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Mark J. White. *Missiles in Cuba: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Castro and the 1962 Crisis.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1997. x + 170 pp. $14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56663-156-3; $22.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56663-155-6.

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Teaching the Cuban Missile Crisis

Telling the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis in an appropriate undergraduate political science course is almost de rigeur. Students who know little about the cold war and are interested even less have at least heard of those famous "thirteen days," and often wish to know more. How should we instructors tell this story?

Mark J. White, a historian, offers us two complementary ways. In *Missiles in Cuba*, the relatively short but very well-written work under review here, White provides a straightforward narrative analysis of the subject. In his earlier and larger work, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*,[1] White offers us a more biography-based scholarly analysis of the subject. Both works are excellent pieces of scholarship and writing. They probably have different audiences.

The student audience for White's 1997 work is probably the American undergraduate student in a first political science course on international relations or foreign policy. A secondary audience might be the student in an introductory general education course on contemporary world politics or global affairs where the instructor wants to include a segment on "cold war history" and prefers to focus upon a specific case study as opposed to a general survey of the entire cold war period. The book's publisher, Ivan R. Dee, includes it in "The American Way Series" with no further elaboration. A telephone call to the publisher did not elicit any further information about the American Way Series or its intended audience.

The book's structure is straightforward. The first three chapters provide the background to the crisis itself, the next two chapters focus on the two weeks of crisis, and the final chapter sums it all up. There are no significant distractions for the student who wants to read the 170 pages in just one or two sessions: few digressions, little overt theoretical scholarly apparatus, and no distracting footnotes. The writing style is excellent. One could skim the book efficiently by reading only the first sentences of each paragraph, an efficient test of readability for undergraduates.

If the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis is part of our conventional wisdom, the author's treatment of it is not. The crisis itself, now more than thirty-five years in the past, has entered both the popular and the intellectual mythology of our time. For instance, the phrase "We're eyeball to eyeball and I think the other fellow just blinked" or a version thereof has entered the general vocabulary of many people who may only have a hazy notion of its origins. In his narrative analysis, White goes out of his way to memorialize such phrases by noting exactly the circumstances in which they were uttered (p. 120). (This phrase was Dean Rusk's aside to McGeorge Bundy on Wednesday of the crisis' second week when the ExComm received news that some Soviet ships had stopped dead in the water and others had turned around to head back East.)

In another example, White debunks the myth that Khrushchev thought badly of JFK after the 1961 Vienna summit and therefore he, Khrushchev, was more willing to take risks in Cuba afterwards. White notes that Sergei, Khrushchev's son, has written that after Vienna his father saw Kennedy as a "worthy partner and a strong statesman" (p. 40).

Although written simply and straightforwardly, the book's academic legitimacy is not in doubt. White uses the advantage of post-cold war scholarship, including the proceedings of the three international conferences (Washington 1987, Moscow 1989, and Havana 1992) at which crisis participants themselves participated and exchanged views. (Castro himself attended the Havana conference.) White has also made use of some ExComm audio tapes, Operation Mongoose files, and correspondence between Soviet officials in Washington and Havana with their colleagues back in Moscow. He weighs conflicting evidence judiciously.

Instead of footnotes or endnotes, there is a seven-

page "Note on Sources," an extended bibliographic essay which the enterprising undergraduate term paper writer would regard as heaven-sent. Any competent student using modern technology can rapidly call up quite a list of works on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Putting them into perspective is the value of White's "Note on Sources." The less inspired student, however, will find it frustrating not to be able to find specific references in the text.

Evenhanded is how I would describe the author's approach toward his subject matter and especially toward its principals, Kennedy and Khrushchev. Both leaders, in White's analysis, started out the crisis in a more belligerent mood than that in which they ended it. Both learned and adapted during the thirteen days. The words "harebrained scheme," with which Khrushchev's Presidium colleagues overthrew him two years later, do not appear in White's book. Khrushchev, knowing about Operation Mongoose by deed if not by name, had ample reason to believe that Kennedy intended to overthrow Castro. Khrushchev may have reacted to defend Cuba in an unrealistic manner but the perceived threat was quite real. White sees Kennedy as having been highly committed to overthrowing Castro, which colored his behavior in ExComm for the first crisis week and part of the second. But he, too, learned and adapted in the second week.

In a concluding chapter, White raises an issue which an instructor ought to raise with students before plunging into the details of the Cuban missile crisis. "Why were Kennedy and Khrushchev so much more effective in extricating themselves from the missile crisis than in preventing it?" The question serves two functions. First, it provides an excellent insight for students to use in sorting through the details of the crisis. Second, it describes in a nutshell White's main focus.

Unfortunately, this passage appears not in his 1997 book, under review here, but in his earlier and more scholarly work, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, which was published in 1996.[2] This earlier work, based upon White's doctoral dissertation (in history), is better suited for graduate students and advanced undergraduates. The analytic focus is on Khrushchev and five key American decision-makers. One recognizes many paragraphs from the 1996 more scholarly work in the 1997 shorter work but with less elaboration and scholarly apparatus. In place of the 1997 book's "A Note on Sources," the 1996 work contains a full set of endnotes as well as a selected bibliography. The 1997 work, it should be emphasized, is decidedly not a dumbed-down version of his earlier work. It is, rather, a work with fewer distractions for the introductory-level student.

Neither the 1997 nor 1996 books employs much of the scope and method of contemporary political science analysis. Graham Allison's name does not appear in either index, nor is there significant reference to decision-making theory, game theory, learning theory, or other methodological approaches. The course instructor will have to look elsewhere for a more methodologically-oriented work. From the point of view of teaching the Cuban Missile Crisis to most undergraduates, however, White's 1997 work as required reading would be an excellent choice.

Notes

[1]. London and New York: Macmillan, 1996, ISBN 0-333-63052-1.

[2]. The quotation is on page 249 of the 1996 book.

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