

Neumann, and Leo Szilard. They would talk after school about physics. Szilard later conceived the notion of an atomic chain reaction and went on to convince Roosevelt to start the American bomb project, while von Neumann and Wigner also played significant roles. Moving on to Germany and Denmark, Teller rubbed minds with other towering intellects, including Werner Heisenberg, Enrico Fermi, Hans Bethe, Lev Landau, and Niels Bohr.

These brilliant physicists were a close fraternity, and even Heisenberg, who remained in Hitler's Germany while the others fled, retained the affection of his peers. It was Teller himself who poisoned the punchbowl by his role, sparked by ambition and old jealousies, in the downfall of Oppenheimer.

Teller himself protests in his memoirs that he hadn't really meant to damage Oppenheimer and that his role in the security hearings had been a reluctant one. But he protests a little too much. Teller was a most helpful source for the FBI agents investigating the man who had directed Los Alamos on suspicion of spying for the Soviets. He also urged that Oppenheimer be charged with giving "consistently bad advice," curbing the development of the hydrogen bomb. Penning his memoirs almost half a century later, Teller recalls plenty of disobliging stories about his old colleague and friend, suggesting that the rancor has not died away.

The H-bomb was Teller's greatest love, and he pursued it with undeviating passion even during the war, to the irritation of colleagues who were still trying to figure out how to make an A-bomb work. (I could never understand why they kept him around.) Hence his chagrin at the fact that the conceptual breakthrough that made the (American) thermonuclear weapon possible has always been attributed to him and Stanislaw Ulam jointly. "What's this?" he exclaimed when shown the patent application for the H-bomb, which Ulam had already signed. "I am the inventor of the hydrogen bomb." His peevishness has evident-

ly not died away, given his painstaking efforts in these pages to demonstrate that Ulam does not deserve any real credit for this dubious achievement.

Today, in his semidotage, Teller must be a happy man. Most of the peers who so despised him for his actions in the Oppenheimer affair are long dead. The communist system that he hated with such unbridled passion has been utterly vanquished, but without extinguishing the market for some of his favorite weapons concepts. And George W. Bush is ready to pour money into the latest incarnation of ballistic missile defense, an idea no more feasible today than it was when Teller first started talking about it back in the 1950s.

ANDREW COCKBURN is the author of *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*.

Absolut History

By Markos T. Kounalakis

MUTUALLY ASSURED HEADLINES was the operational doctrine of newspapers during the height of the outwardly cool, yet constantly simmering, conflict between Moscow and Washington that ended nearly a decade ago. Since that time, Russian news has slowly, yet steadily, migrated from Page 1 to the business sections of American dailies.

Chandra replaced Chechnya in the news hole as the Soviet superpower broke down from a threatening nuclear adversary to a diminished (though nuclear-armed) Russian state. The prevailing news trend gives the popular impression that Russia is on the irreversible—if somewhat rocky—road to a functioning market economy and electoral democracy.

Two new books chart that progress and fill in the missing context and color of the often ignored, but dramatic story born in revolution 10 summers ago. *Russia's Unfinished Revolution* by Michael McFaul and *Casino Moscow* by Matthew Brzezinski are unintentionally complementary volumes.

McFaul gives an erudite and well-documented history of the last 15 years, from Gorbachev to Putin. Brzezinski's personal anecdotes and journalistic observations flesh out McFaul's solid outline.

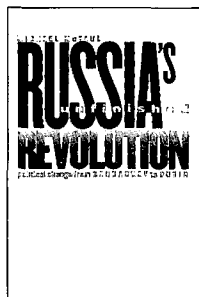
Most of us lack the power of President George W. Bush to divine instantly a Russian leader's soul and

intentions, so a historical review of how Russia got to Putin is helpful in guessing its future moves. McFaul starts his story with Gorbachev, the once all-powerful, all-controlling Soviet leader who introduced perestroika and glasnost into a system where "simultaneous political and economic change had a logic of their own that eventually could not be controlled." The details of these developments do not get lost in McFaul's telling of the story, and his step-by-step analysis of political and electoral events reinforces their significance.

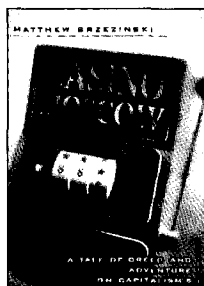
McFaul deftly takes us through the failed first republic that culminated in the shelling of the Russian White House and the establishment of a new political order in 1993—what he refers to as the second Russian republic. The result is a country where, despite the many imperfections of its electoral democracy, leaders are voted in and the law has a basis in the constitution.

The author, a political science professor at Stanford

and a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, came to study the



RUSSIA'S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION:
Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin
by Michael McFaul
Cornell University Press,
\$35.00



CASINO MOSCOW
by Matthew Brzezinski
Free Press, \$25.00

Russian revolution somewhat by accident; he was focusing on revolutionary change in Africa and while researching such movements in Moscow, found that he was in the midst of something too big to ignore.

McFaul brings striking firsthand experience to bear: The access he managed to obtain, and the time he spent with the revolution's various political players, brings fresh material and keen insight to the story.

Brzezinski's book opens with an incident of startling violence: a break-in at the author's Kiev apartment during which he is beaten to a bloody pulp during a fruitless robbery attempt. Brzezinski, who was then a *Wall Street Journal* stringer and later a staffer, uses his survivor's perspective to highlight the grim absurdity of the event that nearly left him dead.

Casino Moscow is a personal look at expatriates, economics, ethically challenged politicians and businessmen, and the place of the ex-Commie cowboy in the "Wild East" during the latter part of McFaul's second Russian republic. Brzezinski, a Canadian of Polish extraction (and nephew of Carter National Security Council chief Zbigniew Brzezinski), seems to appreciate the eastern European absurdist tradition, which allows him to maintain an ironic distance between observation and emotion.

Or perhaps Brzezinski's perspective is less absurd, than it is reflective of the humorous vein that foreign correspondents use to speak to each other about the daily routines and small ironies we're subjected to while reporting. We all have our favorite stories, and love to share details of the Aeroflot flight from hell or the meal that bites back. And we all love to characterize the dire situation in Russia by using the time-honored form of the revealing Russian anecdote: for the economy, the woman on the sidewalk with only one sock to sell, and for alcoholism, doing shots of NyQuil after the vodka's run out. But Brzezinski has done a remarkable job of collecting those anecdotes and creating a cohesive, enlightening collection of stories that adds individual, ephemeral, and

entertaining detail to McFaul's grand historical sweep.

Brzezinski brings to life the characters of modern Russia's greed and adventure—larger than life figures like the cosmopolitan Chechen Umar Dzhabrailov, on whom the author Frederick Forsyth modeled the mafia-like character in his book *Icon*. "Umar," as the press referred to him, was the hotel-owning business partner of Paul Tatum, the American with whom Umar had a public disagreement and who later was assassinated in front of his landmark Radisson Slavyanskaya.

As the Bush administration prepares to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the victory over Soviet communism, the Russia that's emerged continues to play a critical role in today's foreign policy initiatives, from the ABM treaty to Chinese containment. And while Putin may not have the charisma to capture American headlines, Russian oil reserves will continue to entice speculators. McFaul and Brzezinski have done a good job at helping the claim jumpers and latter-day Cold Warriors ground any fantasies they may have in the accurate and often gritty reality.

MARKOS T. KOUNALAKIS was the NBC-Mutual News Moscow correspondent from the August coup in 1991 through the First Russian Republic.

Ethics for Dummies

by Nicholas Confessore

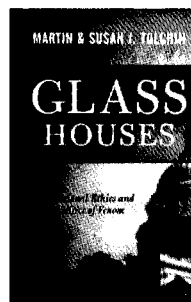
IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE NOW, but there was a time in the mid-1960s when the creation of permanent, bipartisan ethics committees in the House and Senate seemed like a positive step toward open and accountable politics. The Clinton years, however, were not kind to such hopes. Over the past decade, an overly collegial congressional ethics process has given way to the interminable, vicious witch

hunts that characterized the Republican Congress. So perhaps the time is ripe for a lucid examination of the Congressional ethics process, a book that cuts through the thicket of hypocrisy and pseudo-scandal to offer thoughtful analysis and intelligent solutions.

Glass Houses: Congressional Ethics and the Politics of Venom is not that book. Which is too bad, because the book's authors—Martin Tolchin, editor of *The Hill*, and Susan Tolchin, a professor of public policy at George Mason University, would seem well-suited to the task. The Tolchins are clearly well-acquainted with their subject. They've interviewed dozens of key members of Congress and compiled a range of tidbits and anecdotes. (Bribing your congressman was outlawed in 1853. Who knew?)

In a series of brisk chapters, the authors explain how most of today's tangle of Congressional rules and regulations arose more or less ad hoc, usually in the wake of some particularly spectacular outrage. They trace the slow, convoluted evolution of modern Congressional ethics scandals, from Joe McCarthy to Abscam and the Keating Five, to the various sex scandals of the last decade, to a 1995 case in which aides to Rep. David MacIntosh forged budget documents in an attempt to discredit the liberal group, Alliance for Justice.

This history is revealing: rather than rely on any cogent, rational process, successful prosecution and punishment has more often hinged on the intensity of public pressure, the popularity and power of the offender, or the willingness of reformers to upset the status quo. Party leaders practically have to bribe their members to serve on ethics committees; those who do serve find themselves torn between loyalty and principle, and investigations often end in partisan stalemate. Not surprisingly, politics frequently trumps fairness. John McCain only became part of the Keating Five when angry



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