Some refer to the current tensions between Russia and the United States as a “new Cold War.” Regardless of how you frame it, an examination of our history is always enlightening. In this issue of Harriman Magazine, one of our postdoctoral research scholars, historian Markian Dobczansky, takes us back to the 1960s, a pre-internet era when Russian and U.S. influence campaigns used newspaper articles and symbols to get their messages across. Dobczansky tells the story of a transnational controversy over the legacy of 19th-century Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, an episode that, Dobczansky argues, illuminates the broader fate of Ukrainian culture in the Soviet Union.

Reflecting on the Cold War reminds us of the challenges academics face when studying and teaching about a perceived adversary. In her essay about teaching Russian literature in the current political climate, Columbia alumna and former Harriman junior fellow Ani Kokobobo discusses the contemporary manifestations of this particular challenge and strategies for overcoming it. Kokobobo uses literary texts to show her students the nuances and richness of Russian culture and to expand their perceptions beyond what they see in the media.

There is much more to the issue: the story of Russian Futurist poet, playwright, and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky’s 1925 visit to New York, featuring photos from our fall exhibition “Through the Brooklyn Bridge”; an interview with the architectural historian who curated MoMA’s recent exhibit on Yugoslav modernist architecture; a profile of alumna Heather Roberson Gaston and her quest to understand the Republic of North Macedonia; and an excerpt from writer and Harriman faculty member Keith Gessen’s novel A Terrible Country.

As always, we’d love to hear your feedback and ideas for the future.

Alexander Cooley
Director, Harriman Institute