

THE SECOND PART OF THE BOOK consists of letters and diaries written by young Ernesto from various points in Latin America, some of which were found as recently as the 1970s. They make somber and often tedious reading. Much of

Behind the region's problems, major and minor, there supposedly lurks the evil United States, which stays awake nights worrying about how to make things worse for the poor.

the narrative concerns personal details of a rootless intellectual wandering around with no immediate focus, someone dwelling as it were in the interstices of life. Many obvious features of the Latin American environment are treated as if startling scientific discoveries—for example, that in Peru and Bolivia there are impoverished Indian populations. Or that Mexico—far from being a revolutionary state—is run by a clique of generals in tandem with corrupt businessmen and bought-off intellectuals. There is also much critical comment about Latin American politicians, even ones who at the time were regarded as mildly progressive. Behind the region's problems, major and minor, there supposedly lurks the evil United States, which stays awake nights worrying about how to make things worse for the poor. The dogmatic intolerance of his statements foreshadows his sanguinary appetites when in charge of the execution squads at the La Cabaña fortress in Havana after the triumph of Castro's revolution.

Guevara in power is of course far less interesting a subject than the young man morphing into a triumphant revolutionary. What kind of fascination attaches, after all, to a minister of industries who produces toothpaste that turns to stone upon being squeezed from the tube? Moreover, by focusing on the early years, all kinds of embarrassing questions can be avoided—such as the kind of regime that Guevara helped install in Cuba, complete with a censored press, neighborhood spies, and prison camps for non-conformists, Catholics, or homosexuals. Why dwell on the 16,000 executions or the more than 100,000 Cubans who have been jailed on ideological and political grounds? Only backward folk who watch Fox News could possibly be interested in such details.

The most important reason, however, why book publishers and movie producers seem so fixated on Guevara's early years is even easier to explain. For liberals, intentions (real or imagined) are of greater value than results. In fact, for many of them results do not matter at all, only stated intentions. (Have you ever tried discussing rent control with one?) While Ernesto Guevara did not quite die in time to avoid all historical judgment, by flooding movie theaters and bookstores with prettified versions of a harmless revolutionary youth the purveyors of the myth can satisfy their yearnings for social change that is painless and pure. Perhaps it is no accident, as Marxists like to say, that these things are reaching high tide at this particular point in American political history. People who ordered this book on Amazon.com also ordered Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*. A coincidence? Possibly, but probably not. ❄

War by Other Means

WITH ITS VIRTUALLY LIMITLESS possible moves and combinations, chess has meant many things to players since it appeared in India

about the sixth century: casual pastime or embarrassing school of humility, challenging mental workout or, in the case of a number of grand masters, sanity-threatening manic-acal fixation. The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, author of the great chess story *The Royal Game*, whose chess-obsessed protagonist goes crazy, puckishly defined it as “thought that leads nowhere, mathematics that adds up to nothing, art without an end product, architecture without substance.”

For Daniel Johnson, chess is nothing less than a mega-metaphor for the late Cold War. Indeed, in *White King and Red Queen* he argues persuasively that, with its “abstract purism, incipient paranoia, and sublimated homicide” it became a proxy war between superpowers prevented by the nuclear bal-

White King and Red Queen: How the Cold War Was Fought on the Chessboard

By Daniel Johnson
(HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 384 PAGES, \$26)

Reviewed by Joseph A. Harriss

Joseph A. Harriss is an American writer in Paris who covered Cold War Europe as a roving correspondent for Reader's Digest. His latest book is *About France (iUniverse)*.

ance of terror from engaging in direct hostilities. A British journalist, chess aficionado, and contributor to *The American Spectator*, he once played Garry Kasparov to a draw in a simultaneous exhibition. In this original take on an unexplored aspect of the late Cold War, Johnson is well placed to depict in detail that peculiar period in mid-20th century when chess matches were front-page news and grand masters were household names.

Long a favorite of Russian intellectuals and rulers—Peter the Great took along special campaign boards of soft leather while battling Turks or subduing obstreperous serfs—chess was turned into a tool of the revolution by Marx and Lenin, who were avid players. (They were also very bad losers: Marx would rage when put in a difficult position; Lenin got depressed if he lost and finally gave the game up because it distracted him from the revolution.) They and Stalin made it an instrument of the all-embracing Communist state. It was, they considered, both a demonstration of dialectical materialism and good mental training for war both hot and cold.

By the mid-1920s Moscow launched a nationwide program with the declared objective of dominating the chess world. What better propaganda for the New Soviet Man? “We must organize shock brigades of chess players and begin immediately a five-year plan for chess,” declared Nikolai Krylenko, Stalin’s commissar of war and founder of the Red Army, who himself headed the new All-Union Chess Section. With a multi-million ruble budget, Krylenko created a vast, tentacular infrastructure of 500,000 players by the 1930s. That number would eventually peak at some five million. A systematic training program spotted promising players early in Communist youth chess clubs and rewarded them as they matured with rare treats like foreign currency earnings and travel abroad. At one point the Ukrainian province of Chernigov alone had more than 10,000 players, more than the entire U.S.

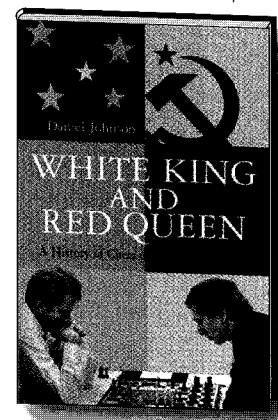
THE FIRST GREAT HERO OF SOVIET CHESS was Mikhail Botvinnik. A meticulous, methodical product of the Russian chess machine, he developed a rigorous pre-match procedure that became standard for Soviet masters preparing for international competition: three weeks’ confinement in a country dacha with intensive training games, plenty of exercise and fresh air, stringent analysis of all the opponent’s past games, four openings devised for both White and Black, concluding

with five days of rest without chess just before the match.

After Botvinnik won a big international tournament in 1936, the ministry of heavy industry rewarded him with an automobile. Stalin himself signed an order providing him 250 liters of gasoline. As Johnson notes, “Apart from the vehicles assigned to the nomenklatura, Botvinnik’s may well have been the only private car in the Soviet Union.” When he entered a theater, the audience gave him a standing ovation; his studious, bespectacled face glowered from propaganda posters; Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, he of the eponymous cocktail, personally intervened to ensure that Botvinnik had plenty of time off from work as an electrical engineer to study chess.

If being a chess star was a passport to the good life, Soviet style, the machine had no pity on losers even after Stalin was long gone. Mark Taimanov, champion of the USSR, grand master, inventor of the clever Taimanov Variation of the Sicilian Defense, and a gifted concert pianist to boot, had to run a humiliating gauntlet of punishment after losing an important international match in the early 1970s. Rather than being waved through customs as usual on his return to Sheremetyevo airport, he was subjected to a thorough search and found to be carrying a copy of Solzhenitsyn’s banned novel, *The First Circle*. As the customs official explained candidly, if he had won, “I would have been prepared to carry the complete works of Solzhenitsyn to the taxi for you.” In Moscow, Taimanov was summoned before the Sports Committee for a harsh dressing-down and Soviet-style “civic execution”: kicked off the national team, he was stripped of his title of Merited Master of Sports, banned from publishing, forbidden foreign travel, and ordered to do no more piano performances.

America had been the world’s strongest chess nation in the 1930s. The Russians ended that after World War II by crushing an American team in a radio match in September 1945. For the next three decades their only serious competition came from their Eastern European satellite states, especially Yugoslavia. The idea that Communist chess supremacy did actually demonstrate Western decadence took hold in certain quarters.



Enter an arrogant, paranoid Brooklyn brat named Bobby Fischer, whom Johnson considers “perhaps the most extraordinary genius in the history of the game.” After winning the U.S. championship in 1957 at 14, Fischer showed up in Moscow the



next year boldly demanding to play Botvinnik. But when the chief Soviet chess bureaucrat informed him that he would not be paid for the games, he abruptly declared, “I’m fed up with these Russian pigs” and went home. When he did play top Russians later that year in Yugoslavia, he finished fifth, good enough to earn Fischer the grand master’s title at 15.

At first he was respectful toward the Russians and was on relatively friendly terms with Boris Spassky. But as he observed the Soviet players in action he became convinced that they had rigged world chess against him by agreeing among themselves to throw games to each other during tournaments. He was largely right—even paranoids have enemies—but that didn’t keep him from beating several Soviet grand masters during the 1960s.

By 1970 the Soviet chess machine began to feel what Johnson calls “Fischer fear,” with Botvinnik warning his comrades that the volatile American prodigy had become a threat to Soviet chess. Little did they know. Despite his mother, Regina, being a

card-carrying member of the Communist Party U.S.A., Fischer had gradually become an ardent anti-Communist ready to fight the Cold War. “It’s really the free world against the lying, cheating, hypocritical Russians,” he declared. The scene was set for the most famous chess match in history, Fischer vs. Spassky in Reykjavik in the summer of 1972. Johnson calls it “the Cold War’s supreme work of art.”

In the tense run-up to the contest, both President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, contacted Fischer with messages of support, saying in effect, Go over there and beat the Russians. As the two-month match got under way, world newspapers played it on their front pages, London pubs replaced dartboards with chessboards, and New York bars tuned their television sets not to the Mets games but to live broadcasts from Reykjavik. (Even I, certified chess duffer, clipped the daily accounts of the games and duplicated them on my board.) Fischer himself called it hand-to-hand combat. Their superb, gripping 13th game, which Fischer won after eight hours of play, doomed Spassky and ended the supremacy of the Soviet chess machine. As Johnson puts it, “In Spassky’s submission to his fate and Fischer’s fierce, exultant triumph, the Cold War’s denouement was already foreshadowed.”

THIS WELL-RESEARCHED ACCOUNT of the Soviet attempt to turn an ancient game into a Cold War weapon makes fascinating reading for both history and chess buffs. In his acknowledgments, Johnson thanks a circle of American friends, including Michael Novak and Bob Tyrrell, for their help in giving the book its unflinching moral clarity.

In his tale of those murky years of looking-glass conflict, two final ironies stand out. First there was the strength that chess gave the unyielding Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, a first-rate player, to resist his interrogators and tormentors. “The chessboard had improved my defense against false threats and concealed tricks,” he later wrote. “I gave them no openings.”

Then there were the contrasting post-Cold War destinies of Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov. Fischer, his neurons overloaded, became increasingly delusional and bitterly anti-American in his exile in Iceland. Meanwhile, Garry Kasparov, the last Soviet champion, became fervently anti-Communist and the most prominent leader of today’s domestic opposition to Vladimir Putin’s resurgent police state. Fortunately not all grand masters are driven crazy by chess. ♣

Doctrinal Candidates

IT'S BEEN ALL THE RAGE in the mainstream media lately: several studies have supposedly disproved the notion that academia presents a lopsided, left-wing worldview to students. Perhaps the most thorough of these new works is *Closed Minds? Politics and Ideology in American Universities*. It does indeed rebut

**Closed Minds?
Politics and Ideology in
American Universities**

By Bruce L. R. Smith,
Jeremy D. Mayer, and
A. Lee Fritschler
(BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS,
278 PAGES, \$32.95)

**Reviewed by
Robert VerBruggen**

a few of the criticisms conservatives tend to level at the ivory tower, but it's far from the thorough debunking its three authors (George Mason University's Bruce L. R. Smith, Jeremy D. Mayer, and A. Lee Fritschler) and their publicists present it as.

Certainly, there are plenty of excesses in the conservative critique, and the authors' jobs would be easy if the only goal were to

pick this low-hanging fruit. Some pundits say or imply that nearly all professors rant in class, share political opinions on topics unrelated to the subject matter at hand, and give conservatives bad grades just for not being liberals. Some college conservatives take these assumptions to heart, and won't even "come out" with their views; this is a shame, and more the fault of right-wing attackers than of left-wing professors.

Fortunately, while *Closed Minds?* addresses these harsher allegations—it briefly and cogently summarizes pretty much every aspect of the conservative critique—it does not dwell on them. For the most part, it's a response to the more intelligent criticisms.

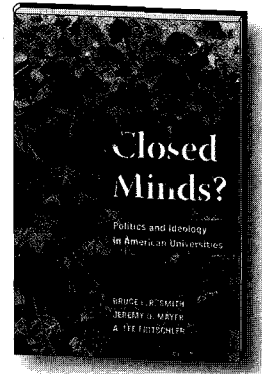
Those criticisms go something like this: relative to the general population, college professors lean far to the left politically. They tend to hire fellow liberals, maybe out of discrimination. In the classroom, most professors make a genuine effort to see past their own perspectives and present topics in a balanced manner, but even these good professors' worldviews frequently come through, and a substantial minority are far less careful. Some make subtle jabs at conservatives and conservative ideas. Others preach outright, especially in the numerous entire departments, such as "gender studies," that exist only to satisfy liberal demands. In rare cases, outright indoctrination occurs—along the lines of showing *Fahrenheit 9/11* in a biology class, or grading based on ideology rather than quality of work.

Because students tend to be more liberal leaving college than they were going in, it's reasonable to conclude all this has some effect on them.

Closed Minds? verifies much of this. For example, the authors' survey confirmed that a solid majority of college professors identify as liberal. Also, profs overwhelmingly see themselves as "honest broker[s] among all competing views," though there's no telling as to how they define what an "honest broker" does. (Does an honest broker exclude ideas he sees as "beyond the pale," and do liberal professors tend to see conservative ideas that way?)

The book pokes some deep holes in other conservative arguments, though. Whatever hiring discrimination takes place, no one within the academy seems to notice it—even conservative professors tend not to think it happens. Also, research has shown that most students don't change their political views during college; while those who do change tend to drift leftward, this mirrors the trend seen among non-college-attendees as well.

That last finding is an especially hard blow to conservatives; one of their biggest reasons for criticizing the academy is that professors successfully "indoctrinate" impressionable students. But it's far from the *only* reason. For example, such bias can make conservative students uncomfortable, especially in the cases when professors mock their views, and it fails to present students (of all political persuasions) with the best of conservative thought. In a country where conservative ideas have led to countless policy innovations, it's important for tomorrow's leaders to understand where right-wingers are coming from.



TO TRULY DISCREDIT THE RIGHT, then, the authors can't just show that liberal bias isn't harmful; they have to demonstrate that liberal bias doesn't even exist to any great degree. Here's where they stumble significantly. Basically, the authors' survey revealed a significant amount of liberal bias on the part of professors, but they pretend it didn't.

For example, the authors write that "most professors did not, in fact, admit to informing students how they feel about most political issues." This is a

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