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The Adam Mickiewicz controversy, 1948: Eisenhower and Columbia

Abstract: Columbia University announced the Adam Mickiewicz Chair in Philology, Language and Literature in May, 1948, during the Cold War. The Chair's incumbent would be Manfred Kridl, an émigré who had left Poland 1940, and the communist Warsaw government would contribute \$10,000 annually. Polish Ambassador Josep Winiewicz, with the assistance of Czeslaw Milosz, had suggested Kridl. Arthur Coleman, an Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages, and the Polish-American Congress loudly protested the appointment, "This infiltration of the Communist voice." The Polish-American press agreed. The controversy received nationwide attention when Coleman resigned and asserted that Poland, controlled by Moscow and the Comintern, would wage a campaign of "academic infiltration" with the Mickiewicz Chair. Sigmund Sluska, a former Coleman student, called Kridl "a noted Marxist." "The New York Times" gave the resignation front-page coverage, and the media emphasized that Columbia was "a Hot-Bed of Communism." The fact that World War II hero, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had just become the university's president increased public interest in the controversy, even though the decision on the Chair had been made before his arrival. Columbia's Provost launched an extensive investigation into the accusations against Kridl and two professors, and Eisenhower presented the confidential report to the University's Trustees. Columbia stood by her support of the Chair and Kridl.

The protest lasted throughout the summer, and several university officials had questioned accepting the funding from Warsaw. While the controversy had undermined the Polish Studies program for the Polish-American and émigré communities, the Provost believed that the Adam Mickiewicz Chair and Professor Kridl contributed to the furthering of Polish-American Studies in America.

Keywords: Thomas Anessi, Stanislaus Blejwas, Arthur Coleman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Frank Fackenthal, Robert C. Harron, Albert C. Jacobs, Roman Jakobson, Manfred Kridl, Adam Mickiewicz Chair, Czeslaw Milosz, Polish-American Congress, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Ernest Simmons, Sigmund Sluska, R. Gordon Wasson, Josep Winiewicz

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Streszczenie: Uniwersytet Columbia ogłosił powstanie katedry literatury polskiej im. Adama Mickiewicza w maju 1948 roku, w czasie zimnej wojny. Katedrę objął Manfred Kridl, który wyemigrował z Polski w 1940 roku, natomiast komunistyczny rząd polski miał przekazywać katedrze 10 000 dolarów rocznie. Osobę Kridla zaproponowali ambasador Polski Józef Winiewicz oraz Czesław Miłosz. Arthur Coleman, profesor slawistyki, oraz Kongres Polonii Amerykańskiej stanowczo zaprotestowali przeciwko tej nominacji, „infiltracji komunistycznego głosu”. Protest poparła prasa Polonii amerykańskiej. Kontrowersja zwróciła uwagę świata, kiedy Coleman zrezygnował ze stanowiska, oświadczając, że poprzez katedrę im. Adama Mickiewicza Polska, kontrolowana przez Moskwę i Komintern, będzie prowadzić kampanię „infiltracji akademickiej”. Sigmund Sluska, były student Colemana, nazwał Kridla „znanym marksistą”. Dziennik „The New York Times” zamieścił relację o rezygnacji na pierwszej stronie, a media stwierdziły, że Uniwersytet Columbia jest „wylęgarnią komunizmu”. Zainteresowanie kontrowersją zwiększył fakt, że bohater drugiej wojny światowej, Dwight D. Eisenhower, właśnie został rektorem uniwersytetu, mimo iż decyzja o utworzeniu katedry zapadła jeszcze przed nadejściem jego kadencji. Administrator Uniwersytetu Columbia zarządził szczegółowe dochodzenie w sprawie oskarżeń przeciwko Kridlowi i dwóm profesorom, a Eisenhower przedstawił tajny raport zarządowi uczelni. Uniwersytet nie wycofał swego poparcia dla katedry i Kridla.

Protest trwał przez całe lato i część władz uniwersyteckich zakwestionowała finansowanie katedry przez Warszawę. Mimo iż kontrowersja sprawiła, że środowiska Polonii amerykańskiej i emigrantów zaczęły negatywnie patrzeć na studia polonistyczne na Uniwersytecie Columbia, administrator uczelni uważał, że katedra literatury polskiej im. Adama Mickiewicza i profesor Kridl przyczynili się do rozwoju studiów polonistycznych w Ameryce.

Słowa kluczowe: Thomas Anessi, Stanislaus Blejwas, Arthur Coleman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Frank Fackenthal, Robert C. Harron, Albert C. Jacobs, Roman Jakobson, Manfred Kridl, katedra im. Adama Mickiewicza, Czesław Miłosz, Kongres Polonii Amerykańskiej, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, Ernest Simmons, Sigmund Sluska, R. Gordon Wasson, Józef Winiewicz

In November, 1946, a year and a half after the end of WW II in Europe and a year and a half before the Adam Mickiewicz Chair controversy, Columbia's Acting President Frank Fackenthal announced the Thomas G. Masaryk Chair of Czechoslovak Studies at an elaborate dinner in honor of Masaryk's son, Jan. "We have a special obligation," Fackenthal declared, to promote "an understanding of nations and peoples (...). By such mutual understanding can we best serve the cause of both learning and peace among the peoples of the world." Jan Masaryk, Prague's Minister of Foreign Affairs, noted "Hitler came within an ace of winning (...). The result of all this is a changed Europe, a sick Europe." The Czechoslovak people must "accommodate ourselves to the situation (...). We need understanding and help and we count on it from the founts of learning in the United States, such as Columbia University." The Czech Under-Secretary of State, a prominent member of the Czech Communist Party also spoke; he would succeed Masaryk after the February, 1948 coup d'état and Masaryk's "defenestration."

Professor Ernest Simmons, the executive officer of East European Languages, had played a major role in establishing the Chair, and he emphasized "the growing importance of advanced study of the whole complex of Slavic

nations.” He hoped other Slavic governments – the Czech, Polish, and Yugoslav Ambassadors attended the dinner, as did the Consul-General of the U.S.S.R. – would also “facilitate full cultural exchanges.” The Masaryk Chair, he added, “will help make Columbia a center of Czechoslovak studies. It had been discussed with the State Department, and the Prague Government already had given \$7,500. Professor Roman Jakobson, a Slavic philologist and on the Columbia faculty since 1943, would hold the Chair. Born in Russia, he had left for Czechoslovakia in 1920 and escaped from Prague in 1939, arriving in New York in 1941.²

Following the successful establishment of the Masaryk Chair, the University had little reason to anticipate controversy when the Polish Ambassador, Josep Winiewicz, proposed in 1948 a chair by his communist government. Simmons, who had been negotiating with the Ambassador for nearly two years, used the Masaryk Chair for a model.

For an outside observer in 1948, the announcement in 1947 of General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s appointment as Columbia’s president had generated worldwide publicity for the university. Columbia had held a highly successful Special Convocation for America’s WWII leaders, and G.I.’s, with some 14,000 registering in the fall of 1946, were flocking to the campus.³ The country was recovering from the postwar recession.

Why, then, did a prominent Trustee call these years the “dark days” for Columbia?⁴ Why did a reference to a “New York Times” review last year of former president Michael Sovern’s *Sixty Years at Columbia*, assert “Columbia University began the second half of the 20th Century in decline, bottoming out with the student riots of the 1960’s.”⁵ What was the situation on Morningside Heights at the time of the Mickiewicz Chair controversy?

As WWII ended, critical issues demanded the Administration’s attention, particularly a rapidly mounting budget deficit and the lack of presidential leadership. President Nicholas Murray Butler’s fund-raising literally had stopped in the early 1930’s. Groundbreaking for the last new structure, South Library, now Butler Library, had occurred in 1932; maintenance on aging-buildings had been deferred for years. Butler, with his eye-sight badly failing, was nearly deaf; he had ignored an opportunity to retire in 1932, on his 70th birthday, his 50th Reunion at Columbia, and his 30th year as President. During the World War II Columbia lost prominent faculty, including Nobel Prize winners Harold Urey and Enrico Fermi. Butler had appointed every Trustee; finally, two Trustees

² Columbia Press Release for November 21, 1948 newspapers, A.C. Jacobs MSS., Michigan Historical Collections (MHC), Bentley Historical Library, Univ. of Michigan.

³ R.A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 350.

⁴ L.D. Egbert to A.C. Jacobs, January 30, 1950, MHC.

⁵ M. Sovern, *An Improbable Life: My Sixty Years at Columbia and Other Adventures*, Columbia University Press, 2014.

asked him to retire in 1945. For decades he had been the prevailing voice in the country's academic leadership; in post-war America, Columbia's voice was missing. As Barnard's Robert McCaughey asked in *Stand, Columbia*, "Would post-war Columbia be able to attract – and retain – world-class faculty?"⁶

Nowhere was that problem more evident than in the long, drawn out search for Butler's successor. Stories circulated with names of prominent leaders who expressed no interest and, then, the "New York Times" published an embarrassing article about another search failure. As pressures mounted after two years and, amid considerable confusion, IBM's Tom Watson, a Trustee not on the search committee, arranged to meet General Eisenhower. Sufficiently encouraged, he made sweeping promises. Bluntly, Eisenhower "wouldn't have anything to do with curriculum, or faculty, or any of that sort of thing," including fund-raising! Incredible, yes! Even more incredible, this commitment was not conveyed to the Board of Trustees before it selected him! This mistake led to many misunderstandings on Morningside Heights; and, unfortunately, he would not arrive for one year. The Trustees appointed Professor of Law Albert C. Jacobs the Provost. He had served for a year as Assistant to the President under Fackenthal; they told him he would "be in complete charge of the whole academic program at Columbia."

Eisenhower arrived on Morningside Heights on May 3, 1948 – two days before Columbia accepted the Adam Mickiewicz Chair proposal – and he did not become president until June 7, after Commencement. He brought with him several military assistants, and his office took on a Pentagon chief-of-staff organization. In addition, he asked the Trustees to give him a special assistant, Kevin McCann, who was working with the General on his wartime memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*. At Columbia he would handle Eisenhower's correspondence and write speeches. Quickly, he assumed authority over the office. According to a Trustee who knew the aides, they "didn't know anything about the University," and they made the President inaccessible for the faculty. They were "still protecting a world figure," Fackenthal recalled, "instead of putting him into a new community."

Eisenhower must have realized, nonetheless, that the year Columbia waited for him had been difficult for the large University. Because of the continuing large budget deficit and no fund-raising program, the Provost saw no alternative to a tuition increase that angered students. The "Columbia Spectator" and veterans, especially, launched a protest that lasted throughout the 1948 spring semester, and prompted the Dean of the College to say "We have stubbed our toe."

In addition, Eisenhower inadvertently became associated with a freedom of speech controversy and the issue of communism on campus. Harsh press

⁶ T.B. Jacobs, *Eisenhower at Columbia*, Transactions Publishers, 2001, Ch. 1; R.A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, op. cit., pp. 330–331.

and radio criticism had occurred when Provost Jacobs in December denied permission for the communist Howard Fast to speak to students, declaring “no convicted person” should have “the privilege of the University forum to argue his case.” Fast, the author of *Freedom Road* and *Citizen Thomas Paine*, was appealing his conviction on a contempt citation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Students and liberals supported the “Spectator’s” headline: “Columbia Provost *Denies Freedom of Speech*,” and critics argued that “the University’s action was prompted by the threat” of the Committee turning its “attention to the Columbia campus.” Jacobs had added that Columbia would honor the student request when Fast “is cleared under the law” – which it did four months later. The city universities followed Columbia’s ban.⁷

Meanwhile, Columbia had allowed the legislative director of the Communist Party to speak in Pupin Hall on campus. This prompted the benefactor’s daughter to request the removal her father’s name from the building. She was not mollified by the Provost’s reply; consequently, her husband asked Eisenhower, who had just arrived on campus, “Will Columbia agree to keep traitors out of Pupin Hall?” Columbia had been sensitive to the issue of communist influence on campus since the 1930’s and saw a chance to address the recent publicity with a reply from Eisenhower. On May 25 Eisenhower, after writing he had been at the University only for three weeks and did not know the specifics, declared he had “a passionate belief in the American political plan (...). The values of our system will never be fully appreciated by us and our children unless we also understand the essentials of opposing ideologies.” Columbia sent this letter to alumni.⁸

This occurred on the eve of the country’s Democratic and Republican presidential nominating conventions and, with an Eisenhower “boom” gaining momentum, he probably could have had either party’s nomination for president.

During the conventions, Jacobs recalled, “He had his office blinds pulled” because of reporters and curiosity seekers outside. The national political speculation disrupted the University and preoccupied Eisenhower into mid-July, when he went to Vermont for a week. In late July he left for Colorado until after Labor Day. He “should have been around” that summer, the Provost recalled, “and he wasn’t.”⁹

These dates – Eisenhower’s arrival in early May and not becoming president until June 7th – refute an assertion by Thomas Anessi. When discussing the Adam Mickiewicz Chair in a recent article, he wrote “All of these in-

⁷ For the previous paragraphs, see: T.B. Jacobs, *Eisenhower at Columbia*, op. cit., Ch. 1–3.

⁸ D.D. Eisenhower to L.G. Smith, May 25, 1948, CACU; *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: Columbia University*, ed. L. Galambos, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, X, 84–87 (PDDE).

⁹ For the previous paragraphs, see T.B. Jacobs, *Eisenhower at Columbia*, op. cit.

stitutions,” referring also to the Russian Institute and the reorganization of the Slavic Languages programs, “reflected the political priorities of the university’s first cold-war president, former general and future U.S. President, Dwight Eisenhower.”¹⁰ Impossible. He was not at Columbia then. But, like the communism controversy on his arrival, he would become associated with the Adam Mickiewicz protest. The Polish-American and émigré communities blamed Eisenhower for the Polish Chair decision, and Eisenhower’s conservative critics saw the opportunity to attack him.

In April, 1948, Polish Ambassador Josep Winiewicz, after long negotiations with Professor Simmons and the Professor’s encouraging discussions with the State Department, proposed a chair for Polish Studies in honor that country’s famous poet, Adam Mickiewicz.¹¹ On May 5th Acting President Fackenthal in a letter to Winiewicz accepted the proposal for the Adam Mickiewicz Chair in Philology, Language and Literature for a three-year trial period. Warsaw would contribute \$10,000 annually. Fackenthal stated that Columbia had the privilege of making the appointment and the incumbent “of so distinguished a chair” would be Manfred Kridl, a professor of Polish literature. Kridl, an émigré, had left Poland in 1940 and taught at Smith College since 1941. Columbia envisioned this first Polish Chair in America as leading to “a national center (...) in building closer educational and cultural ties between our two nations.” The Ambassador handed Fackenthal a \$5000 check on May 20.

Columbia had control over the appointment but, while Fackenthal and the Provost would insist throughout that the incumbent was named “without any suggestion or advice from outside sources.” The suggestion, however, had come from Winiewicz with approval by the Polish Government and the University. In the negotiations with Simmons, Winiewicz had assistance from Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish Cultural Attaché and poet, who had been a student of Kridl’s in Poland. He had visited him in Northampton and advocated him for the Chair. In pre-war Poland Kridl had been a liberal and anti-Catholic critic of the Polish government; consequently, a great number Polish-Americans and émigrés reacted negatively when they learned about his appointment.¹²

¹⁰ S.J. Blejwas, *Two Chairs in Polish Studies (and the Space Between) at Columbia University*, www.academia.edu/10341951/Stanislaus_Blejwas_and_Two_Chairs_in_Polish_Studies_and_the_Space_Between_at_Columbia_University, accessed: 25.02.2016.

¹¹ On September 20, 1948, Eisenhower wrote confidentially to the Trustees that the Chief of the Eastern Division of the State Department told Simmons, speaking unofficially, that the Department would be “sympathetic to any attempt” to develop such studies, “especially so in the case of Poland,” as long as Columbia had “complete control over the selection” of teachers and “the subjects taught.” CACU.

¹² F. Fackenthal to J. Winiewicz, May 5, 1948, Central Archives, Columbia University (CACU); PDDE, X, 141; S.J. Blajwas, *The Adam Mickiewicz Chair of Polish Culture: Columbia University and the Cold War (1948–1954) (Part 1)*, “The Polish Review” 1991, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 324–326.

Over Memorial Day Weekend, probably Saturday, May 29, a delegation from the Polish-American Congress (PAC), which ardently opposed the communist regime in Warsaw, called on Provost Jacobs, who had not been involved in the Chair's negotiations. They were, he remembered, "respectfully requesting" that Columbia rescind its acceptance of the Polish grant. The Provost refused, stating that the University already was "fully committed," and he emphasized the University's long-standing commitment "of furthering the study of peoples and cultures in various area of the world." He later recalled: "The meeting was most cordial as was its ending." Then the "fireworks began."¹³

The "New York Times" reported on June 1st, Columbia's Commencement, that the PAC, at its meeting in Philadelphia, had sent on May 31 a telegram to Eisenhower, who still was not president. It urged him to reject the \$5000 for the Chair, asserting that the funding and Kridl's teaching were "not compatible with the high patriotic ideas of the American student of Polish descent. (...) This infiltration of the Communist Voice is anti-American." Fackenthal, in Columbia's first public statement on the Chair, mentioned that the gift was on a trail basis and that it would promote interest in the Polish language and culture; moreover, it conformed to the University's policy of "furthering the study of peoples and cultures of the various areas."¹⁴

With the telegram the protest had reached the "New York Times", and throughout June the Polish-American press supported the PAC's position. According to the scholar Stanislaus Blajwas, "The PAC protest was orchestrated by Sigmund Sluszkza (...). Sluszkza, in turn, received his information from [Arthur] Coleman." Coleman, an Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Columbia, had been involved with the Chair's discussions. A Columbia Ph.D. and an Instructor from 1928 to 1946 – before the "up or out" policy – he also was secretary-treasurer of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages. Sluszkza, a former Coleman student, was a Queens College Instructor and high school teacher. He would continue to fan the flames.¹⁵

On July 1 Coleman, unsuccessful in his protests, resigned in a letter to Eisenhower, and he sent a copy to Simmons. He had to object to funds from the communist government paying his colleague's salary, or else he would be "conniving at the sort of intellectual 'collaboration'" by professors who stayed "during Hitler's regime." Moreover, he could not accept any association of Mickiewicz with the communist government in Warsaw, especially since he and his wife were working on a biography of the poet. He could not face her or his students "if I succumbed to the subtle pressures coming out

¹³ A.C. Jacobs, "Memoirs," Unpublished, 1974, p. 166, author's possession.

¹⁴ „The New York Times,” June 1, 1948.

¹⁵ S.J. Blajwas, *Adam Mickiewicz Chair...*, op. cit., p. 328.

of Poland today to make Adam Mickiewicz a kind of Polish John the Baptist for the regime's version of 'authentic Polish Marxism.'" Nor could he support this "Greek gift" from a Marxist regime that advocated overthrowing the American government and "denies basic voting and the elementary democratic rights." Poland, controlled by Moscow and the Comintern, would wage a campaign of "academic infiltration" with the Mickiewicz Chair.¹⁶

The resignation letter "surprised" Simmons and triggered a series of letters with the administration. He reminded Coleman that during the two years of discussions about the Chair, Coleman never had objected to the proposal. Perhaps Simmons knew that in 1941 Coleman had wondered if he could get Kridl to come to Columbia, when he wrote "I need your help here also." In any event, Simmons knew that they had had a friendly relationship. Later, Professor Jakobson, who had had several conversations with the Provost, informed him that Coleman, if the Polish Chair were established, had wanted support for his candidacy. Simmons also wrote to the Provost. He criticized his colleague's teaching – the enrollments were small – and his scholarship and commitment, adding that he had not made a "name for himself among Slavists." The Provost replied he would meet Coleman before accepting the resignation.¹⁷

While anticipating the meeting, had Coleman, a minor figure at Columbia, lost perspective and exaggerated his position on campus? Did he see his resignation as an opportunity to create widespread publicity? Whatever his concerns about communist infiltration in his department, did he realize how badly the controversy could damage Polish Studies at Columbia? Had he lost all sense of reality? He certainly had to realize that his demands would be unacceptable to Columbia University. On July 9, he told the Provost he would only withdraw his resignation letter if Eisenhower investigated communism at Columbia, withdrew Professor Kridl's appointment, and authorized Coleman to use \$5000 of the Polish grant for the purchase of scientific materials for universities in Poland. On Sunday, July 11, before receiving a reply, he held a press conference at which he released copies of his resignation letter, and he told the media that Kridl would be spreading Poland's communist propaganda to students.¹⁸

"The New York Times" announced on the front-page the next morning: "Quits Columbia Job Over Polish Grant: Dr. Coleman Charges Moscow Controls Fund for Study Chair With 'Infiltration' Aim." The article continued on page five with three columns and Coleman's photo. He discussed his resigna-

¹⁶ PDDE, X, 140; A. Coleman to D.D. Eisenhower, July 1, 1948, CACU; "New York Times," July 12, 1948.

¹⁷ S.J. Blejwas, *Adam Mickiewicz Chair...*, op. cit., p. 330; E. Simmons to A. Coleman, July 3; R. Jakobson to A.C. Jacobs, August 23; E. Simmons to A.C. Jacobs, July 3; A.C. Jacobs to E. Simmons, July 7, CACU, also mentioned in PDDE, X, 140.

¹⁸ „The New York Times,” July 12, 1948.

tion letter, saying he had not had a reply, though he had spoken with the Provost. His resignation stands, he continued, as long as Columbia accepts money that Polish universities need, money that comes “from the gaunt hands of Polish peasants and workers and even professors, many of whom Mrs. Coleman and I used to know and with whom we still sympathize.” In response, Columbia released a statement from the Provost, which stated that Eisenhower would act on the resignation soon. Columbia had accepted the grant after careful consideration, and here it reiterated Fackenthal’s earlier comments about Columbia’s purpose with the Polish grant. And, for the first time, the University said Kirdl would hold the Chair. During his press conference Coleman had conceded he had little hope Columbia would meet his stipulations.¹⁹

That evening Sluska called Kridl “a noted Marxist.” Escalating the level of rhetoric, he added: “It is morally wrong for Columbia to take ‘Cominform’ money because if Columbia accepts such funds, other colleges will also take it, and thus American higher education will then become centers of Communist training.” Two weeks later Sluska told a conference: “If Dr. Kridl wishes to be an American, he should follow Dr. Coleman’s leadership in this and restore the money to those from whom it was taken” – poor Polish peasants.²⁰

That same evening, Kirdl replied from his home in Northampton. After saying “I don’t think any comment is necessary,” he added: “Any accusation that this chair will be used for political purposes is an affront to Columbia University.” It “will be used for teaching Polish literature and language, not propaganda. My political opinions are another matter. I don’t see that I have to explain anything.”²¹

Eisenhower the same day accepted the resignation in a letter written by the Provost, following his meeting with Coleman. Eisenhower specifically supported Kridl’s appointment, and he also addressed the issue of communist subversion. “If I ever find that the incumbent of this Chair steps aside from his academic assignment to infiltrate our University with philosophies inimical to our American system of government, the Chair will be discontinued.” The “Times” published the letter. When Coleman was then interviewed about the letter, he denied that Kridl, “paid as he will be, (...) will be able to carry on his teaching at Columbia under conditions of true scholarship.” This lack of understanding “will grow rather than be diminished by this regrettable decision of General Eisenhower” on establishing the Mickiewicz Chair.²²

Coleman’s press conference had launched a wave of protest the same day as Eisenhower’s letter. Newspapers and radio had a field day, led by the “Times,” the Associated Press wire service, and other papers in New York

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem; July 30, *ibidem*.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

City. One headline read: “Columbia Provost Supports the Reds – The University is a Hot-Bed of Communism.” An editorial, “Coddling Communists at Columbia,” in the “San Francisco Examiner” criticized the Check and Polish Chairs, and Eisenhower personally for his role in the latter. The newspaper added that General Eisenhower had prevented Allied troops from occupying Czechoslovakia in WWII, “Thereby establishing the red flag in central Europe.” It attacked Kridl, Jakobson, and Simmons for their Communist sympathies. The anti-communist “Counterattack” often drew on New York City’s “World-Telegram”, which had a nationally syndicated Red Scare columnist who kept the controversy alive.²³

The University still had not addressed the charges that Simmons, Jakobson, and Kridl were communist sympathizers. When Sluszka sent to Trustee Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of the “New York Times,” a file he had prepared, “Cominform Infiltration into Columbia,” Sulzberger forwarded it to Eisenhower. Sluszka had described himself as a “conscientious American school teacher” and offered himself as a “researcher or ‘subversive data reporter’” to gather information for the newspaper on infiltration at Columbia. Eisenhower, before he left on vacation, replied in a long letter to Sulzberger that “the whole matter [would be] exhaustively examined.” He was giving the material to Jacobs “in strictest confidence” with instructions to “develop such further facts and statements,” and “if Mr. Jacobs arrives at any conclusion before I return, he will communicate it to you.”²⁴

The Provost’s extensive investigation during the next few weeks would provide the material for a confidential, nine-page report Eisenhower sent the Trustees on September 20th. In addition to investigating the accusations about Communist sympathizers at Columbia, particularly Simmons, Jakobson, and Kridl, there was the matter of hundreds of letters protesting Kridl’s appointment and the acceptance of Coleman’s resignations. Nearly 800 hundred persons had sent a form letter, while the seventy-five personal letters would receive an individual reply. In both cases Jacobs had assistance from Robert Harron, the University’s Director of Public Information, who had excellent working relations with the city’s media. Harron, admittedly unhappy about the Polish Chair, undoubtedly had quickly prepared Fackenthal’s statement after the PAC’s May 31st telegram and the Provost’s statement after Coleman’s press conference.²⁵

²³ A.C. Jacobs, “Memoirs,” op. cit., p. 166. For “Counterattack” and the “World Telegram,” see Appendix B, D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, confidential, September 20, 1948, CACU.

²⁴ D.D. Eisenhower to A.H. Sulzberger, July 27, and to A.C. Jacobs, July 27, 1948, CACU. See also footnotes, PDDE, X, 164–166. The file of papers Sluszka sent is in CACU. Eisenhower also instructed the Provost to look “intensively, into plans for reorganization the University’s administration” so he would be “completely prepared” for the October Trustees meeting. D.D. Eisenhower to A.C. Jacobs, July 19.

²⁵ A copy of the form letter appeared in the report’s Appendix. D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, 1948, CACU.

More difficult was the letter that the Provost sent to Professor Simmons on August 2. Simmons, considered an academic “fellow-traveler” in the late 1930’s, had come under attack, and the letter included accusations from the anti-communist newsletter “Counterattack” and an article in the Hearst “World-Telegram.” “I am a bit concerned,” the Professor quickly replied, “that you should be disturbed by the attacks on me and Columbia coming from these sources.” Asserting, “I am not, and never have been a member of the Communist Party,” he proceeded for two-single spaced pages to address specifically the charges against him in “Counterattack,” many of which came from an article in the “World-Telegram.” He then cited journals in which he was listed as an “enemy” of the Soviet Union. Finally, he noted the “insinuations” about the Slavic Languages Department and wrote that all twenty members are “ideologically opposed to the Soviet Union.”²⁶

The Provost, meanwhile, had an important conversation in late July with R. Gordon Wasson, a Columbia alumnus and an English Instructor for one year, and a Vice President in Charge of Public Relations at J.P. Morgan and Company. Wasson, who had been “following from the inside rather closely for a long time the evolution of Slavic Studies,” confidentially wrote that policy should “favor every effort to cultivate Russia and the satellite countries on the study level (...). We should have missed the signals if we had churlishly rejected those funds.” While he had never met Kridl, he had carefully inquired, and “he is absolutely first class.” As for Professor Jakobson, Wasson had known him for many years, and “he was very emphatic in stating the complete loyalty” of him. After the meeting with Jacobs, Wasson wrote to Sulzberger that “The University is doing a superb job, quite unique, in this field (...). The recent criticisms have been monstrously unfair, in my judgment, and uninformed.”²⁷

Wasson dismissed “Coleman’s dastardly behavior” as “so easily explained,” adding that “the public’s memory is so short.” He did not “think the incident should give much concern.” He wanted, nonetheless, the Provost to “talk separately with a number of newspaper persons. When he hoped there would be “an opportunity to say something along these line,” Jacobs suggested the possibility of Eisenhower speaking on “academic freedom and his aversion to various subversive activities.” Eisenhower, when he returned, liked the idea; he

²⁶ For academic “fellow-traveler,” see D. Caute, *The Fellow Travelers*, Yale University Press, 1988, p. 88; A.C. Jacobs to E.G. Simmons, August 2, E.G. Simmons to A.C. Jacobs, August 5, and D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, with excerpts from Simmons letter in an appendix, CACU.

²⁷ A.C. Jacobs, confidential memo, July 31; R.G. Wasson to A.C. Jacobs, August 18; R.G. Wasson to A.C. Jacobs, July 30, D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, CACU. Wasson had married a Russian pediatrician in 1926; he would become a famous mycologist, a Trustee of Barnard College, and a member of the Harvard Visiting Committee to the Slavic Department. His CIA file remained closed in 2012, 26 years after his death.

referred to it when he concluded his report to the Trustees. And, significantly, during his Installation Address in October he discussed the importance academic freedom.²⁸

The Provost's investigation served as the confidential nine-page report, plus five appendices, that Eisenhower sent to the Trustees on September 20. The attacks against Columbia, he said, raised two issues. Concerning Polish funds for the Chair, he cited the University's position that students would know more about a "country that has suffered so much." After saying that "too much trouble in the world is traceable to a lack of understanding," he emphasized Wasson's comments that Columbia "is doing a superb job, almost unique."²⁹

Then Eisenhower turned to the second issue, the accusations about the three professors and asserted "there have been many unwarranted and vicious charges made against the University (...). So far as the public is concerned" it had "to maintain a dignified silence." (He might have added he would have liked to reply to certain accusations himself.) He criticized the motives of Coleman and Sluszkas and described Sluszkas as the "spearhead" of the protests. He discussed how Sluszkas had misquoted a letter from an American woman, Anne Waterman, who had returned from teaching in Poland for two years. As for Sluszkas's "misstatements," he referred to a detailed letter from Jakobson that he included in the report's appendix.³⁰

Eisenhower expressed his conviction that Simmons was not, as charged, "a communist sympathizer." It was "not unnatural" for Simmons to have cultivated contacts in Soviet Russia over the years; that did not make him disloyal. He had included Simmons's letter in an appendix and declared that Wasson was "not really concerned about any difficulty" for Simmons. Wasson also had emphasized Jakobson's loyalty and considered Kridl an excellent choice. The Provost, moreover, had had several conversations with Kridl. Years later, Jacobs recalled: "There was not a scintilla of evidence that he had any communist leanings."³¹

Eisenhower concluded he could not guarantee Columbia had no communist sympathizers, but he guaranteed the University would "not be used as a forum to instill into our students philosophical inimical to our form of government. I am confident that none of the professors (...) is disloyal to our government."³²

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, CACU.

³⁰ When D.D. Eisenhower thanked Professor Henry Steele Commager for sending him the "San Francisco Examiner," he had written: "The Hearst papers, of course, have made no attempt to get the facts. They have said worse things about me than appear in the article you sent." July 29, PDDE, X, p. 171; D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, CACU.

³¹ Ibidem; A.C. Jacobs, "Memoirs," op. cit., p. 165.

³² D.D. Eisenhower to Trustees, Confidential, September 20, CACU.

Before Coleman left Columbia in late August, he spoke to an audience of 250 people at an event sponsored by the National Committee of Americans of Polish descent. At Columbia “an atmosphere and a climate” has been created “which in itself constitutes a flagrant and outright denial of academic freedom.” The Slavic Department, he declared, had a goal of receiving an annual subsidy of \$100,000 from the Soviet Union, which Columbia denied immediately, and he quoted Simmons as saying: “Then we will have a real department.” The “World-Telegram” article reminded its readers that “Counterattack” recently had accused Simmons of being “one of the leading fellow-travelers in American colleges.”³³

At registration in September a dozen students picketed, and placards asked “What can Kridl teach us?” and urged boycotting Kirdl’s classes. Yet, a mere dozen protesters seldom gather attention at Columbia; in fact, the demonstration paled in comparison to the Howard Fast protests and, especially, to the campus reaction to the tuition increase. Still, Coleman and Sluska had undermined the Polish Studies program for many in the Polish-American and émigré communities. Kirdl faced a challenge and, as Stanislaus Blejwas observed, his “tenure was a fruitful one in the history of Polish Studies in the United States.”³⁴

For Coleman and the PAC, their timing was unfortunate. There is little evidence that Coleman, a very junior and little known member of the liberal arts faculty, attracted a following on the Columbia campus. The “New York Times” article on June 1st, mentioning the PAC telegram to Eisenhower, had arrived on Commencement Day. Thus, Coleman’s protest began, ignited by Sluska and the PAC, as students had departed or were departing, and the faculty was thinking about summer projects and plans. For the Provost, however, the media controversy became prominent. While he never had any question about Columbia accepting the Chair and Polish funding, when Coleman chose to present his demands on July 9 he turned his back, once and for all, on the program with which he had worked for twenty-two years.

The controversy in the press, however, had prompted several officials to consider a different course. Fackenthal, who had accepted the Polish proposal, soon backtracked and proposed a compromise on Polish funding. The Director of Public Information later emphatically recalled: “I still think it was not a smart thing to do and that it cost us more than \$10,000 a year in public opinion.” Yet, would abandoning Winiewicz’s offer also lead to terminating the Masaryk Chair, especially after the communist coup in Prague? More important, would not cancelling the two Chairs diminish Columbia’s Slavic

³³ “World-Telegram,” August 16 [in:] C.W. Ackerman MS., Library of Congress; “New York Times,” August 16 and 17.

³⁴ S.J. Blejwas, *Adam Michiewicz Chair...*, op. cit., p. 435, 438.

Programs? Wasson had emphasized Columbia's challenge in his confidential letter to the Provost. "The whole history and culture of Eastern Europe is unfamiliar to us Americans, that in our own interest we must make up for this ignorance as fast as we can." This is the most "pressing area for expansion of top level studies in the humanities," and Columbia's achievements are unique in this field. "There is no such center in all the Russias (...) only in Columbia is there promise of an adequate program. The further intensification and expansion of these Slavic studies (...) will enable our University to render illustrious service."³⁵

As for Eisenhower, he had been at Columbia only a few weeks when the controversy began. We know the criticism bothered him, and he found himself in a position at Columbia for which he had literally no experience. While we do not know what he specifically thought about the controversy, a few excerpts from his letter to the "Times" Arthur Sulzberger on July 29 are interesting for being non-committal. He reminded Sulzberger that everything had happened before his arrival, except "the formal acceptance" of Coleman's resignation. "I have studied" the Mackiewicz Chair "matter enough to know that we are in the middle of an argument of which the sources can scarcely be traced," but he added they were not "exclusively in support of democracy" or the promulgation of "communist ideology." He added: "I do not pretend, of course, at this time, to express an opinion on the merits of the argument pro and con regarding Professor Coleman." His personal staff, especially his speech writer, always did everything possible to protect him from bad publicity and, in this case, to minimize his involvement. For the Provost, Coleman and the media controversy had been prominent throughout the summer. From his meeting with the PAC over Memorial Day Weekend to his session with Coleman and the media protest led, by the Hearst and anti-communist newspapers, the Provost supported the University's commitment.

In the summer of 1948 that meant establishing the Adam Mickiewicz Chair with Professor Manfred Kridl holding the Chair and contributing to the furthering of Polish-American Studies in America. Years later, the Provost recalled: "I think we came out with a plus."

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