieth century Russian history; it was all eighteenth, which was really his field, and nineteenth century Russian history. And there was no Soviet history—you couldn't get access to the archives, it was all a sham, you couldn't teach Soviet history. But I was teaching Soviet history, so he wasn't altogether happy with what I was doing. Leo was teaching the history of the Russian Revolution, and he was very interested in the Mensheviks. He was writing a history of Menshevism, Marxists. That was not to Marc

Raeff's taste. So, Leo and Marc split in the first instance on political grounds: Leo was a semi-Marxist if not a Marxist, Marc was not. But then that political difference got infused with personality differences.

They were very different kinds of people. And I don't know how religious Marc was but I think he was religious. His wife was very, very religious. Leo was anything but religious. They were just different people and they drifted apart. It went through several stages. First they taught together, then they began to drift apart, then they became really far apart, and for a while I was a bridge. I would run between them—I was the only person who could talk to both of them; they wouldn't talk to each other. So you know, there were some really contentious issues there. But it didn't—I don't think it really harmed the teaching of Russian history at Columbia. There was a moment when there wasn't a university in the country that could come close to teaching Russian history as fully as Columbia did. We had Marc Raeff, Leopold Haimson, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Loren Graham all teaching Russian history. Four people. And we really covered the field even though the people sometimes couldn't get along with each other.

Q: And so, was your—I mean, so you were in the Russian Institute, you were teaching Russian history. Did you have a lot of other—I mean, I assume you were also close with other faculty teaching political science, economics, literature, *et cetera*.

Graham: Sure. Absolutely.

Q: Was it—what did you think of the community of the Russian Institute at that point?

Graham: Very, very strong. I think it was vastly superior at that moment to Harvard in terms of Russian studies. Very strong. But idiosyncratic. These were individuals, I mean, of strong tastes. From a student standpoint it was wonderful. You'd go take a course with Leopold Haimson and you'll find out why the Marxist revolution failed when it should have succeeded. You go to Marc Raeff and you hear how the golden and silver ages of Russian culture and the promise that Russia had in the last years of the Czarist regime were just enormous. Look at what they produced: Dostoevksy, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Stravinsky—just think of the richness of Russian culture. This is great, great, great culture. Very different from what you'd hear from Leo, where it was all about workers and political strife. You'd go to hear Sheila Fitzpatrick and she would tell you that there is a real Soviet history and let's look at it, and let's look at the cultural revolution of the 1920s and what happened there, things that neither Leo nor Marc would even begin to talk about. Then you go to hear Loren Graham. Well he tells you about Soviet history too, but very differently from Sheila Fitzpatrick. He talks about the scientific and technical community and all that. So it was just a smorgasbord. And the students loved it. It didn't last, but there was a golden moment.

Q: And so, do you think that golden moment was—that was during the '70s, would you say?

Graham: Yes, it was late '60s and the '70s, up to '76 or '77.

Q: So can you talk a little bit about the work you were doing on the history of science while you were there?

Graham: When I was there I got very interested in the interaction of Marxism and science in Russia. And the whole received opinion was that the only influence Marxism could have on science would be a corrupting one. It would damage it. Well, I was not a Marxist, never had been a Marxist, but nonetheless, I saw something different; that in certain fields of study, like origin of life studies, relativity theory studies and others—I could go on and on—the interaction between Marxism and science wasn't all corrupting. There were certain developments of Russian science that you could say had something to do with Marxism, just like there are certain developments in Western science that have something to do with religion. I mean, Isaac Newton was a religious believer of a very, very idiosyncratic and sincere kind, and he believed that his theory of gravity illustrated the beauty and omnipotence of God, and that belief drove him on. Well, I found a little something like that in the Soviet Union. Every Marxist in the Soviet Union wasn't a party hack. There were plenty of party hacks, but they weren't all. And I found—I could name the scientists, but if you look at my book, *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, you'll find it all there—where the Marxism meant something to them. And so, I wrote about that and I wanted to do my master's essay on it, and Henry Roberts said, "That's a life's work, Loren." No, I want to do—yes, I wanted to do my master's essay. "That's a life's work." So I wrote on just a tiny little narrow subject, Marxism and resonance chemistry. For my dissertation, I wrote on the history of the Academy of Sciences in a five-year period. Talk about an academic dissertation. And so I got that. But then when I got out of that, I knew I was free. And I did the big book. I worked on it for ten years, gave a year to each chapter. It was published in 1972. It was nominated for a National Book Award, and it made my reputation and got me tenure and so forth.

Q: So, in terms of influence, that book that you wrote that talked about Marxism and science together, do you think that the American public—you taught the American public something they didn't know about the Soviet Union?

Graham: It would be a stretch to say that my book had an impact on the American public, but it did have impacts on certain people, and in particular it had an impact on certain people in the American scientific community.

Q: Can you talk about—

Graham: Roald Hoffmann, Nobel Prize winner, chemist. He paid a lot of attention to it. What was the name of that guy who was on TV for years, science programs? Carl Sagan. He talked about billions and billions of stars out there. He wrote me about my book; it meant something to him. People in origin of life studies have written to me about how the book meant something to them. So, I can't say that it had a really broad impact, but for those people who knew enough to be able to see what I was trying to do, it did have an impact. It probably had the biggest impact of all on me; it made my reputation. So basically I think when my tenure committee came up, they said, "You've got to read this book. Look at this book. He's just now publishing it." They read it and said, "Well we don't understand it but it must be awfully good." [Laughter]

Q: Well you spent ten years working on it.

Graham: I did.

Q: So that's significant. And during that time did you go back—I assume you made several trips back to the Soviet Union to do work?

Graham: I have gone to the Soviet Union—with exception of a few years when I was *persona non grata*, 1972 to 1976—with exception of those years, I've gone to the Soviet Union several times every year. I've probably been there—I've lost count, but it's over 200 times.

Q: And are you still going back there as frequently now?

Graham: I am. I was there last year. I'm going again this year.

Q: So tell me how it changed over time; what it was like to go there in say 1960-'61, versus—did you feel any changes throughout the period when you were at Columbia in the '60s, or was it not until later? Obviously later it changed.

Graham: You're probably asking about political changes.

Q: Political changes.

Graham: Just before I get into political changes, let me say something about how it changed in the way it looked. When I went to the Soviet Union in 1960, there were almost no private cars. I didn't meet a person during that whole year who had a car. At Moscow University where I was

studying, there was a Packard that was parked right by the front door. It belonged to an Arab student who was studying there. People didn't have cars. In Leningrad—which is what St. Petersburg was called then—which is this wonderful imperial city—you'd go down the street and you look down the street and you would think you were in the nineteenth century. I mean, no cars, nothing really had changed since 1890. And restaurants, there weren't any, except for a few state restaurants. I knew every restaurant in Moscow that was worth talking about. Well of course that's completely different now. I mean, Moscow is one great traffic jam, terrible traffic jam, worse than Boston or New York. Restaurants everywhere and so forth. So those kinds of—things are what you might call superficial but nonetheless momentous changes to the observer. From that standpoint, Russia is just a different place than it was from when I went there as a student.

Q: But even when you went back, say in your later years as a professor at Columbia, did you notice little changes along the way even during that time or did it pretty much stay the same until say—

Graham: In the things I've just been talking about—what you might call observable, visual—it didn't change much until the end of the Soviet Union. A few more cars. But there were no private restaurants until the very end of the Soviet Union. So in those things it didn't change that much.

Now politics, of course it changed politically and all the changes were not in one direction. In the early '60s in the Khrushchev period, there was this thaw and it was changing in a more



liberalizing way. People were willing to say things that, if they had said seven or eight years earlier, they could have been thrown in prison for. You could have real political discussions, not all the way, but a long way toward free discussion. Then, when the [Leonid I.] Brezhnev period came, there was retrenchment and some of my Russian friends looked back on the times when we had been students together as the best period of their lives in terms of political freedoms. There were crackdowns; you know, Sinyavsky–Daniel trial, trials of dissidents and so forth. So it got worse.

Then in the '80s, it began to loosen up again. Then came the end of the Soviet Union in '91, and of course there was a tremendous opening up. You could say anything, do anything. Arts were free. You could say anything you wanted to during the period from '91 until '95 or so, when almost anything went. Then, again, crackdown. And that crackdown is now still increasing, so that the Russia of today, I think, is more—I was going to say, more authoritarian than any of the times, all the years I've gone there, but is that really true? There was a time in the Brezhnev period, which might match it, when they were cracking down on dissidents. But nonetheless, right now Russia is more authoritarian than most of the times I've gone there.

Q: That's quite a statement. So, how has that affected your ability to do the work that you've done?

Graham: You know, I've been free to do the work that I want to do most of the time. I have met relatively few restrictions on my own work. I got into archives when nobody else could get in. I think part of it was because of the nature of what I was working on, science and technology.

Do you remember the story in my book about when I'd been working there for a while and this KGB officer called me in and said to me, "Professor Graham, let's talk." And he pulled out a vodka bottle and poured vodka and said, "Now let's talk. Let's have a frank discussion."

Of course I knew this was going to be—there were tape recorders everywhere and probably cameras, that this was anything but a free discussion, and I knew I was certainly not going to drink much vodka. But anyway, he said, "Let's just have a heart to heart conversation." He says, "Let me tell you something. You're studying science here in the Soviet Union. And we know that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and intelligence agencies are very interested in science in the Soviet Union. We've been told you're a spy. So you've been working here now—at this time I'd been working for a month—you've been working here now for a month."

And so, he said, "We've been with you every day, every minute. Everywhere you go we have an agent watching you." And he says, "Let me tell you something. If you are a spy, you are the most goddamned boring spy we've ever had on our hands. Why don't do you do something interesting? You just sit in the library in the archive all day. You're driving our agents nuts." He says, "Do something. Get drunk, have an affair, do something." [Laughs]

The reason I tell that story is, I think that I convinced them, by boring them to death, that I was legitimate in what I said I was doing, that I wasn't a spy. They followed me and followed me and followed me, and I never did anything that looked like what a spy would do. So I think they

decided that I wasn't that interesting to them, and therefore, I had freedom to do most of what I wanted to do.

Q: And the work that you produced also didn't turn them off. I mean, I remember when you—in your book you said when you applied to do your dissertation research in Moscow, you were accepted and you were kind of surprised and you thought, “Well maybe they don't really understand what I'm going there to do.”

Graham: They never did. They saw science and technology the way most people in the United States see it. It's something else. It doesn't have to do with our political and our social and our real lives. It's, you know, equations and gadgets. There's nothing political about it. No. That's not the way I see it. I think there's something very political and social about science and technology, but the Russians didn't see that. And to tell the truth, most Americans don't see it either.

Q: So again, I asked you about your first book and whether you thought it influenced anybody. You have been a very prolific writer over the years; you've written several books. Your most recent book you just published last year, on [Trofim D.] Lysenko—which I have in my bag. I mean, this book in particular, *Lysenko's Ghost*, does talk about the politics.

Graham: Absolutely.

Q: And have you had any reaction from anyone? Do you think that you—do you think your book has had influence?

Graham: Yes. I know. In Russia right now, if you got a group of Russians—six or eight Russians to read it, you'd immediately have an argument among the Russians. That's what I like. The argument wouldn't be all of them against me; it would be among themselves. I like to write like that.

Q: Yes. So can you tell me what you think that argument would be like?

Graham: On this particular—I could do it on any book I've written, but on this particular book it would be, did—I mean, this is going to bore most people. It doesn't bore me. Did the rise of epigenetics, a new view in genetics in the United States, in the Western world, have something to do with Lysenko? In other words, did he maybe see ahead of his time a little bit on the inheritance of acquired characteristics? I mean, I lose my audience very fast when I start talking about these issues, but to me they're important. And the fact that the Russians fight each other over it, hey, I think I'm onto something.

Q: Do you think the argument would also have—do you think they would also argue about whether—regardless of his influence on epigenetics—that as a man, he—because of all the other things he did—like, that discounts his work in science?

Graham: Well that's a really good question. Most people in Russia who have specifically studied Lysenko tell it in terms of black and white. Heroes and villains. Heroes and villains, and he's very definitely, to most of them, a villain. Well, he was not a nice man. I'm the first person to say that. But I'm not looking for a story of heroes and villains. I'm looking for the interplay of scientific ideas and social and political ones, in ways that make you think, What's going on here? Is there something—are there really authentic issues here? Is this not all just a political charade, but there's also something important here? That's what I like to do.

Q: Have your books been translated into Russian?

Graham: Yes.

Q: And so, are they widely read there?

Graham: *Science and Philosophy of the Soviet Union* has been translated into Russian—fifty thousand copies; a lot more than here. *Lonely Ideas [Can Russia Compete?]* has been translated into Russian and is selling very widely, and I gave a talk about it in St. Petersburg last June that went viral—three hundred thousand downloads. So I guess what I would say in answer to your question is, no, not all my works have been translated into Russian, but those that have been translated in Russian have done much better in terms of copies sold than they've done in the United States. More in Russia.

Q: What do you think that says about your readership here versus there, or do you think it says anything?

Graham: I'm not complaining about my reputation here. I've been a very lucky man. I've had a wonderful career, wonderful life. Been married now for over 60 years. Love it. So I have no complaints. I'm a happy man. That must mean that I'm not an intellectual because intellectuals can't be happy [laughs]. So I have no complaints. But it's true that I seem to have tapped into themes in my writing that are more meaningful to Russian readers than American readers.

Although, as I say, I have no complaints. I mean, one book was nominated for the National Book Award in the U.S. I'm a success. But still, in answer to your question, that's what I would say.

Q: So, 1978—I'm actually curious about something else. Sorry. So, there were—I counted one, two, three, four, five different directors of the Russian Institute during the time you were there, starting with Henry Roberts when you were a student, through to Marshall [D.] Shulman was the director twice, and then Robert Belknap at the time you left. And so, what did you think of the way—the direction of the Russian Institute when you were there? Where it was headed, what it was doing?

Graham: I had no major complaint against that direction, but if you're asking me more about nuances and smaller complaints, I felt that Marshall Shulman—who was a friend of mind and actually a very congenial personality—nonetheless tried to drive the Russian Institute and then the Harriman Institute more toward policy questions and political questions, and less toward cultural questions. Even though Russian literature is a large part of Russian studies centers. It's a

great literature. I don't think anyone can look at Russian literature and not say, It's a great literature. Marshall Shulman wasn't interested in that. He was interested in things like arms control and foreign policy, that kind of thing. And so, I had a little bit of a disagreement in the way in which I thought he was driving the Institute, but this was not an enormous grievance. It was just something I noticed.

Q: That's interesting because, you know, I think the Harriman Institute now is kind of interested in how it can have a policy influence. So, can you talk about—I don't know if this is sort of the same question that you ponder a couple of times in your book about whether academics should be involved in government, or should sort of be involved in the military and also have—you know, have secrets and then also do their academic work freely. I don't know if it's the same question or not about whether there should be academics working towards policy as well as academics just doing academic work.

Graham: I'm not against people studying policy. In fact, I'm for it. And people like Robert Legvold—you probably know that name, still very much around, old friend of mine—he's very interested in policy, particularly foreign policy. Congratulations to him. He does it well and as far as I'm concerned, it's not only legitimate, but praiseworthy. However, I do think you have to decide what master you serve, and if you get so close to the government that you start being a government operative and you start using classified sources, you're serving two masters. I think one should decide which master to serve. People should be doing both things, but I don't like it when they're trying to do both things at the same time.

Q: And is that what you think that Marshall Shulman was pushing for at the Harriman Institute, or is that something different?

Graham: I think he did push for that. I think he had trouble seeing that there might be a distinction between what's good for the world and what's good for the United States. He saw those as the same things. They're not always the same things. And I think that anyone who accepts access—who gets clearance and gets access to classified documents—has yielded in that process, a part of the power of a free intellectual, because there are certain things you can't say, there are certain criticisms you can't make. You're no longer a free intellectual. So I am skeptical to the point of criticism of people who mix those roles too thoroughly.

Q: So, then you decided to leave Columbia in 1978.

Graham: And come here.

Q: And come here. Can you talk about that decision?

Graham: I liked Columbia, even though there were these strains and tensions that we've been talking about. I liked Columbia and I like New York. I didn't leave it easily—leave that place easily. A very important thing to know is that while I left Columbia in 1978, my wife, who had been teaching at Barnard and Teacher's College, left Columbia in 1974 and took a position at Harvard as dean of the Radcliffe Institute [for Independent Study] and professor of history of education here. So, from 1974 until 1978, we were a commuting couple. She had an apartment



here and—well we both—we had two apartments, but she was mostly in an apartment here in Cambridge, and I was mostly in an apartment in Manhattan, because I was at Columbia and she was at Harvard. So when an offer came to me from MIT, it had a significance bigger than just an offer from MIT; it was a way to get the family back together. Every weekend one of us would fly from the one place to the other. I got to the point where—at that time it was the Eastern [Air Lines] Shuttle, I used to get on the plane and the attendants would say, Hello, Mr. Graham. They knew me just that well. I flew once or twice a week. Well, we did it pretty well for four or five years. It did get old. And so, when I had a chance to move back to Cambridge, that was a tremendous bonus. I'm not sure I would have done it without that. It's hard for me to say.

Q: So you didn't leave Columbia—

Graham: In a huff?

Q: —in a huff?

Graham: No. Even though I could write many essays of criticism about Columbia, I didn't leave it in a huff.

Q: And tell me how it was to be in a—you know, in a new institution after tenure and twelve years at Columbia?

Graham: MIT is a great place, it's a great institution, but it's not to my taste. There's a certain spiritlessness, a certain lack of introspection at MIT that, for all of my reverence for the quality of minds there, didn't satisfy me. The humanities are not respected at MIT. For all my interest in science and technology; nonetheless, the humanities are not respected at MIT to the degree that I felt that they should be. Nonetheless, as I say, I respect the place enormously and the particular program I was in, Science, Technology and Society, was really to my taste. But because of my feeling that the MIT culture was a little cold to the issues I was interested in and that I thought other people should be interested in, when I almost immediately got an offer also teach at Harvard, boy I took it. And so, I taught half-time for all those years at both MIT and Harvard and, actually, that was wonderful. I liked it. I learned a lot at MIT. I learned a lot. And I've learned a lot at Harvard, so it worked out. But I didn't feel warm and comfy at MIT.

Q: So, I assume that you were then immediately part of the Russian Research Center when you came here. How were they different, Russian Research Center and the Russian Institute?

Graham: Two ways they were different; the first way is that the Russian Research Center was at that time a community of scholars, not just Harvard, like we talked about before. That was much less so at Columbia. The Russian Institute and Harriman Institute was mostly—not entirely but mostly Columbia. Another was that, although I'd been very critical of the Soviet Union and I hope I don't need to have to say that I thought it was a place where all kinds of freedoms I believe in don't exist—didn't exist—I was shocked at the crude anti-Soviet attitudes that I found here compared to Columbia. That's less so now. I mean, people like Adam [B.] Ulam and Richard [E.] Pipes, I mean, they just—they couldn't find a thing good to say about the Soviet

Union, whereas I had a deep respect for certain writers and scientists and intellectuals in the Soviet Union.

Q: So do you think you were able to change their minds at all? Coming here, having a different attitude?

Graham: I don't know whether I changed their minds or not, but I think I had an impact on the students because I was able to teach courses in which I tried to represent the views I just expressed; that the Soviet Union was a complicated place, that despite all of the awful things you've heard about it, there are people there trying to live decent lives and trying to do intellectually honest things. And they write and they sing and they go to concerts and they compose music, and some of what they do is pretty good.

Q: That's an interesting thing, just to talk about the difference in the student body. So do you think that, as a result of the differences in the faculty's attitudes toward the Soviet Union, that the student body was different in each place?

Graham: I don't—you know what graduate school is like—you come, you're going to write your dissertation with a certain professor. You're foolish to write a dissertation that you know the professor is going to despise or dramatically disagree with. So, I think I could never have written my dissertation at Harvard under Richard Pipes. Richard Pipes is a fine scholar. He's written some important things. But he and I live in different worlds.

Q: So, you have been—do you think that that attitude about the Soviet Union has remained, or do you think that the two institutes have slowly come closer?

Graham: Closer. I think they've come closer. The post-Soviet Union is—in the post-Soviet Union period they've come closer, yes. And those differences that I saw rather dramatically when I came in '78 to Harvard are not so dramatic anymore. No.

Q: And then in terms of the '70s, '80s, you know, maybe even into—and certainly into the '90s, you know, there was a lot of talk at Harriman about funding, about there being sort of a less of an interest in area studies during that time.

Graham: Yes. Well, why is it that Harvard and Columbia are still today, I would say, the two best places in the country to do Russian studies? Well part of it is the talent they've managed to attract, but probably more important in terms of what's happened in the last thirty years, is the fact that both of them got big endowments—maybe not big enough, but endowments. Columbia got the Harriman endowment, and here at Harvard we got the Davis Center endowment. That allowed—that money allowed those two centers to continue even through periods in which interest in Russia dropped dramatically. There were people who said, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, why should we have a Russian studies center? Russia is not important anymore. One of the sad aspects of my profession is that people get interested in Russia most when Russia misbehaves the most. I'm sorry about that, but it is a fact.

Q: And so, did you yourself see a decline, you know, in the student interest?

Graham: Oh, definitely there was a decline. It's a little back up now, but oh yes, there definitely—the decline was sufficient that, had those two institutions not gotten the money they got, I think they would have—they wouldn't have disappeared, but they would have been severely, severely weakened.

Q: And do you think that the decline was also—I mean, Russian literature is Russian literature, regardless of whether there's a Soviet Union or there's Russia, right? Or what period we're in, Russian literature still stands as what it is. Were people still interested in that, did you find?

Graham: Less. Although there's no logical reason why interest in Russian literature should vary with interest in Russian studies as a whole, and know-thy-enemy kinds of studies. The fact of the matter is there is a little bit of a relationship. Whoever comes to study Russia, even if they're going to go into history, thinks they should know something about Russian literature, so they're going to take courses over there. Enrollments help them keep going. Plus there's money. Not a whole lot of it, but we have money. The Davis Center gives fellowships. The Harriman Institute gives fellowships. Some of those fellowships go to people working in literature. Where does the money come from? The money comes in part from the U.S. government, even now. Title VI, or whatever it's called, and other money.

So, even though Russian literature isn't logically and directly connected to political studies of Russia and the Soviet Union, indirectly there is a relationship. I mean, right here on the—we have—I'm a member of it, the executive committee, which sort of is supposed to kind of run the

Davis Center. Well there are four or five people from literature who are members of the executive committee. So, we have a shared enterprise, even if it isn't always logical and direct.

Q: And so, because the interest in Russia and the Soviet Union has gone in waves, given how relations with Soviet Union and Russia go, does that mean that—do you think that influences which parts of the department are more powerful?

Graham: That's a pretty big—it would be a pretty big claim to say it influences which departments are more powerful. The rise and fall of interest in Russian studies, for example, probably doesn't influence the history department—it's a big department, the history department at Harvard—that much. It might make the difference between having one historian at Russia and two or three, but in a department of fifty or sixty members, that's still—it doesn't influence the department as a whole very much. Slavic languages and literature is a little different, because it's all about Russia there or all about Slavic languages, so there, the rise and fall of interest in Russia has a more direct effect.

Q: So you were actually, I believe, the acting director of the Davis Center.

Graham: I was.

Q: Ninety-five to '96, is that correct?

Graham: Yes.

Q: So that was after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Graham: Yes.

Q: So can you tell me—and you've been a member of the executive committee for a number of years.

Graham: Many years.

Q: Can you talk about the transition between the Soviet Union and Russia and how that might have changed the focus of—

Graham: Okay. As you remember, the Soviet Union collapsed in '91. I was acting director in '95-'96. In the years between '91 and '95, interest in Russia dropped precipitously. So I was acting director at a time of crisis for the field. Russian studies centers all across the United States were closing down, disappearing. You know, there used to be many of them. There are not that many left, of strength—a handful—three, four, five. I became acting director at the moment when we were wondering, can we hang on? And the view was we can't hang on unless we get money, big money, and the money isn't going to come from the federal government. It has to come from somewhere else. And Marshall Goldman played a big role in this. He was a good friend of the Davis family and so forth. But I happened to be acting director at the moment the money arrived from the Davis family.

That photograph right there shows me—the woman in the center is Kathryn [Wasserman] Davis' daughter. That photograph was taken when I was acting director, when the money came. I just lucked out, you might say, to be acting director when the money came. That transformed us. It was \$10 million. That's not a whole lot of money these days, but nonetheless it meant the difference between being pessimistic and thinking, We're in for a real diminution if not an expiration, and knowing that we can hang on. So that's it; we hung on. Now it's true, the money didn't actually come to us until Kathryn Davis' death; she lived on for what seemed like forever, but still, it meant the difference between feeling besieged and feeling like we had a continuing life.

Q: And in terms of what to study, did you—did the Davis Center always know that it would expand to cover all the former Soviet states and that it would—

Graham: Oh, we had tremendous debates about that. After all, it used to be called the Russian Research Center. Now what had been Russia was thirteen republics. Should we say that we're going to continue studying all of them, or should just concentrate on the Russian heartland that's left as a part of Russia? As a legal state? And in particular, what about all those *stans* out there; Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and so forth—what we call Central Asia, which all had been part of the Soviet Union and that were now all independent states? Now that the Soviet Union has disappeared, what's the mandate of the Davis Center in terms of covering those areas? And the decision was made to cover those areas, particularly since in many of those areas, Russian is still a very important language. Not the Baltic states, but in Central Asian states,



Russian is very important—it's still some in the Baltic states—but anyway, the decision was made to cover those areas. And so we changed the name; it's now called the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Eurasian—that gives you an enormous mandate that was not included in the title Russian Research Center. So all those things got discussed *ad infinitum*, and the decisions I just described were made.

Q: And were you in favor of those decisions? The decision that was made?

Graham: I was in favor of the decisions that were made, but I felt—and I still feel—that we didn't follow up on it. If we were going to call ourselves the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, then we ought to have full-time tenured members of the faculty in Eurasian studies. We don't. I don't believe that there is a tenured member of the history department who teaches Eurasian studies. We're talking about the last fifteen years or so. But I felt through that period, and I still feel, that we're not completely truth in advertising. That we say that we're the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, but we still serve Russia in terms of who are here and what they research and so on, more so than we do Eurasian studies.

Now, it is true we have fellows here—right here on this hallway studying right now—who are in Eurasian studies, but we don't, in my opinion, have adequate faculty strength in Eurasian studies.

Q: Can you afford to?

Graham: I'm sure that's what the Harvard administration would say, that we can't afford to. I think they could, and I think they should have said either, you can't rename yourself, or, we will afford to. Again, I don't feel that the title of the center is fully authentic in terms of the strengths of the center.

Q: And now that we are—well, in the world that we're in now with Russia becoming more authoritarian, do you think the focus will then—do you think that the study by the Davis Center will become even more Russia focused?

Graham: Yes. The title of the Center will remain the same, but the problem I've been discussing deepens.

Q: Interesting. And so, I assume that you have kept in touch with your colleagues across—in the field of study of Russia and history.

Graham: Pretty much. But you know, it's a big field now. When I began in the field it was easy to know everybody. Now I don't know everybody, but I still know a lot of people.

Q: So how do you think that the Davis Center is doing now? Or, how do you think—do you know about how you think the Harriman Institute is doing now? I know you said you thought they were the two strongest players. What are they—

Graham: Well who's teaching Russian history at the Harriman right now?

Q: That I don't know.

Graham: It was Richard Wortman. He's retired.

Q: Right. He's retired.

Graham: It was [Mark L.] von Hagen. He left.

Q: He left.

Graham: Who's doing it right now? I feel—and you look back on the times when we had four people doing it. There's been a definite weakening. But there are some very good people out there and I'm not in on the faculty discussions at Columbia, and I'd be willing to guess—it's only a guess—that they're discussing deeply who they can add in Russian history. Timothy [M.] Frye is very good, in political science. But there's been some weakening.

Q: Do you think that Harvard has kept up with this time?

Graham: At the moment, I think Harvard has kept up a little better, but that may be because I'm more familiar with what's happening here than I am with what's happening at Columbia.

Q: One of the things that I know the Harriman Institute considered after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was to become more a focus for the private sector, to become more connected to the business community. Did you have discussions like that when you were acting director? Whether that should—

Graham: Here?

Q: Here.

Graham: Yes. Such connections are not easily made. There are two ways that such connections can be and have been occasionally made; one is potential donors and friends, and the Davis Center definitely has several—I won't name them, but several successful business people who are interested in Russia and have given money and funded conferences and things like that. So that's what you might call the donor, or the potential donor connection, although some of these people are more than just donors. They come to our talks sometimes and they are a little bit of a part of the life of the place. But they're still mostly seen as potential donors. The other is to have activities, conferences and talks, that businessmen will find—business people will find interesting.

And I've been involved in that because of my interest in technology and high-tech companies and so forth. There's such a thing as the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce, and it has an active Boston branch. They're in trouble right now because relations between the two countries are at such a low ebb. In the last ten years they've been rather significant. And I've taken part in

a number of conferences on such things as business possibilities in Russia, start-up companies in Russia that could be of interest to America business. So, there is some of that. Not as much as I think there ought to be, but yes, there is.

Q: So I'm just thinking about sort of influences that Davis or Harriman may be having sort of on the wider world, so maybe business influence is one. What about the students coming out of here now and what they're doing?

Graham: Well, just as Columbia had its certificate program—which, does it still exist? I don't know. I'm not sure it does.

Q: I think so.

Graham: Does it?

Q: I think so.

Graham: Okay. Well just as they have that certificate program, which I went through years and year ago, so also we have here something called REECA [Master's Degree in Regional Studies: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia], which is a master's program in Russian studies. It's been here for years, it's still here. I think each year there are ten or twelve people in it. Many of the graduates of that program have become either journalists or government officials, particularly

at the State Department. Some of them have gone into the military, some of them have gone into intelligence services. I don't have the statistics, but I'm sure they have.

So, if you look at that community out there in the world or in the United States, of people who are in one way or another a specialist on Russia or who know a lot about Russia and that's important to them in their business or their government job or whatever, over the years sure, Harvard has produced dozens of people who do that kind of thing. I wouldn't want to exaggerate it, but it's very definitely there. And the military sometimes sends—each year in the REECA program there's usually one or two people from the Air Force or the Army who want to know something about Russia; know the language, know something about the history and culture, thinking that will help them in their military positions. I think often intelligence, but not always. So yes, that goes on. But the primary mission—that's an important secondary mission—the primary mission—I don't think I have to say this—of a place like the Davis Center, is academic. I mean, we produce the historians and the political scientists of our country who go out and specialize in something having to do with Russia or Central Asia.

Q: And are many people interested in the history of science?

Graham: No, not many. Well, in the history of science in general or in the history of science in Russia?

Q: No, Russia.

Graham: No. But there is—I've sometimes been called the dean or father or whatever of those people—a creator of a school of people who study the history of Russian science and technology, and yes, there's a group of maybe—stretch it—ten to twelve people who have studied with me and who do this. And some of them are rather prominent, like, I don't know whether you know the name, Michael [D.] Gordin, who's at Princeton [University]. He was my doctoral student; he's a specialist in the history of Russian science. He wrote a biography of [Dimitri I.] Mendeleev. There are other people like this.

Q: I wondered if you could talk about—just talking about your work—about the NOVA science show that you shot in Moscow, when that was and if you could describe it, and what kind of influence you thought it had here.

Graham: The name of that program was *How Good is Soviet Science?* It was shot in the Soviet Union and was a NOVA program. There was a team of us, five or six of us, cameraman, director, sound person, and it was shot in the Soviet Union in '86. I believe that's right, '85-'86. Exactly at the time when Gorbachev came in. He either came in just before we went or while we were there. I was the interlocutor, if you could call it that, which meant that I was the person kind of asking questions of Russians and having discussions with Russians. It had some impact. NOVA is a—as you know—a nationally broadcast program of some repute and fame. So, certainly more people came to know me as a specialist on Russian science through that program than they did for the articles and the books that I write, because the reading public of an academic monograph is pretty small. It's rare that the greater public reads those things, but a pretty large public—NOVA could give you the statistics, but we're probably talking several million people—watched

that program. So, I guess if you're asking questions about impact, that was an important moment. It's a long time ago now and very few people even remember it.

Q: What was the message you wanted to convey?

Graham: The message that I wanted to convey was that Russians are very smart, creative people, and just as they have a great literature, they have a great scientific tradition. But, the restrictions—particularly political, but there's some other kinds of restrictions, too, economic—the restrictions in Soviet society are—and this is counterintuitive I think to most people—are actually more debilitating in terms of technology than they are in literature. If you are a dissident writer, you're a Boris [L.] Pasternak and you write a book called *Doctor Zhivago*, and that book is banned in the Soviet Union, that book still lives. It's published in Western Europe, the United States. You get a Nobel prize. You can't go get it because you're politically prohibited, but it still lives. But, if you're a Russian scientist and you discover something like the laser, which as a matter of fact they did discover, you can't convert that into a technology and help your country. So the restrictions—the point I was trying to make was that there's genius in Russia, but that genius has more trouble in science and technology than it does in literature, which is completely counterintuitive.

Q: Yes. Okay. Let's see.

Graham: Have you seen that program?



Q: I have not. I was going to look for it. I'm wondering whether it's available in—can you find it on—have you seen it at all recently?

Graham: Yes. I have a—not here—but I have the tape.

Q: Right, but is it available on—

Graham: I think it is. I think it would take some searching, but I think if you went on to Google and you typed in “How good is Soviet science?” something would come up.

Q: So, you do end your book *Moscow Stories* with the statement about where is Russia heading. That book was written in 2006.

Graham: What do I say?

Q: I have the book here, but I think you basically say that where it is heading may depend on—or, the West may have some influence in where Russia is heading, depending on how wise their policies are. Something of that sort.

Graham: Yes. Right. I still believe that.

Q: So I'm wondering whether you—if you could just talk about that a little bit and what you think our role should be.

Graham: Okay. When I was at the Harriman Institute and when I was a student there, one of my best friends was Stephen [F.] Cohen. You know who Stephen Cohen is?

Q: Yes.

Graham: He's now at NYU [New York University], for many years he was at Princeton. We had a very, very close friendship. He is still in the news. I'm glad that you know a little bit what I'm saying, and I have to say I don't agree with him in his message, which seems to be—if he were here he would quickly probably correct me—but which seems to be—that it's the United States' fault that Russia has gone the way it has gone, and the reason for it is, in particular, the fact that NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] moved in on Russia. The Baltic states are now members of NATO, and there was even talk about how Ukraine might eventually become a member of NATO, and that frightened [Vladimir V.] Putin so badly that he turned against the West and the United States in particular, and in some degree Putin is our creature. It's our fault. He's come close to saying that.

I think the United States made mistakes. I think in particular, the United States made some mistakes with regard to Ukraine. But I cannot buy the view that NATO membership should not have been extended to say, the Baltic states. If it had not been extended to the Baltic states, where would they be now? Probably a part of Russia because conquering them would be a lot easier than conquering Ukraine. So, I think that Steve has taken some good insights and ridden them too far, gone too far.

So, I think that the United States has made some mistakes. I think that was true, particularly in the early years of the Ukrainian thing, we made some mistakes—early months of the Ukrainian Maidan demonstrations. I mean, we had a Secretary of State in there practically cheering them on. But I'm not going to be backed into the position of saying that the current state of bad Russian-American relations is the United States' fault. I don't think that. I think Putin has never deviated very far from his training in the KGB, and it's important to remember that not only was he a member of the KGB, for a while he was the head of it. And so, I would assign fault more to Putin than I would to the United States for the present, sorry state of affairs.

Q: And do you think there's anything we can do as a country or anything that any experts in Russia can help our country do to sort of get us out of this?

Graham: I think any improvement in the relations between the United States and Russia after the election of Trump will be at a very heavy cost. I could imagine Putin and Trump getting together and Trump saying to Putin, Look, let's try to improve relations. Let's strike a deal. You join us in fighting radical Islam, and we work together on that, and we'll stop hassling you about Ukraine. And essentially excusing Russia for what it's done in Ukraine. I happen to believe that what it's done in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine is more egregious than Crimea, although Crimea was bad enough.

So, a deal could be cut. Eastern Europe would see this a lot like the Hitler-Stalin pact, as a deal at everybody else's expense. So yes, in the immediate future with Trump president, I think it's

possible for an improvement in Russian-American relations of a sort that I wouldn't like. If Hillary Clinton had been elected president—and she was far from perfect but a lot better than Trump—another kind of improvement could have occurred but it would be of a different sort. It would probably start out with a deterioration. Clinton would say, Look, we're not going to take it from you. Your economy is a tenth of our economy. You just can't get away with this. So, we're telling you, no more expansion. If there is, there'll be resistance. And it would have been a really difficult time. We would have been really worried about war. But my guess is we would have gotten through it because Putin doesn't want an all-out war. And then people would have learned to live with limitations.

Q: Well, I guess we'll have to wait and see.

Graham: Oh yes. I've never—by the way, I've never posed as an expert on foreign policy. I answered the way I did simply because it was a question you asked.

Q: Okay. Understood. Well on that note, maybe you—unless you have something else you'd like to discuss today, we can end the session for today and pick up again tomorrow.

Graham: Very good.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]

Session: #2

Interviewee: Loren R. Graham

Location: Cambridge, MA

Interviewer: Christina Pae

Date: January 24, 2017

Q: Today is Tuesday, January 24, 2017. I'm here with Professor Loren Graham in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and we're recording our second session. Good morning.

Graham: Good morning on this rainy morning.

Q: Yes, very rainy, unfortunately. So I wanted to pick up on our discussion yesterday. We talked a bit yesterday about your experiences at the Harriman Institute, and one of the topics that I wanted to cover was what your experiences at the Harriman were like during the late '60s, during the Vietnam War and the protests that were going on there, and if you could talk about that a bit?

Graham: I'd be happy to. First, just a word or two about me politically. I was never a Marxist or a true radical, but I was very much on the left in terms of my political views. And I was very anti-Vietnam War and participated in many demonstrations, both at Columbia up and down Broadway and so forth, and also marches on Washington [D.C.], probably four or five that I participated in. We'd all get on buses and go to Washington, D.C. A little bit similar to the women's march that just occurred.

Columbia was a very political place in those years, and the predominant view was left. There were people more conservative. We used to call them the jocks. There were people who were more conservative, but the majority was on the left. When the student uprising of 1968 occurred, I was there on the faculty then. I had become a faculty member, not a student. My sentiments, and of many of the other people I knew—faculty—were on the side of the students because we felt that the Columbia administration under Grayson [L.] Kirk, who was a particularly distant, austere, uninvolved, aristocratic-looking man, that that administration had been unresponsive to all kinds of grievances. And an example of that was the proposal to build a gymnasium in Morningside Park.

Now Morningside Park separates Columbia from Harlem, just down the hill, and it was supposed to be a public park and Columbia was a private institution, so from the beginning it was a controversial project, but Columbia tried to—the word you choose at this moment, or I choose. I could say pay off or mitigate; one word is more critical than the other—the people at Harlem by putting an entrance to the gymnasium down in Harlem, and the idea was that when Columbia teams were not practicing or using the gymnasium, then they could. And I think the Columbia administration probably made that offer in all good faith, but the situation had become so politicized because of the Vietnam War and lots of other things—there was still a draft, so the students were worried they were going to get into the draft and so forth—the situation had become so politicized that that offer was seen as a denigration of the people in Harlem, sort of like when the servants had to enter the back door. And so it blew up. And I was very critical of that—of that gymnasium proposal. And the Columbia administration, until the breakdown, until '68, was very defensive of that. So that was an issue on which we began to break.

When the revolt occurred, I participated in a faculty group—faculty ad-hoc group—trying somehow to mitigate some of the grievances, bring some kind of peace back. It was a hopeless task. And we were in the middle and got dumped on by both sides. As the students became increasingly radicalized—and did they ever—became increasingly radicalized and the university administration became increasingly defensive and eventually calling in the police, it was hopeless for anybody in the middle, as I was. We didn't make anybody happy except for the person next to us in the middle, but neither the students nor the administration liked what we were doing. The administration thought we were too pro students, the students thought we were too pro administration. So that was the way it went.

And it was extremely political. I'll give you one example. When the police were called in—when the students occupied buildings and the police were called in and there were lots of people who were really clubbed, I mean, hurt. I wasn't hurt but many of my friends were. It brought out almost subterranean political feelings, good and bad. It was a very important revelation for me to see how, when a society is under tremendous stress, all the things that emerge are not all good. There are good and bad. Orest Ranum, one of my colleagues in the history department, had all of his research papers destroyed, burned. There were lots of stories like that.

Leo Haimson, my colleague, had a nervous breakdown. You know this story?

Q: A little bit.

Graham: He had a nervous breakdown and he went to the hospital, Columbia Presbyterian [Hospital] right there. And I and other people too who were his colleagues and some of his students, went to see him. And he was convinced at this one moment when he was sick, he was convinced that this was not the 1917 revolution, but it was the 1905 revolution. Now, you know the difference between those two revolutions in Russian history. So, that gives you just a little picture.

Q: Can you just describe for maybe people who might not know the difference between the two?

Graham: Well, the 1917 revolution brought an overturn of the government. The 1905 revolution came at moments close to that, but it failed. And what it brought instead of an overturn was some reforms, which didn't last, but some reforms in a kind of parliamentary—hardly democratic, but parliamentary direction.

So, Leo was seeing everything going on at Columbia through the eyes of a specialist on Russia, which was, in a way, kind of pathetic. But we knew he was sick, so we couldn't tell him what he was saying was pathetic, so we just had to kind of go along with him.

So those were tumultuous years. Not just '68, but from '62 or '63 all through '72 or so. Those were tumultuous years. And I spent most of them at Columbia and I'll never forget them, and they've left—they've either enlightened me or left a mark on me, whichever words one would choose. And I think I've become a much more knowledgeable person, maybe a little bit more cynical than I used to be, because of that experience.



Q: Other than Professor Haimson's breakdown, where were the faculty on the issues of supporting students versus not?

Graham: The faculty split. I would say the majority of the faculty were either neutral or somewhat sympathetic to the students. But as the students moved further and further left—and you know that in any situation that's approaching revolutionary—the radicals, the extremists tend to push the moderates out. So, what happened among the students was that the moderate students, who were nonetheless protesting, got pushed out of positions of authority and all kinds of breakdowns occurred: breakdowns between blacks and whites—Hamilton Hall was occupied by blacks and they wouldn't let any whites in there. There were breakdowns between men and women; the women protestors accused the male protestors, quite accurately, of expecting them to bring food in and coffee and take care of them. So, there were—fractures were running in every direction, and that's what happens when you get into extreme situations. I mean, it may sound like common sense for me to say it now, but to have been there and see that happen and watch it happen was an educative experience for me.

Q: And there were—I've heard some stories about faculty who were not just sympathetic, but actually tried to do things to help some of the students.

Graham: Yes. There were, definitely. I didn't do that much, but I did it a little; I took some food to some students. One of my students was arrested because he jumped up on the sundial in the center of the Columbia campus and shouted expletives about the police, and he got arrested,

and—by the way, he still lives here in Cambridge. I still know him. He got arrested and charged with inciting to riot or something, for which the punishment was severe, like five years in prison or something. So I wrote a letter to the judge. It was legal, a *pro bono* letter, saying this was my student and he was a good student and I felt that this was an extreme moment in his life that would pass, and that his life shouldn't be scarred forever by what he did in the heat of a political inferno. And he was let off. The student, who at that time was radical, no question about it, sent me as a gift, a subscription to two magazines: one was *Foreign Affairs* which he thought was an establishment journal, but the other was *The Marxist Review*. [Laughter] And so, he was showing there that he appreciated what I did, but he wasn't completely buying what he thought was my message. [Laughs] So, things like that happened, which were kind of nice.

But it was an absolutely transformative experience, and I think that—I know quite a few Columbia faculty, some of whom have gone elsewhere, who were with me then, and they all kind of reproduce what I'm saying; that it was a really significant event in their lives.

Now, you ask me about the sentiments of the faculty. I can't answer statistically, but subjectively I'll say it seemed to me that two-thirds of the faculty were either neutral or sympathetic with the students, and one-third was very antipathetic to the students.

Q: Did that create a rift?

Graham: Oh, of course. Friendships were sacrificed. People stopped talking to each other. I mean, Sidney Morgenbesser, who was in the philosophy department, a friend of mine, had his

skull cracked with a policeman's billy club. And still he was walking around—he was still able to get around. He spent a day or so in the hospital—with a big bandage on his head. There were other members of the philosophy department—I'm not going to name who they were—who were very anti-student rebellion, and the fact that Sidney had been injured was seen as being on the side of the students, which to some degree he was. And so, members of the same department stopped talking to each other. It was—this was a big event. Very big.

And there were—underneath the Columbia rebellion, there were lots of other issues simmering. The draft was one of them. The draft to go serve in Vietnam or someplace, that had a radicalizing effect on students. The women's movement was really just beginning—what became known as the Women's Movement was just beginning, and Columbia was inert. I'll give you one example. In Fayerweather Hall where the history department was located, down the hall there was a restroom. Did the window on the restroom say men or did it say women? Neither. It said, "Faculty." The assumption was that if you were a faculty member, you were a man, and as a matter of fact, there wasn't a single tenured female in the Columbia history department. The first woman in that department was a Nina [G.] Garsoian—she's still alive, long retired, a specialist in Armenian and Byzantine history, exotic enough that she wasn't disturbing to male professors of American history. Prejudice was rank.

My wife and I were both getting PhDs in history at Columbia. We were classmates, actually. So, just before we were going to get our degrees, we went to a meeting which was called Becoming Employed: Professionalization of History. It was for people like us who were on the point of getting our degrees and were going to be looking for jobs. The man—the chairman of the history

department—no, the man who chaired the meeting was Shepard [B.] Clough, professor of European history. So he gave a talk. We were sitting there. My wife wasn't the only woman in the room, but there were maybe two or three or four, and the rest were all men. We were all getting our PhDs in history. And so, one of the women asked, "Well, Professor Clough, you haven't said anything about what the prospects for women with PhDs in history from Columbia are. For example, would you be willing to consider a woman in the history department of Columbia?" He said—and it's just incredible now—people don't believe this, what I'm about to say. I almost don't believe it myself, except he said it. He said, "There's never been a woman in the history department of Columbia University, and so long as I'm a member, there won't be." Can you believe that? This was 1962 or so. And in fact, Nina Garsoian was hired right after Shepard Clough retired.

So, we were harboring grievances. The faculty was harboring grievances, the graduate students were harboring grievances, the undergraduates were—we each had our grievances. So when the demon—'68 came, the tinder was all there. I mean, it just exploded. And we weren't all angry about the same thing, but we were all angry. [Laughs]

Q: So speaking about women on the faculty, I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about Sheila Fitzpatrick.

Graham: Well, Sheila Fitzpatrick came—she didn't get her PhD at Columbia, but she came as a teacher there after the terrible period I just described had passed; things were opening up. So, I don't believe Sheila herself—she might have a different story, I don't know. But from what I

saw—Sheila and I were pretty close friends. We taught together. I don't believe that she hit head on anti-women prejudice. She might have. After all, she didn't stay, and there may be stories I don't know. But she went on of course to become a very distinguished professor of Russian history at the University of Chicago and the University of Texas and other places. Sheila was bright, incisive, extremely knowledgeable of the sources. She'd spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union. She'd become friends of the Lunacharsky family. [Anatoly V.] Lunacharsky was the first commissar of education or enlightenment, or minister, in Soviet history. She'd become—she had befriended—or they had befriended her—he was dead—but had befriended the members of the family, and they made available to her a large amount of correspondence and other records, and her first book was a book about Lunacharsky and the Commissariat of the Enlightenment. And it was a great book, not only because she's a very good historian and writer, but of course she had access to materials that nobody had ever seen before. So what did you mean when you asked me about her?

Q: Well I was under the impression that there were some issues with why she didn't stay at Columbia, so I just didn't know whether you knew about that.

Graham: I have to admit, I don't have a strong memory on that. I do know that I defended her, and she and I were friends, and I thought she was an excellent historian, as I've just said. Was there a campaign against her?

Q: I'm not sure if I would go—

Graham: That far.

Q: —that far, but.

Graham: It's possible. It's possible, but I don't know that story. Strange that I don't, but I don't.

Q: Okay. Fair enough. So, I guess just moving on, connecting to the Lunacharsky story, I mean, you yourself—I mean, obviously you were very well connected within the community of academics in Russian studies, but you also had numerous friendships with Russians.

Graham: Many.

Q: Soviets. And many in high places, or who became—who sort of grew to be in high places eventually.

Graham: Some of them in high places. Although, quite frankly, I didn't seek friendships in high places. I sought friendships and I had them, and some of those people ended up in high places: [Alexander N.] Yakovlev is one, [Ivan T.] Frolov is another, became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist party, a philosopher. But I befriended them when they weren't in high places, and then they ended up in high places. But the corollary of that is, I became friends with many people who never ended up in any kind of high place at all, but they still were my friends.

Q: How did those friendships come about? Were they from your time in the Soviet Union or were they studying here?

Graham: Well, Yakovlev began here, but most—in New York, and we can return to that if you wish—but most of them began there. I spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union. I suppose if you added it all up, we're talking about two or three years of time in the Soviet Union. In a friendship with a Russian at that time, during the Soviet Union, there was a discernible turning point in a friendship. At first you're just a casual friend. You may drink a little vodka together and you have conversations together, but still in the background, you both know that you don't know whether to trust completely the other one. For me, is this guy from the KGB and is he spying on me; for them, how close should I get to this American and just who is he? I don't know what his background is either, you know. So there was friendship already, but everybody knew—both sides knew there was distance. There comes that moment—and it doesn't happen quickly—when suddenly you start trusting each other, and you start saying things—and what marks that transition is when each of you starts saying things to the other, that if blabbed could get you in trouble. You say those things, they don't blab, you trust.

Q: Did any of it—

Graham: And that was so different from American friendships. Friendships in the Soviet Union had a kind of depth and significance and binding and disturbing quality that friendships in the United States didn't seem to me to have. I have some very, very close friends here too,

obviously, but friendships in the Soviet Union were baked in a retort [laughs], and they glazed and took on a quality that, here in the United States, don't have.

I can remember a time—this is a little simplistic. Hopefully you'll forgive me. I went to the Soviet Union. I was there for two months and during the time I was there, some of my friends confessed to me the problems they had. And some of these problems were terrible. They had a sickness that they couldn't get medicine for, they were being harassed in their place of employment because they were being suspected of disloyalty or something. So they would confide these things to me. And I took all this in and I began to suffer with them, and it just—things intertwined and became strong. So I came out of the Soviet Union and I was at one of my closest, oldest friend's house, and he asked me how things were and how my trip had been to the Soviet Union. So I started just trying to tell him a little bit about why I was still so emotionally engaged, and he said, "Just a minute. This is a moment in the football—he had his TV on—a moment in the football game here that I don't want to miss." [Laughs] So that illustrates—he is a good friend, American friend—illustrates the difference I'm trying to talk about. A friendship that you trusted in the Soviet Union was like no other friendship that I had had.

Q: Was there ever anyone you trusted who turned out to be untrustworthy?

Graham: Yes. He's still alive. He's in the United States now. I don't want to name him. He wasn't a black guard, but when the pressure came, he wilted and ratted on me. There was—I wasn't a spy and so there was nothing terrible he could rat on, but he told his superiors and members of the Communist party, things about me he shouldn't have. But when you asked that



question I hesitated. That's the only one I can think of. Most of my friendships in the Soviet Union went well, but I should preface that by saying, a lot of what looked like they were going to be friendships didn't quite click. That happens here too, you know; you think you've got something going with somebody, a good friend and so forth, and then somehow you each go on your own orbits. That happened of course, in the Soviet Union; not every friendship blossomed. But of those that blossomed, that's the only one I can think of where it went awry.

Q: So can you tell me a little bit about Yakovlev and how you got to know him?

Graham: Alexander Yakovlev was a really remarkable man. He didn't look remarkable; he was—particularly in his later life—pudgy and looked like your corner grocery store man or something, but he was a truly remarkable man, and one of the most remarkable things about him was passion. Underneath this totally unremarkable countenance and physiognomy, there was just a tremendous passion. He never delved into any issue or problem without taking strong sides. So for anyone who reads this transcript who doesn't know who Alexander Yakovlev was, he ended up being Gorbachev's primary advisor in the period of perestroika and the loosening of the Soviet Union just before its collapse. I met him when he was a student, but not in Russia. My first year of graduate school at Columbia was 1958-59. That was the first year that any Soviet students were permitted to come to the United States on an exchange agreement that had been signed. It's called the Lacy-Zarubin agreement. The agreement had been signed in 1957 by the U.S. and Soviet governments setting up an exchange program.

So, three Soviet students came to Columbia. They were Alexander Yakovlev, Oleg [D.] Kalugin, and a third one who I don't remember right now, the name. I became friends of, first of all a very good friend of Yakovlev, somewhat of a good friend with Kalugin, and I didn't interact with the third one at all. There wasn't anything bad between us, we just didn't meet each other. But Yakovlev and I met and talked. He was writing his own dissertation back in the Soviet Union and it was on FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] and the New Deal. And I maintain that his writing of that dissertation and reading sources in the United States prepared him for the idea that reform wasn't the same thing as betrayal.

He came to me excitedly one time, saying he'd been reading in the library there—Butler Library there at Columbia, and he had read how the members of, what he saw as FDR's class—in other words, rich people, because FDR was from a very wealthy family, accused FDR when he became president, of betraying his own class by the New Deal and all of the social programs that he promoted. They accused him of being a traitor. But Yakovlev came to me very excitedly. I'll never forget this. He said, "You know, he wasn't a traitor. He was trying to save capitalism. He was trying to save capitalism, not undermine it, by reforming it in a way that it could survive." I later on, many, many, many years later when he was advising Gorbachev, asked him if that's what he was trying to do; was he trying to save the communist state by reforming it and make it softer and more humane. He said, "Of course." So I think that was important.

In my relationship with Yakovlev, there's an untold story. I didn't really put it in my book but I did hint at it may be here or there. You may be already aware of it. Yakovlev and I became close friends. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the head of the KGB was a man named

[Vladimir A.] Kryuchkov. Kryuchkov accused Yakovlev of being an American spy, and I was his handler. And Kryuchkov said “This American student, who inducted Yakovlev into the hands of the CIA, has continued to make contact with him ever since, and almost every year when he comes—when this American, Loren Graham, comes to the Soviet Union, Yakovlev and he get together. He’s still his handler.” But this was just before Kryuchkov was thrown out. So thank goodness that charge never came home to roost. It could only have hurt me terribly. Perhaps not everyone will believe me, but I tell with my hand on my heart, I’ve never had any in my life relationship with the CIA, and in fact, I turned down the CIA—because they did approach me, because here was an American who had these incredible contacts in the Soviet Union. They several times contacted me and asked me to work with them and I had to turn them down. I did turn them down, flat.

Even though I was critical of the CIA in those days and I still am, if a person in an authoritarian government had done what I did, turning the intelligence agency down flat, that person would have suffered. So I think in a way it’s a compliment—a backhanded one—a compliment to the American system, that I could so overtly say no to the CIA and the FBI and still have a good career. Here I am, happily retired in a great university. If I was hurt by what I did, I’m unaware of it. That’s a compliment to the American system; that they didn’t take retribution on me.

Anyway, Yakovlev went on and he was—when I met him he was very pro-Stalin in many ways. He told stories about—he was terribly wounded toward the end of World War II, and he told stories that when they would charge the German lines—he was a marine—a member of a particularly brave unit called the Black Angels who were known for their bravery and ferocity.

They would drink 200 grams—he told me about this personally; we would sit in a Chinese restaurant on Broadway—he'd drink 200 grams of vodka, grab his gun and charge to the German lines. And, of course, eventually he was almost killed, hit multiple times with a German machine gun, spent a year and a half or two years in the hospital back in the Soviet Union, and to the end of his days, walked with a quite marked limp. In the old days, when we used non-politically correct words, we would say the man was a cripple. Now we would say he was severely handicapped.

Anyway, so he went on and he went through phases. He had this ardent pro-Stalinist phase, which he was maybe just beginning to get out of a little bit when I talked to him at Columbia, but then he went on and wrote book after book in the early '60s which described the United States as just the most awful place imaginable: the workers were all persecuted, they were all unemployed, they were starving, capitalists ruled everything.

Then he became ambassador to Canada for quite a few years, six or seven, eight years I think. I met him sometimes during that time, too. And there he wrote very anti-American books. He didn't write any anti-Canadian books, even though Canada was also a capitalist society. Then, he became—when he was in Canada he was particularly impressed with how Canadian agriculture, which is northern just like most of the Soviet Union, was nonetheless productive and even prosperous in many ways. That made a big impression on him.

So he decided that they needed reforms in the Soviet Union, first in agriculture and then other things. Once he started down that path, the reform path, because of the natural passions in the

man, he became more and more engaged in this and he started reading, and then he got access to the archives because he was so highly placed. He was a member of the Central Committee and then eventually a member of the Politburo, which is the eight or ten people who ruled the whole country. So he was a very important man and he got access to archives, and he started reading what had happened in the terror years and Stalin and—his hero was first Stalin, then he had to surrender on that, but Lenin was still his hero. And then when he saw all these orders from Lenin to execute people, priests and so forth, he was severely disillusioned, and he took that same kind of passion that had once made him celebrate Stalin and Lenin, and made him celebrate their opponents. He just flipped, and became so outspoken on that, that even Gorbachev—they had a wonderful period when they were together, but even Gorbachev departed from him and Yakovlev became a very, in Gorbachev's eyes, extreme denigrator of the Soviet Union. What else do you want?

Q: Well I'm curious though, you—I mean, you were very good friends with him when he was studying. You got to know him when he was studying in the U.S., and I would imagine that you must have had discussions about your different political views. So you were never able to sway him away from his anti-American sentiment at that point?

Graham: Nothing that he would acknowledge, but we went—we were always looking for the cheapest food because we were both students, so we would go to often Chinese restaurants, but other restaurants. I remember there was a Cuban restaurant that we used to go to. And we both enjoyed it. It was clear that we both wanted to do this. So we would talk politics, sit there and eat the food and talk politics. Even though he would disagree with me, there was never a moment

when we raised our voices at each other. There was this kind of implicit understanding that the other person was trying to learn something, and that by having these kinds of conversations, we could learn something. I'm absolutely sure that he was thinking some things that he wasn't saying, but he certainly wasn't a dissident. He was still a loyal Soviet citizen, but he talked about how terrible the United States is, and so forth, so I said, "Look, we're only ten blocks from Harlem. Let's go to Harlem." So we went to Harlem together. Well, it wasn't the pleasantest place in the world, but the people weren't starving. At least they didn't look like they were starving. He thought they would be.

So we had this relationship, and we continued it. And perhaps the most bizarre moment came when he was a member of the Politburo—the Soviet Union still existed—he was a member of the Politburo. This is as high as you can go, just about. The president's cabinet, except that's not really comparable. Really high up. I used to call him at his apartment; I couldn't do it anymore. All that had been cut off.

The head—the Central Committee and the Politburo's offices were on a place called *Staraya Ploshchad*, Old Square, in downtown Moscow. Not very far from the Kremlin. I knew that's where his office was. I knew he was there, but I had no phone. How was I going to get in contact with him, tell him I'm in Moscow and I want to see him again? So I started poking around that building and I found a door, and it said on the door, *Sovershenno Sekretno*, completely secret. So I put my hand on the doorknob to see if it was unlocked. It was unlocked, and I walked in. Corridor. Walked down the corridor. Came to a soldier standing with a rifle with a bayonet on it, and right beside the soldier there was a little window, kind of like a bank teller's window. So, I

wrote a message, I addressed it to Alexander Yakovlev, *chlen*—member—Politburo. It said, “Sasha [laughs], I’m in Moscow. I’m staying at the *Academicheskaya gostinitsa* [Academy of Sciences hotel] on October Square. My phone number is such. Could we get together?” Put it in the envelope, stuck it through the window. Next morning my phone rang, it was Alexander Yakovlev. He says, “Oh yes, let’s get together.” Now of course Kryuchkov, the man I mentioned, head of the KGB, noted all that. I didn’t know it at the time, but I’m sure he did.

But anyway, we’d get together. So here I was in this bizarre situation of being an American professor, having lunch and meetings, coffee, with a member of the Politburo completely outside of anybody’s knowledge, just by taking letters and putting them in that little window. It worked.

Q: And no one ever stopped you from walking in that door, even though it said completely secret? And the guard didn’t point his bayonet at you?

Graham: No. If you act confident, I must have had permission, right? And after all, I didn’t try to break into anything, I just arrived with a letter addressed to a member of the Politburo. This must be pretty important. I held myself straight, pushed it in there, acted as if the system has to accept this, turned around and walked out. What are they going to do with it? They gave it to him.

[Laughs]

Q: Well maybe Kryuchkov was behind it. Maybe he thought, “Oh, we’re going to catch this guy now.” [Laughs] “He’s communicating with this American spy.”

Graham: Well, we were communicating, and I'm sure they recorded everything we said. And that's probably why it never really blew up; because we didn't say anything that could—there were no talks of military or weapons or secret agreements. No. It was, "How's your family?" His son was a philosopher. I knew him, too. Just friendship.

Q: So you also had friendships with people like Nikolai [N.] Vorontsov?

Graham: Oh, he was at one point my closest friend in the Soviet Union.

Q: So he was Minister of the Environment?

Graham: Yes, but I knew him before that.

Q: Okay. So can you tell me about that friendship as well?

Graham: Well, we really hit it off. And here it was, in the beginning, very intellectual. He was a biologist, and he was also very interested in the history of biology. He actually wrote a book on the history of evolutionary theory, which I worked with him on, in the sense of reading his drafts and so forth. So we became quite close friends. Then he was invited to come here to Harvard for a year, and did, with his wife Lala [Vorontsova], who is still alive and whom I know well, and they lived in the Radcliffe Yard in a house there—Pforzheimer House, I think—and so I was with them practically every week for some conversations, or they were in our house many times for dinner. So we were really close. He returned to the Soviet Union. He was not a member of



the Communist Party. He returned to the Soviet Union, and became—under the Gorbachev government, at the end of the Soviet Union—became Minister of the Environment. The first Minister of the Environment that the Soviet Union ever had, and to tell the truth, the last, because now it's not a ministry. There's still an environmental office, but it's not a ministry.

He was the first member of the Council of Ministers—that's sort of like the president's cabinet—the first member of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union who was not a member of the Communist Party. Everybody else—you couldn't get that high without being a member of the Communist Party. But in the expiring days of the Soviet Union, under the influence of people like Yakovlev—who also knew him, not as well as I did, but also knew him—tolerance was growing and so they let him in. He used to joke that he'd like to be the first non-Communist member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party [laughs], which of course is a ridiculous thought, but it just shows his sense of humor.

So he was a wonderfully dear man. I mean, I had many, many, many contacts with him. I even sponsored a conference, paid for by the MacArthur Foundation here in the United States, on the environment in the Soviet Union. He chaired it in his ministry, and many, many, many contacts: both personal, friendship, and academic; history of biology, history of the environment, environmental protection, that kind of thing.

I was in his dacha outside of Moscow, a dacha, which he had the right to use because he was a member of the Council of Ministers, a very high ranking post. I was in that dacha with him—Pat and I—my wife and I were there together with him and his wife, Lala—when the Soviet Union

began to break up. And, we couldn't get news that was revealing from the Soviet radio stations, so I had with me a little shortwave radio actually, and so we listened to the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] in his little dacha and got the news of rebellion in the Baltics and so forth.

Anyway, yes, he was a close friend. Unfortunately he died some years ago, but I still am close to the family. His daughter, Masha Vorontsova, lives here in the United States now and she—she's still a Russian citizen but she works for the International Federation for the Advancement of Wildlife; the same kind of environmental issue that he was interested in. One other of his daughters lives in Estonia—and Russians are not much liked in Estonia, but she learned Estonian and ran for the Estonian parliament. I can't remember whether she won or not, but she is—I kind of think she did. But anyway, she is a rare Russian in that she learned to speak Estonian, became a part of Estonian society, and they respect her. I'm just saying that—his grandson Igor is a young man I've had many connections with. So yes, I know the whole family.

Q: And so what was the reaction when you were sitting in the dacha listening to this news? How did Vorontsov feel about what was happening? Was it a shock, was it expected, was he disappointed by it?

Graham: We—even though he was a member of the government, we celebrated together the downfall of that government. Definitely. There weren't any disagreements between us.

Q: How interesting. Thank you.

I wanted to ask you if you could just talk a little bit about the period when you were *persona non grata* in the Soviet Union, in the '70s, when you were unable to go back. We talked a little bit earlier about the one friend you had who sort of betrayed you, but that wasn't the reason why—

Graham: No, no. No, no. Well, I was *persona non grata* from 1972 until 1976. To this day I don't know exactly why I was *persona non grata*. I can think of three possible reasons: one was because I had published a book in 1972 called *Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union*. It's around here somewhere, which at first the regime reacted to very negatively. Eventually it was published in Russian, so it was a controversial book. That may have been a reason why I was *persona non grata*. The other was I—in '72, when I was in the Soviet Union, I rebuffed the KGB. I think I described it in my book, when they took me out to this restaurant. I had to escape by jumping out the window. It was quite a dramatic story. I'm sure that angered them. So that might have been the reason. Another reason is I had this cross in '72 with Lysenko, and that's described in my book, *Lysenko's Ghost*. And Lysenko may have complained about me to the secret police or something, I don't know. I don't know why I was *persona non grata*, but I was.

I probably would have stayed *persona non grata* had it not been in that in 1976—I don't remember how much of this is in my book—in 1976, the National Academy of Sciences in the United States wanted to send a delegation to the Soviet Union to discuss science policy. Most of the members of the delegation were scientists, including one or two Nobel Prize winning scientists, but I was also a member. They asked me because I knew a lot about Russian science, and because I spoke Russian and so forth. So they asked me to be in the delegation. So when

they applied for entry visas to the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C. everybody was given an entry visa, except for Loren Graham. Loren Graham was turned down as “not being welcome in this country.” That was the phrase. And then the American delegation said, “Okay, if you won’t let Loren Graham be a part of our delegation, we’re not coming.” It was wonderful. I was so proud of them. Anyway, that’s what they said.

So then the Russians buckled and said, Okay, Loren Graham can come. So I think what that meant was that I was on the list—the black list of *persona non grata* people—but the charges against me, although there were probably lots of bad things being said about me, there was nothing really, really substantial. No one had proved anything bad about Loren Graham, I don’t think. And so they said, Okay, let him go. And from that point on I was able to go whenever I wanted to. That broke the spell.

Q: They did call you a bourgeois scholar.

Graham: Yes, they did.

Q: We talked a little bit yesterday about how your work was received. Do you think that that’s the general view?

Graham: No. I was called, at moments, a bourgeois scholar, a Sovietologist—and to the Russians that’s a terrible term. So I was called those things, but I was also—in reviews and academic journals—said “remarkably objective.” So I was being complimented and criticized at the same

time. The criticisms came from the very political side of things; the compliments came from the academic side of things. And a number of my books were translated into Russian, even before the end of the Soviet Union.

Q: Right. So, yesterday we talked about how you were possibly more widely read in Russia, the Soviet Union, than you were here. You sold more books—

Graham: In terms of absolute numbers, yes.

Q: In terms of absolute numbers.

Graham: *The Science and Philosophy of the Soviet Union*, which was published in Russian during the Soviet era, was published in fifty thousand copies. I've never published a book in the United States in that number of copies.

Q: So, then who do you think was buying those copies?

Graham: Boy, that is a good question, particularly since that's a rather indigestible book.

[Laughs] I think it was educated people. Academia writ large, not just for specialists but for—Frolov, who was also a very high member—Ivan Timofeevich Frolov—very high member of the Communist Party, a philosopher, professional philosopher, liked me. I met him in the Institute of Philosophy where I was often, and he read that book in English, and recommended it for publication in Russian.

Q: So I'm curious to know whether you think that this fact that you were widely read in the Soviet Union says something about the educational system in Russia, the Soviet Union, versus the U.S., about society potentially being maybe more intellectual, quote, unquote, in Russia.

Graham: That's a difficult question for me. I do know this; that my personal experience—and I was at good universities: Columbia, MIT and Harvard. My personal experience was that I couldn't engage in deep intellectual discussions of the sort that I was interested in as well in the United States as I could in the Soviet Union. I would be hesitant to conclude from that that the Soviet Union was more intellectual in general than the United States. I think maybe I was in a little bit of a special position. I was talking about Soviet intellectual life. The number of people in the United States who are interested in Soviet intellectual life—were at that time—was limited. There was a lot of talk about the Soviet Union; it was almost all political. There was very little discussion of Soviet intellectual life.

In the Soviet Union, they knew I was talking about them, and therefore, they were curious about what an American of no Russian background—I have no family or any other Russia connection. I'm a typical American from their standpoint—what American would say about them, and that this was an American who wasn't writing for political reasons, but he was writing for academic reasons. So I was a curious person to them, and that may account for the fact that I was more read there than here. Here I was read by a sliver of the academic world and the people who promoted me—they were assigned the job. [Laughs] So yes, my experience in the two societies was different, but I would be hesitant to build really large generalizations on that basis. But I do

know that kitchen discussions in Russia, all through my life and up to the present day, have an intense intellectual quality that such discussions here don't.

Q: Why do you think that is?

Graham: Russians have—Russian intellectuals have always been devoted to ideas and not very devoted to practice. They talk very expansively about truth and justice—we're not back to that. But they do know that it might affect their chances for a promotion, and affect their lives in some way, and so they usually bite their tongues.

Q: Okay. So can—let's just take this all back to the Harriman. You left Columbia in 1978, came here, and I'm just wondering whether you had continued contacts with the Harriman Institute after—I mean, obviously you had some personal relationships, but did you participate in any joint Harriman/Davis Center activities, like Arden House?

Graham: Yes. Yes. I went to Arden House several times on that—I'm glad you know about that. I went to Arden House several times for those meetings. I gave several papers or lectures at the Harriman. But know that the contacts have attenuated as the people I know have passed off the scene. There's almost no one there right now—I don't know if you know the name Catharine [Theimer] Nepomnyashchy.

Q: Of course.

Graham: She was an old friend of mine—she's dead, as you know. So long as she was there I had a contact to the Harriman. I'd known her forever. But they're gone. The generation that's there now are not people who automatically say Oh, Loren Graham. He was one of us. Maybe there may be somebody who says that, but you know, time has rolled on.

Q: And what is the—do you know—what the relationship is between the two institutes right now?

Graham: Davis and Harriman?

Q: Yes, if there is.

Graham: I'm not aware of any great fights or tensions.

Q: But there's no direct cooperation or anything that you know of?

Graham: Not at the moment, I don't think so. Maybe something I don't know about, but at the moment I can't think of it. But in—I don't think that's terribly significant, and I could imagine doing it again. I'm long past now making applications for grants. I don't need them. But I could, even now, draw up a plan for a Harriman-Davis Center conference, submit an application to a foundation and maybe get the grant, and do it. There would be no obstacle. So, the potential is still there. I'm not—I don't think there's any bad blood between the two centers. And there have been, even recently, communications, and somebody gives a lecture at the Harriman and we say



well—they're coming from Europe or someplace—let's hitch onto it and have them come up here and give a lecture, too. Things like that happen. But I'm not aware of any ongoing deep cooperation at the moment. Just occasional cooperation.

Q: I see. So I'd like to just end our discussion by talking a little bit about the future of places like the Davis Center or the Harriman Institute, Russian studies. What directions do you think they should be going now?

Graham: Well, I'm not very good at predicting the future. I think the direction they should be going is to make the study of Russia like the study of any other country, and not make us dependent—not make our prosperity dependent on Russia being a bad guy. Unfortunately that is the truth; whenever Russia starts acting up, the money starts flowing back into Russian studies. We've got to have people who know the Russian language, we've got to—it's the old know thy enemy motivation. I'm realistic enough to know that the study of Russia is never going to be quite like the study of France for Americans, but I'd like to push us a little that direction because it is a great culture. I mean, the literature, the science, the music that has come out of Russia. I mean, just think of the literature and music of nineteenth century Russia, and some of the great composers of the twentieth century, [Sergei S.] Prokofiev, [Igor F.] Stravinsky. It's a great culture. And I'd like to see—it's probably a little naive of me to say this—I'd like to see a little bit more emphasis on that, and not emphasis on, how can we rush down to Washington and advise people what to do about Putin. [Laughs] Although that's a legitimate function, I just wish it was not the governing principle.

Q: And what about—a couple of areas that I think the Harriman has moved towards are issues like human rights, nationality studies. Do you think those are directions that—are those directions that Davis is also pursuing?

Graham: Yes. There's a lot of study of nationalities here, and you know, the [Andrei] Sakharov Center for Human Rights was located in the office on the other side of this wall for quite a while. Yes, there's interest in that. But reality tells you that, at a great university like Columbia or Harvard, these functions are useful and they can be taken on, but the driving force are students writing dissertations on very specialized topics, and right across the hallway here is the graduate student lounge. And I see these people go in and out all the time, I say hello them, I think they know who I am. But all of them are writing on their special thing, and that tends to have a silo effect. So that, someone could have—could be over there for three years and I would never have, possibly, a really intimate knowledge of what they're doing. I try to, when I'm at the coffee machine, ask them what they're doing. I try to combat that a little bit, but academia creates specialties, and people don't meet as often as they should. They don't think they have that much to say to each other. I regret that. So, I would like to see more effort to bring us together. I would like to see more functions where I have to listen them and they have to listen to me.

Q: And what about sort of the alumni of places like Davis and Harriman? Do you feel that there's enough communication between the institutes and former students and keeping up with what they're doing?

Graham: No, I don't. Whenever I get a letter from Columbia asking for donations, fund drives, it's always an anonymous letter. It would be a real surprise to get a letter from Columbia—I'm not making a direct criticism of Columbia because I'm sure Harvard is the same way—it would be a real surprise to get a letter from Columbia saying, We have been following what you've been doing, and we wonder if you would come and talk to us about it in some way. What they don't adequately recognize is, if they did that, the chances of my making donations would be much higher.

Q: Well, on that note [laughter], something on the to-do list for the Harriman, I just want to thank you for meeting with me over the last two days. If there's anything else that I haven't—you know, we haven't covered that you'd like to talk about, happy to do that.

Graham: I think we've done a pretty good job of covering it. I'd just like to repeat that, the Columbia experience, both the university itself, the Harriman and the old Russian Institute, and New York City where I lived for twenty years, all connected with Russian studies, had an incredible impact on me, and I am a different person than I would have been if that hadn't happened, and I hope it's for the good. I think it is.

Q: Well, thank you so much again, and it's really been a pleasure.

Graham: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]