

The Second Annual W. Averell Harriman Lecture

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The National Nature of Russian History

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The Public Career of W. Averell Harriman

The W. Averell Harriman Lectures honor a man who served his country with exemplary devotion. As Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1943 to 1946, he represented the United States during the most important phases of the wartime partnership and the initial, fateful postwar deterioration in relations. Before becoming President Roosevelt's envoy to Stalin's Soviet Union, Harriman accepted the President's request, early in 1941, to serve as his personal "expediter" (FDR's description) of American aid to a war-besieged British government.

He returned to London as Ambassador in 1946, when President Truman appealed to him to take the assignment in the midst of the crisis over the Soviet refusal to withdraw troops from northern Iran contrary to arrangements worked out with the United States and Britain. Before the year was up, the President called him home to replace Henry Wallace as Secretary of Commerce, a post he held until 1948.

From 1951 to 1953, he directed the large-scale economic, military, and technical assistance program established by the Mutual Assistance Act of 1951. For three years before, he had helped to coordinate the Marshall Plan recovery effort in Europe. In 1954, he ran for and won the governorship of New York, after which he was generally known as "the Governor." In early 1961, President Kennedy named Harriman Ambassador-at-Large, and then, in October, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, a post he occupied until April 1963, when he was appointed Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Three months later, in Moscow, he successfully completed negotiations on the Limited Test

Ban Treaty. His last formal assignment was in 1968 as the Johnson Administration's representative to the Paris negotiations with the North Vietnamese government.

From his first contacts with the Soviet Union in 1924, when as a young business executive he sought a substantial manganese concession in Soviet Georgia, to his last visit in 1983, to meet with Yuri Andropov, Averell Harriman's name would be most prominently associated with the cause of sound U.S. policy toward that country. For six American presidents, he was a source of reasoned, dispassionate insight into the challenge posed by the Soviet Union.

Averell Harriman died at age 94 on July 26, 1986. At his death, *The New York Times* called him "America's plenipotentiary supreme."

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Introduction by Robert Legvold, Director of the Harriman Institute

Welcome to the second annual W. Averell Harriman lecture. How pleased would be the man in whose honor this lecture is established! Governor Harriman could only dream of an evening like this: people assembled in an American university hall to celebrate the company and the words of one of the Soviet Union's most distinguished minds. That we in this room sit waiting for this lecture without any of the political encumbrances or special prizes that existed only a few years ago is an outcome to which Governor Harriman devoted much of his life.

Dmitrii Sergeyevich is the first Soviet scholar to be invited to give the Harriman lecture. The choice by the selection committee was not only quick and unanimous, it was joyous, I might say, even reverent. No one by accomplishment and character exceeds Academician Likhachev.

For more than half a century, from the appearance of his first essays on the *letopisanie* of Novgorod, he has given depth and grandeur to our understanding of Russian history and literature. His massive corpus of work on the chronicles of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries brought the power of history to the understanding of literature, and the artist's understanding of literature to the elaboration of history. He is the teller of the history of Russian literature, tracing its roots and continuities into a careful weave of seven centuries. From his profound knowledge of medieval Russian literature and culture, he has brought powerful insights into the work of the eighteenth and nineteenth century masters.

His first research, while still a university student, was on the nineteenth century poet, Nekrasov. Much later in the 1970s and '80s, after years of passionate and patient study of Old Russia's epics, his literary theory returned to Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and even Akhmatova and Pasternak.

It has not been a small or an easy life. As a young man graduating from Leningrad State University, when by talent he should have been taking his place in Pushkin-sky Dom, he was instead banished to labor on the Belomorsko-Baltiski Kanal. What a distance, therefore, when last March Dmitrii Sergeyevich made his way down the aisle of the Supreme Soviet, mounted the podium, and spoke on behalf of the new strengthened presidency sought by Mikhail Gorbachev, lending what many at the time saw as decisive support. His role, they said, could have been played by no other, for now he bore Sakharov's mantle as conscience of the nation.

The years between February 1928, when he arrived at the Sovetsky camp, and this March 1990 moment have been enormously rich. Full not simply in the sense of what he has produced: by my count nearly 2000 books, articles, and reviews. But also full from the perspective of the merit others have seen in his work: twenty years an academician, with candidate standing in the Academy for an additional seventeen years; membership in at least fourteen foreign academies of science; honorary degrees from Oxford, Edinburgh, Zurich, Budapest, and Bordeaux; winner of the state prize of the USSR (twice), the Order of the Red Banner of Labor, and Hero of Socialist labor with a Lenin Order. Even more telling, his writing has been the subject of more than 800 Soviet and foreign authors — I said authors, not articles, which are many more.

Decorated for his role in Leningrad's defense during the Second World War, full professor at Leningrad State University, elected to the Leningrad Soviet of People's Deputies first in 1961, again in 1987, Chairman of the Soviet Cultural Fund, member of the Supreme Soviet, scholar exceptional, humanitarian, Dmitrii Sergeyevich, we welcome you to the United States and Columbia, and with eagerness we await your lecture on "The National Nature of Russian History."

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The National Nature of Russian History

D.S. Likhachev

There is hardly another country in the world whose history has been enveloped in so many diverse myths as ours. Nor has any people been so variously viewed as have been the Russians.

There are several reasons for this. One, as Nikolai Berdyaev repeatedly pointed out, is the polarization of the Russian character, that strange combination of diametrically opposed qualities: kindness and cruelty, delicacy and rudeness, free-thinking and despotism, self-abasement and arrogance or chauvinism, and so on.

Another, I believe, are the theories and ideologies by which we have interpreted our present and past. To cite as but one example: the reforms of Peter the Great. In implementing them, a perfectly twisted idea of Russia's past was created. In the process, a closer relationship with Europe gave rise to the myth of Russia's previous isolation. The idea of inert and stagnant Russia was made to serve the goal of a rapid advance. A new culture meant an end to the unification of old. As was often the case with Russia, a crushing blow to the old was regarded as a necessary stimulus for the new. Peter I, in effect, slandered and discarded the whole of the seventeenth-

century period of Russian history, thus creating a myth of Russia as well as of himself. Incidentally, Peter I was a true representative of the Russian seventeenth century, of the Russian baroque, a man who impersonated the pedagogical ideas of Simeon Polotsky, the court poet of his father Alexei Mikhailovich.

The myth of the Russian people and its history created by Peter I lasted unprecedentedly long. Our more recent history has also produced samples of lasting official myths. One such myth, supposedly needed by the socialist state, is the myth of Russia's prerevolutionary cultural backwardness. (Remember the notorious phrase, frequently used in boastful speeches of the late '70s: "Russia has turned from an illiterate into an advanced country." The president of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Alexandrov, often began his annual speeches in Moscow with the phrase.) Meanwhile, academician Sobolevsky's prerevolutionary study of signatures on many official documents reveals a high degree of literacy in the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. This is also confirmed by the great number of birch-bark records, found in Novgorod. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries all old believers were registered as illiterate, only because they refused to read new-printed books. True, in seventeenth century Russia, there were no higher educational establishments, which may be due to the specific type of culture of ancient Rus.

There is also a notion, common both in the West and the East, that Russia has never known parliamentarism. The State Duma of the twentieth century was, indeed, an unprecedented — and short-lived — experience of this kind. However, the tradition of pre-Petrine deliberative assemblies had deep roots. I am not referring here to popular assemblies ("*veche*"). In pre-Mongol-Tatar Rus, a prince began his day by conferring

with his boyars and personal bodyguards. Regular conferences with townspeople, abbots, and the clergy laid the foundation for a regularly convened, representative "*zemsky sobor*," in essence a parliament. This kept written accounts and passed decrees. Even Ivan the Terrible, despite the cruelty with which he dealt with the people, did not dare to abolish officially the old custom of conferring "with the whole land," and maintained a pretense of ruling the country in the traditional way. It was only with Peter the First and his reforms that representative old Russian conferences and popular assemblies came to an end. Social and political activities were not resumed in Russia until the late nineteenth century. But, strangely enough, parliamentary traditions did revive; they had not been forgotten in all the time since Peter the Great.

It is surprising that, because of western influence, popular opinion and popular agreement in Rus disappeared — and nobody noticed.

There is no need to mention other prejudices existing in Russia or about her. I have intentionally dwelt on some notions that put Russian history in an unfortunate light.

While compiling a history of any national art or literature, even a museum catalogue, we tend to emphasize the best, not the worst, focusing our attention on men of genius and their masterpieces. This is a very important and indisputable principle. In dealing with Russian literature, we cannot do without Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and Tolstoy, while we can safely do without Markevich, Leikin, Artibashev, Potapenko and the like.

Therefore, don't take it as braggadocio or nationalism, if I speak about the best in Russian culture, leaving out phenomena of negative or no value. Indeed, any culture ranks high among others only for its loftiness.

Thus, we judge Italy according to its achievements in the realm of painting, sculpture, architecture, spiritual life; not by less elevated matters. I would like to call your attention to the fact that *evil* is always and everywhere the same, while *good* is various, individual. Therefore, to understand something of a foreign culture, one must focus one's attention on the greatness of that culture, its accomplishments, rather than on its departures from these heights.

Contained within the numerous myths and legends concerning Russian history is an ever-fascinating question, Does Russia belong to the East, or to the West?

Currently, the accepted view in the West is that Russia is an eastern country. But we must then ask: what is "the East"? What is "the West"? We can speak with some degree of certainty of "the West" and its culture. But as to the East and the eastern type of culture, their essence seems obscure.

Are there any borders on the map between the East and the West?

Is there any difference between the Russians of Petersburg and those of Vladivostok? (The latter's very name contains an allusion to the East in the word *vostok*, "East"; *vlad* means "ruler." Vladivostok, therefore, is "ruler of the East.")

It is equally unclear whether Armenia's and Georgia's cultures are eastern or western; my own feeling is that they are western.

I don't think it will be necessary to answer these questions if we attend to a particularly important fact about Russia, that it occupies vast expanses and is inhabited by numerous peoples of both the western and eastern types. From time immemorial, the question of neighbors has played a great role in the history of three related peo-

