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Series Editor: Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

ESSAY BY DAVID C. ENGERMAN, YALE UNIVERSITY

My becoming an international historian was, as Marxists would say, overdetermined—but nevertheless I took a long time to determine it. I did not so much decide to study international history as make a series of incremental decisions, usually driven by advice or inspiration from an intellectual mentor, that led me along that path. So even if not by design, it was no accident that I came to study international history.

The eldest son in an academic household, becoming a professor seemed a natural if not necessarily an easy path; I felt no pressure from my parents, but some invisible momentum seemed to be at work. Thanks to my parents, I certainly knew first-hand the benefits of university life, both the flexibility they enjoyed and their dense web of professional/personal friendships, with no major distinction between the roles of teacher and student. My upbringing in university life made even its more arcane aspects familiar by osmosis, though I probably learned some economic history and public health from my parents as well. As for what to study, by the time I got to high school, I devoured international news... though of course there was much less readily accessible news to devour in those pre-internet days of the early 1980s. With my high school and college years coinciding with President Reagan's 'Second Cold War,' an interest in international events came easily—primarily in vehement if only rhetorical opposition to U.S. policies.

A handful of teachers and fellow students deepened my interest in world affairs. Amid a high school climate of general apathy, even at our suburban 'good school' in western New York, the legendary Mr. Szabo stood out. The myths swirling around him come back easily to me—but a little online searching surprises me by confirming that many of them may actually be true. He came of age in Nazi-occupied Hungary, was imprisoned by the Communist regime there after World War II; while he was escaping from Hungary during the uprising of 1956, legend has it, he traveled with Ernő Rubik of cube fame. Though Mr. Szabo had earned a university degree in Hungary, his first job in the United States was as an overnight janitor on the factory floor at Eastman Kodak. As you can imagine from his life history, he offered a perspective on 10th-grade European history that was not available elsewhere in our typically provincial high school curriculum. Mr. Szabo's lasting lesson was just how much history *mattered*; he took personal offense when students weren't serious about his class. We always thought that such insistence betrayed his lack of understanding about American institutions ... though the fact that he occasionally wielded an oh-so-American baseball bat while teaching us might suggest otherwise.

My next history mentor came in my first year at Swarthmore College, where Marjorie Murphy taught what was then called a Freshman Seminar on the Cold War. Murphy, a social historian, came to this topic mostly out of enthusiasm for the radical critique of U.S. foreign relations, and introduced me to the ideas of the Wisconsin School. My college course work went heavy on U.S. foreign relations from a deeply critical perspective. Political science seminars only reinforced this criticism; the instructor, James Kurth, traversed Marxism en route to Evangelical Christianity but somehow turned cynicism into an analytical and pedagogical strategy. He exuded an intellectual charisma that won him a dedicated core of student followers—predominantly white men—who adopted, in varying degrees, his viewpoint and even his cadences. Kurth and Murphy, from their different angles, emphasized the structures that shaped (in their views, mishaped) American foreign

relations. So even if I was raised in a solidly centrist (if somewhat skeptical) household, my early mentors held strong political views arrayed along what we might now dismiss as ‘Cold War lines.’ At that moment, though, they seemed to address the pressing questions of our time.

Other courses at Swarthmore exposed me more to things Russian, including an intensive history seminar and language classes. Unlike most of my classmates in elementary Russian language classes, I read Pushkin because I was interested in the Politburo and not the other way around. My Russian instructor bore more than a passing resemblance to Lenin and had political views to match. He got the last laugh; decades after his course, I can still recite from memory a few lines from a Pushkin poem—but not a single Politburo report.

It says a good deal about my Swarthmore experience that I found graduate coursework something of a letdown. The issue was not so much the seminars themselves, which were interesting and well-organized, and taught by incisive and for the most part dedicated professors. But students’ attitudes were very different between college and graduate school; the seminars that defined my last two years at Swarthmore had a playfulness that was crowded out by the professionalism of graduate seminars, first at Rutgers and then, so I could expand my study of Russian history, at University of California-Berkeley. Once again, I found mentors—or, more precisely, lucked into meeting mentors—who expanded my perspectives in different ways. The first was in Madison, fittingly enough for someone already compelled by the Wisconsin School, as I took a few graduate courses while working nearby. Even more fittingly, I got a chance to study with Tom McCormick, one of the pioneering generation of the Wisconsin School. He helped me apply to Rutgers, where I got a chance to work with his friend and classmate Lloyd Gardner, and got deeper into American policies toward Russia with David Foglesong, with his newly minted Berkeley Ph.D. From Rutgers, I went to Berkeley to work with Diane Shaver Clemens—not from Wisconsin, but inclined to its politics and historical vision in any case. By the time I earned my doctorate from Berkeley in 1998, I was a ‘grandstudent’ of William Appleman Williams twice over, with many other supporting influences along the way.

My commitment to William Appleman Williams’s view of the mainspring of American foreign policy was expanded by other courses and other mentors. I gained, for one thing, a deeper appreciation of the relationship between ideas and interests in American cultural history with Jackson Lears at Rutgers, in American intellectual history with David Hollinger at Berkeley, and working at the compelling if idiosyncratic intersection of political economy and cultural history with Jim Livingston at Rutgers. This scholarly work, as I understood it at the time, was consistent with the thought of William Appleman Williams; his notion of *Weltanschauungen* (world views) derived from mid-century European sociology called for understanding the intellectual structures through which people, past and present, understood the world around them.

My first effort to bring together cultural/intellectual and diplomatic history came in my MA thesis, on American relief for the Soviet famine of the early 1920s—what George Frost Kennan termed “a forgotten chapter” in American-Soviet relations.¹ Riffing off of the title of my thesis advisor Lloyd Gardner’s first book, my MA thesis was called “Economic and Cultural Aspects of Early American-Soviet Relations.”² I started by examining the mechanics of the relief effort led by Herbert Hoover, then the head of the American Relief Administration, in Soviet Russia between 1921 and 1923. But the influence of cultural and intellectual history soon kicked in, and I grew more and more interested in how American relief workers and policy makers understood Russian ‘national character’ and credited or (more often) blamed Russianness for the famine’s origins and impact.

My perspective expanded further as I sought to learn more about Soviet views of American aid. I made my first trip to Russia—a summer-long language/research program in St. Petersburg—in 1992, and grew more and more determined to use Russian sources in my work, aided by independent study with Ziva Galili. These interests ultimately led me to transfer to

¹ George F. Kennan, “Our Aid to Russia: A Forgotten Chapter,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 July 1959.

² Gardner’s first book was Lloyd C. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

Berkeley, with its renowned Russian history faculty and not one but two area studies centers focused on that part of the world. (Berkeley, by virtue of its longstanding internationalism as well as its size, seemingly covered the globe with such centers; I recall getting lost in one building and finding myself in the offices of the Finnish Studies Program. Not wanting to be too closely associated with Russia in those quarters, I just asked how to exit the building). Learning Russian history from the mensch of all mentors Reggie Zelnik, as well as from Nicholas Riasanovsky and Yuri Slezkine, I had the chance to make Russia a serious part of my dissertation work—and completed dual ‘major’ fields in U.S. and Russian history (actually, ‘Late Modern Europe,’ a category that seemed to exist only at Berkeley, but for all intents and purposes Russian history). With David Hollinger providing much professional and intellectual guidance, and Diane Shaver Clemens offering staunch support for all of her students, I had something of a ‘dream team’ of advisors at Berkeley. Between the professors, the library, and of course the profusion of outdoor cafes and cheap taquerias, Berkeley was the ideal place to write a dissertation.

My Berkeley research project grew from the seed of my Rutgers MA thesis on the famine of the 1920s. My doctoral dissertation explored American attitudes and policies toward Russia during its period of most intensive industrialization, from the elder George Kennan to the younger. (The younger being the diplomat, then a nonagenarian, whose namesake cousin was a journalist and speaker on Russian affairs). While I might have begun the project imagining it as inspired by William Appleman Williams’s dissertation/first book, it certainly evolved. I grew especially interested in American ideas about Russia, whether published or in diplomatic correspondence, and how these changed along with Russia itself. Along the way, I found my way, as so many diplomatic historians have, to George F. Kennan. I was in no sense a convert to his way of thinking, but was attracted by his writing and compelled to understand his peculiar relationship to the two countries he knew best, America and Russia. I still have a shelf of books split between Williams and Kennan, representing two approaches to the Cold War, to historical study, and to the world.

Somewhere in the process of researching and writing the dissertation, which became *Modernization from the Other Shore* (2003), my Williams-school arguments took new forms.³ Rather than focusing on economic interests, I grew more and more interested in conceptions of economics and economic actors. What I had found in my MA thesis—that American experts and officials understood Russian events through “Russian character”—seemed to apply to other settings as well. American intervention in the Russian Civil War, a topic of interest to both Williams and Kennan, seemed to me closely tied to ideas that Russians were unable to rule themselves; they were “sheep without a shepherd,” so the United States was supporting “shepherds” among the White Russian generals. By the same token, many prominent American reporters soft-pedalled the devastating famine of the early 1930s with reference to Russians’ innate laziness; “without the immediate stimulus of hunger,” the argument went, “they would not work.”⁴ Other chapters of the book read dispatches from Kennan and his fellow diplomats, as well as decades of reporting from Russia, in terms of Russian national character.

My second book, begun after I started teaching at Brandeis University in 1999, was in many ways a continuation of my first; if my dissertation looked at American ideas of Russia before WWII, my second, which became *Know Your Enemy* (2009), picked up the story where the first left off—with George Kennan still visible (if now on the sidelines).⁵ I will confess now to twinges of topic envy; I watched my cohort of friends, colleagues, and conference pals embark on exciting and very different projects while I was writing “volume 2” of a history of America’s Russia expertise. Those feelings aside, “volume 2” differed substantially from “volume 1,” *Modernization from the Other Shore*. My dissertation had examined a motley crew of individual “freaks and nuts” (as the University of Chicago’s pre-WWII Russia expert termed himself and his colleagues). But in the 1940s, Russian Studies became an organizational juggernaut, a leading edge in the emerging area studies complex that reshaped American humanities and social sciences for decades. So I got a chance to learn from intellectual historians

³ David C. Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴ Engerman, *Modernization*, 95, 171.

⁵ David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

and historians of science. While I made the rounds of the usual diplomatic archives—the presidential libraries and the NARA mother ship at College Park—*Know Your Enemy* was more squarely in intellectual history than my first book had been. Diplomats and policy-makers appeared less often, and typically for their encounters with academic life.

One particularly interesting part of the research was the chance to speak with many of the participants, some of whom were students in the first years of organized Russian Studies in the 1950s. This was a time-consuming and exciting process, though ultimately not the most productive; as much as I enjoyed the opportunity to speak with the subjects of my historical work, their recollections worked best in conjunction with other forms of documentation. I recall walking into the lobby of the Slavic Studies (then AAASS, now ASEES) meeting in about 2005, looking around and seeing hundreds of primary sources. I reached two conclusions from the research process, aside from any findings about the topic itself. First of all, I learned, belatedly, the importance of being answerable to one's primary sources. I don't mean this in the sense of agreeing with them, or of taking their recollections as fact. But I needed to understand their own views even—especially—if I saw things differently. I learned this lesson too late to save me from a critical review of my first book based in part on a snarky comment I made in print; my comment prevented us from laying out our meaningful points of disagreement. Second, I came to realize that few people like to be 'historicized,' to see their own experiences as the result of broader trends and forces rather than individual decisions. In my experience, historians (ironically) dislike being historicized even more than others. Nevertheless, the research gave me the chance to meet a number of legendary scholars, and to interview the likes of Madeleine Albright (Columbia Ph.D. in Political Science), whom I bumped into while waiting for a flight; she recounted her experiences over a serving of 'airport chili,' replete with bread bowl and plastic spoon.

I pursued a few side projects as I worked on both my first and second books on Russia expertise, most likely due to a combination of restlessness and topic envy. For purely selfish reasons (so I could assign the book in class), I helped get the Cold War classic *The God That Failed* (1949 / 2001) back into print; it compiled the personal accounts of six radicals who had been close to Communism before or during World War II but had abandoned the cause.⁶ While the post-Cold War world was already a decade old by the time that book appeared, questions of Communist Party membership still seemed relevant, at least to those of us who came of intellectual age in the Cold War. Looking back with 2020 vision, the issues seem quite remote, and remind me how much my teaching has changed as well. My sophomore tutorial on Marxist thought now seems all but irrelevant to present-day politics or scholarship. And my lecture course on Socialism and Communism in America seems similarly outdated. What I recall most about that class today didn't happen in the classroom: on my usual Tuesday/Friday early-morning schedule, I was teaching about utopian socialism when the September 11th attacks took place.

A second side gig on histories of development lasted longer. Together with a few colleagues, I helped coedit a book, *Staging Growth* (2003), that highlighted a variety of different historical approaches to the topic.⁷ The topic had, with only Nick Cullather and Dennis Merrill as exceptions, been the near-exclusive domain of social scientists.⁸ My contribution to that volume looked at Harvard and MIT scholars' engagement with India, especially during the Kennedy administration. Conveniently, the archives for that project were all arrayed along the Red Line of the Boston 'T' (subway).

⁶ Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*, with a new Foreword by David C. Engerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁷ David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark Haefele, and Michael Latham, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

⁸ Nick Cullather, "Fuel for the Good Dragon: The United States and Industrial Policy in Taiwan, 1950-1965," *Diplomatic History* 20:1 (January 1996), 1-26. Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

With the completion of *Know Your Enemy*, I finally moved the sideshow to center stage. I began working on what became *The Price of Aid* (2018), an account of American and Soviet economic and military aid to India during the Cold War.⁹ Considering that I started work on this project when my wife and I had two young children (newborn and age 4), the decision to take on such a travel-intensive project was ill-advised; the Red Line of the “T” was replaced by trips to Moscow, New Delhi, and of course Abilene, Kansas. A few longish research trips were trying for all concerned. Within three years, though, the calculations shifted; we turned summer trips to research sites—Washington, London, Berlin, Geneva—into part of the fabric of family life. A particular highlight was the chance to take my children (by then ages 9 and 13) to New Delhi where I gave some book talks. I don’t credit these trips for instilling in my daughter a love of travel, but they did at the very least nurture it. She’s still not interested in joining me in Abilene, though.

While I started out thinking of this project as watching India navigate between Cold War superpowers, my research in India quickly led me to invert the story. Geopolitical competition did not bring ideological differences to India; instead, domestic differences within India brought the Cold War powers into India. As Bruce Schulman put it in our late lamented local reading group on 20th-century history, Americans and Soviets saw development as a Cold War tool—but in India the Cold War was a tool for development. Coming to this conclusion was a bit of a surprise for me; after all, I came to the topic trained in U.S. and Soviet history, with little experience regarding India other than one leg of a backpacking trip before starting graduate school. I was also keenly aware that some scholars of South Asia look with particular wariness on interlopers who tell the history of that region only with foreign sources. Fortunately, I once again came across mentors and friends (old and new) who helped orient me to South Asian scholarship, scholars, resources—and to the topographies of dispute in this fiercely contested field.

The topic of development has its William Appleman Williams-ian qualities: the use of development aid to expand, promote, and/or impose a global economic system that benefited the United States, the celebration of an American ideology of global markets and flows of goods, capital, and (in some moments) people. And yet I would be hard-pressed to identify Williams as an inspiration for any element of *The Price of Aid*. My interest in the United States, however strong, was nevertheless diluted by so much attention to other countries. And the sorts of granular work in diplomatic archives was a far cry from Williams’s impressively broad and sweeping generalizations about ideologies at work. And yet Williams’s notion of *Weltanschauungen* remains a core part of *The Price of Aid*, and of my interest in development assistance more generally. I am trying to see multiple worldviews at play: not just unitary American, Soviet, and Indian (I’ll avoid scare-quotes here) ones, but also divisions within each country and alliances and resonances across national borders.

My current research moves further still from American history even if it remains focused on economic ideas. At first I was looking for an avenue to narrate the history of development ideas and practices over the latter half of the twentieth century, and had settled on a handful of economist/practitioners who mapped out the contours of development thought. But as I complained about having to go through a bumbling and unconvincing explanation for why I chose those particular economists, a brilliant junior colleague helped me rethink my choices. So I’m now looking at a slightly larger group of South Asian economists who all studied together in the 1950s and went on to play leading roles in Western intellectual life, international organizations, and first and foremost in their own countries.

I have to admit, somewhat apologetically, that this current project makes little direct use of my training in American and Russian history. This new project suggests just how much my own thoughts about the place of the Cold War in twentieth-century history have changed. For each of my first three books, the Cold War stood at the center of my analysis. But here, in spite of my graduate training, the United States and the Soviet Union recede. Of course, the end of the Cold War shouldn’t mean the end of Cold War history—much to the relief of historians of Renaissance and Reformation, I’m sure. But the ideological divisions at global and national levels that animated my first books seem quite removed from current concerns.

⁹ David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

That said, I do have a ‘Cold War’ project in mind, one that looks at global movements to eradicate economic inequality, such as the New International Economic Order, from a global Cold War perspective. I still look forward to returning to Moscow (right now, in summer 2020, I’d look forward to seeing any place beyond my own neighborhood, much as I love it), but have been on a long trajectory away from Cold War history.

As with my move into international history, my move into new projects was not the result of any one conscious decision, but of many smaller decisions—to write this article, to attend that workshop, to follow this research lead, etc. Many of those decisions, in turn, came in response to advice from mentors and sponsors who steered me in fruitful directions I was unable to see for myself. Even though the etymology of ‘mentor’ is about elders advising the young, I am nevertheless glad to learn from others, older and (increasingly) younger. It is perhaps this lesson that is the most important one I learned from my familial exposure to academic life; we may call ourselves ‘teachers’ but are really still learners.

David C. Engerman is Leitner International Interdisciplinary Professor in the History Department and the Jackson Institute at Yale University. He taught at Brandeis University from 1999 until 2018, and served as president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in 2016.