

W & B

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Seeing such a strange title, you have perhaps asked yourself what words the author could be hiding behind these capital letters. There is nothing improper in either the 'W' or the 'B'. The letters stand for 'White' and 'Black'. Although we are talking about chess, it's always better to be safe than sorry: one careless word and you'll be labelled a chauvinist or even a racist.

In March 2019, Magnus Carlsen and Anish Giri played a match where black symbolically made the first move. The game was timed to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the World Champion commented on the event, saying, 'We cannot change the rules of chess permanently, but we flipped the board for one game to use chess to bring a new perspective to the discussion about equality. This rule was never about race or politics but we can break it to send a message to everyone who believes that colour should grant an advantage in chess or in life.'

It's a great shame that Carlsen has departed from his principles. If a world champion has decided to voice an opinion on politics, it would have been far more topical to focus attention on problems that actually exist. For example, the preventing of Israeli chess players from appearing at the World Rapid and Blitz Championships in Saudi Arabia, or Iranian chess players refusing to play against Israelis in international tournaments. There are any number of other problems in chess, even those that ricochet from politics, now prevalent in every aspect of life.

In their comments on the event in Oslo, journalists and chess historians recalled that, way back when, the squares on the board were the same colour. In contrast, when the game appeared in Europe during the Middle Ages, the colouring of the board had not the slightest racist connotation. As far as the colour of the figures is concerned, there were clubs in the United States where they played with red, rather than black, figures, but this was not associated by any stretch of the imagination with indigenous Indians.

The right of the first move was finally assigned to white only a century and a half ago. Before this, games would be started alternately: sometimes white, sometimes black. In 1824, the little-known German chess player Horny declared, it should be said, that it should be black that has the right to move first. We can only guess what guided him in this idea. Still, if we abide by today's fashionable terminology, then it was Horny who was chess's first anti-racist, even if he could not have imagined how his proposal would later be interpreted.

In 1880, the final decision was made that white would always make the first move in chess. It was an arbitrary choice, made for convenience, to create common rules for all and to standardise all games played. From that time, the historically established rule remained unchanged in chess and, until recently, no one had ever seen anything improper in it. Certainly, no one had thought to seek any racist subtext.

Carlsen and Giri's event generated hundreds of different responses in the virtual space. Some vented outrage at the 'discriminatory' rules of a game, where white always moves first. Others moved straight from chess to the popular topic of the day, switching to discrimination and racism in society.

A certain someone, however, wrote that the problem of racism had been dragged into chess. 'Frankly, with all the real problems in the world, I find it irritating that people try to find ones where

they don't exist,' one user wrote and it is hard not to agree with him. And so, general statements that chess is also a place where we need to fight discrimination remain undecided.

The Chess-News website has already covered the recent investigation by the Australian radio broadcaster ABC, which originally decided to ascertain why white always starts a game. Here too, the word 'racism' appeared very soon after that.

In these times, news spreads instantaneously and the debate has even reached celebrated champions. Although Karpov and Kasparov have polar opposite views on many things, here, the twelfth and thirteenth world chess champions are as one.

'A period of total insanity has begun. What does it have in common with the centuries-old game?' Karpov said.

Kasparov also commented: 'If you are worried that the game of chess is racist, please take up Go, where black moves first, instead of looking foolish by wasting taxpayer money at a state broadcaster to "investigate" it!'

The influential American weekly Newsweek, attempting to keep up with the times, published an article titled 'Black Grandmaster Pontus Carlsson Is Speaking Out About Racism in Chess'. After this, the Swedish grandmaster gave an interview to Peter Doggers for Chess.com on the same topic. Carlsson's name has become a regular fixture on other websites, too, and he has become extremely popular in the virtual space.

Pontus Carlsson was born in Colombia in 1982. The boy's parents died when he was only one year old, and he was adopted by a couple from Stockholm. Pontus's adoptive father is a great lover of chess (he is the former chairman of the Swedish Chess Federation), so it is no surprise that chess appeared in the child's life from an early age. The Swedish-Colombian grandmaster (Carlsson is often in Colombia and holds dual Swedish-Colombian nationality) now lives in Prague and plays in a team championship for a club in the Czech Republic.

In his Newsweek article and his Chess.com interview, Carlsson speaks mostly about general problems of racism in society. As far as specific discrimination in chess is concerned, Carlsson presents three examples. The first, from early childhood, when someone threw a banana at him during a tournament. The second, when someone started to make monkey sounds and the third, relatively recently. In 2017, Pontus received an email from the manager of his local chess club in Sweden, sent to all team members and sponsors. The message cited Agatha Christie's novel which, first in the USA and then in other countries, came to bear the title *And Then There Were None*. However, the book's original title when it was first published in England, was *Ten Little Ni\*\*rs*, and it was this title that the manager used in his letter. Carlsson left the club in protest and reported the incident to the Swedish Chess Federation. The Federation found the action unacceptable and racist, but the grandmaster said that no action was taken against the perpetrator.

Very recently, Pavel Matocha, the well-known organiser and director of many chess tournaments in the Czech Republic, published an article dedicated to the problem. The article appeared in *Lidové noviny*, the oldest and highly influential newspaper in the country. In presenting these examples, Matocha reaches the logical conclusion that if, over his thirty-year career, Carlsson has encountered only the instances of racism he describes, chess surely deserves praise rather than reproach.

Even if many readers agreed with Matocha's arguments, they expressed this agreement only in private messages, worried about aggressive attacks from those following the latest trend. No one

who wrote to Pavel resolved to act publicly, while the critics, Carlsson among them, came straight out and declared Matocha a racist.

'Unfortunately, logical reasoning on this subject has little chance of success in the face of this current epidemic of hysteria,' Pavel laments.

And this is not an isolated example, either. Whilst being unable to present facts of actual racism in chess, advocates of the new trend switch to the problems in society which, although they do indeed exist, are by no means on the same scale as these people, mindful of their PR, like to exaggerate.

It is not by chance that the world's first black grandmaster and the famous chess commentator Maurice Ashley refused to discuss the matter when asked for comment.

Maurice knows better than anyone that the colour of his skin never caused him a problem when he played chess and, working as a commentator in this day and age, it has more likely been an advantage to him than a hindrance.

The scope of things that are now deemed racist has grown ever broader and it has gradually reached such an extent that one can now glean if someone is a racist based on hidden signals or even just looks, that only the thinnest-skinned types are likely to notice.

A good example is another black American, the chess master from Chicago Daniel Jones. He cannot recall any personal instances of racism in chess.

Jones speaks only of an inner discomfort when an opponent looks at him across the board, and that they feel superior, thinking: 'This victory should be easy...' (reading this, I got to thinking it was a good thing the American master never got to play Korchnoi, about whom many used to complain: 'During a game, Victor would look at his opponent as if they had cut up his entire family into tiny pieces').

The South African master Watu Kobese, whom I have watched play at many Olympiads, spent three and a half years in Germany. He says he also encountered racism there. Kobese recalls the discussions he held on the subject with his teachers, which usually ended with the question: If you dislike Europe so much, what are you still doing here? I don't know how you would interpret this advice; I don't find it illogical either, but the South African chess player perceived it as racist.

Kobese also recalls his experience in Russia. He expresses surprise to have encountered racism here, in a country that came out so passionately against apartheid. He relates how he once came to Russia for a tournament and a child turned to his mother on seeing him, to exclaim, 'Mummy, look, a monkey!' We don't know the mother's reaction, but do both these unfortunate examples have anything to do with chess?

In 1972, Dutch grandmaster Jan Hein Donner penned the witty column *The Chasm Between the Sexes*, which contained the following quote: 'The difference between the sexes is remarkable in chess, but not any more so, to my mind, than in any other field of cultural activity. Women cannot play chess, but they cannot paint either, or write, or philosophise. In fact, women have never thought or made anything worth considering. So chess is not to blame. But what is? First of all a woman is far more stupid than a man.'

Obviously, Donner received a host of responses but, with his wicked and provocative sense of humour, he responded, 'I have even been accused of discrimination. Donner forgot to include ni\*\*ers in his list. The list should appear as follows: women and ni\*\*ers cannot play chess because they are far more stupid than us, a reader has written from Amsterdam. This lady, I fear, has

understood me incorrectly. Ni\*\*rs can play chess; ni\*\*r women cannot. That is the difference.' And so on and so forth.

All of this took place half a century ago. One can only imagine what would have become of Donner had he written such a witty article today.

Nowadays, Alexander Kotov would have thought twice about naming his novel about the life of Alekhine White and Black. (Although not relevant to the subject at hand, Max Euwe, who knew the great Russian champion like no other, was short and to the point about this book, which has been read by generations of chess players in the Soviet Union, calling it an absolute falsification.)

The concept of BLACK IS OK! put forward in the last century by the Hungarian grandmaster András Adorján, also smells off. There is no need to pat blacks on the head! We don't want to be OK; from the outset, we are the same as you are!

Once, during joint analysis of the American team, Robert Byrne had opened over-zealously with an advance of his black pieces, and Bobby Fischer brought him down a peg: 'No, Mr Byrne. Black must first equalise the game!' But what can you say about Fischer? By that time, Bobby was already probably struggling with his mental health.

However, the question could be put to Boris Johnson. And in the sternest terms. We have already written that, although the British Prime Minister, by his own admission, is a rather mediocre chess player, he would never turn down the chance to take part in a chess happening.

But take a closer look: which colour does the British Prime Minister always prefer? Is that not a belch of the colonial past of a once-great empire?

Johnson took charge of the white pieces even at the opening of a children's festival, in a game with a young player. A coincidence? I don't think so.

They say that there was a game with Lev Gutman, where he was playing with white, which developed as follows: 1.Nf3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.d3 Nc6 4.d4?!?! The thing is that, from an early age, Gutman was a passionate advocate of the Grünfeld Defence, and he had simply wanted to launch his opening with a change of colour.

I'm curious: would the proponents of equal opportunities for both sides in chess have granted the grandmaster such an indulgence today? Or would things have been the other way round and he would be subjected to abuse for such a sophisticated act of mockery?

And what about Larry Kaufman's book?

The publishing house that released the American's heavy tome attempted to alleviate the guilt felt from the segregationist title, colouring the cover in black and, as you see, by blackening the white and whitening the black and rendering the white king prostrate as a sign of allegiance. However, will these pitiful, conciliatory attempts remain without public attention?

And even then, despite signs that read This is a Black Business, Black Owners and the like, suspended by American businesspeople on the doors and windows of their shops and restaurants, this didn't help them much: aggressive crowds stormed and looted these places just like all the rest.

Boris Avrukh, doubting that there is systemic racism in the United States and presuming that black Americans have 'even more than equal rights', has been subjected to targeted attacks in social media.

British Women's International Master Sabrina Chevannes commented on his post with the words, 'One thing is for sure, I'm never buying a book by Avrukh again. In fact, they're not even worth using as toilet roll. May just have a bonfire later...'

One doesn't have to agree with Avrukh's opinion, and you could say that he is still a very young American who has lived in the country for only a few years and who has a poor grasp of its history. One could argue with the grandmaster or even condemn his remarks. Sabrina's decision never to buy his books and not to use them even as toilet paper is her own affair (she has every right). However, arranging a public burning is something else altogether: we have seen the outcome of campaigns of this kind in 1930s Germany. The mass public demonstrations of popular anger during the time of the Soviet Union come to mind, as do the Red Guard reprisals in Communist China.

One of the world's most influential psychologists Paul Bloom comments, 'We empathise with the "us" and that is why we become more aggressive to the "them".'

'Research,' he goes on, 'has shown that those who call for empathy for one enormous group as a whole, simultaneously express militant aggression to others.' The manifestation of these feelings in the baying and disunited American society is now all too clear to see in everything.

The world's largest financial holding Morgan Chase has turned away from the traditional terms blacklist and whitelist. Millions of dollars and months of work are needed for such changes, but it is so worth it to join ranks with those declaring a relentless battle with racism.

The New York Times has decided henceforth to write the word black with a capital letter as a sign of respect for the black population. The newspaper published the corresponding statement on its website on 1 July, saying, 'We believe this style best conveys elements of shared history and identity and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover.'

The newspaper has long-since used the uppercase for the words Asian-American and Latino. The rule has recently spread to indigenous Indians and Eskimos too. Nevertheless, the word white remains in lowercase. The newspaper explained this as being a result of there currently being no cultural preconditions for writing this word any differently.

This plague has afflicted music groups as well, who are clamouring to change their names, even if millions of fans have grown accustomed to them. For example, the famous country music band Lady Antebellum will now be known simply as Lady A. The name Antebellum, the musicians declared, was too reminiscent of the Civil War and the black slaves in the southern states. And there are countless such cases.

The latest in the long line of those to change their name is the famous DJ and producer The Black Madonna Marea Stamper, who has now become The Blessed Madonna.

It surprises no one that serious magazines have long been publishing and readers have been actively discussing articles, voicing the opinion that Beethoven, although somewhat better than average, was not a composer of genius. He gained popularity only thanks to the white male majority, who determined whose works were those of a master and whose, were not. So, Beethoven was a master, right? they question. A master, meaning a boss? A gentleman? (These are other meanings of the word master, which evoke times of slavery according to new interpreters of the great composer's music.)

It's a good thing that it hasn't dawned on the people behind such theories that chess still features the title of master. Or, worse still, grandmaster. After all, the association with prominent plantation

and slave owners is no less obvious. With everything that is going on, it should come as no surprise that many estate agents no longer use the term master bedroom in their property descriptions.

Generations of children around the world who have enjoyed their favourite Eskimo ice creams will now have to forget the name, for it, too, is racist. The ice cream manufacturer has said that it is committed to racial equality and finds the name degrading for the indigenous population of Alaska.

On 22 August, Cleveland radio anchor Kyle Cornell was fired for using the term coloured people instead of people of colour when speaking about Vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris. Even after the Ohio journalist issued a public apology for potentially causing offence, the station's director was unbending; that is the price for altering a part of speech with the ed syllable in modern-day America.

This and many other instances could be taken as a not very smart joke if this hadn't been a reality.

Gary Garrels worked at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art for more than twenty years. Still, he was forced to resign recently after concluding a fateful Zoom meeting by saying, 'Don't worry, we will definitely still continue to collect white artists'. Staff members saw this as an instance of toxic ideology, related to white supremacy, gathered 500 signatures demanding his dismissal, and Garrels's fate was sealed.

Anti-racism has become a whip to crack over all objectors, without indulging in a discussion. The director's explanations that avoiding acquisitions of the work of white artists would result in the museum being guilty of reverse discrimination fell on deaf ears.

Let us not forget George Orwell, one of the most uncompromising figures in the fight against inequality, who said back in the 1930s, '...many Indians and Negroes display the normal [sic] colour prejudices in an inverted form.' Today, the writer would probably have been condemned, not only for raising the question, but also for using the 'N-word', that euphemism now known and understood by all.

One of the most prestigious American football clubs in the United States, the Washington Redskins, recently changed its name. Against the backdrop of off-the-charts political correctness, the word redskins was too offensive to Indians. Although the club's owner blustered 'over my dead body' at length, he was eventually also forced to yield to the sponsors' wishes and the aggressive charge of the movement. The club is now known simply as Washington.

No one is now likely to be surprised by deleted non-PC expressions from texts, written in a different era, when there were different standards, or by the censorship of the history of art, music, sport and everything else. Will it affect chess?

In 1892, one of the greatest masters of the latter part of the 19th century Joseph Blackburne declared that if a foreigner were permitted to play in the English championship, he would refuse to take part. Which is what happened: Emanuel Lasker played in that tournament and Blackburne was true to his word. In the light of today's views, the Englishman's actions also fail to appear *comme il faut*.

And what of it? Perhaps we should cross Joseph Henry Blackburne's name from the chess world?

American soccer player Samantha Murphy remained standing during a rendition of the US national anthem before her latest match. Believe me, she needed no little courage to do that when the entire country without exception was taking to kneeling as part of the new ritual.

After all, Samantha knew perfectly well what they do to those who are merely suspected of racism, and here she was for millions to see, recorded on film and photograph. To their credit, the management of North Carolina Courage, the club for which the young lady plays, displayed no reaction to her personal choice and the club website bore no mention of her action.

One of Michael Jackson's most popular songs, Black or White (1991) contains the words It don't matter if you're black or white. Jackson knew better than anyone what he was singing about, for he had experience of both colours. The transformation from a black child into the person he became did not happen overnight. First, his cheekbones were raised, then the shape of his nose, followed by a dramatic lightening of his skin tone. This was the same and yet a different Michael Jackson compared with the talented singer his fans knew when he was a young man.

At the end of his life, Jackson experienced a tough time: accusations of child molestation and articles about prominent court cases that never left the front pages. I think he wouldn't have had it any easier in our time either. I am not sure what is worse today - to be branded a paedophile or a black man who betrayed his race.

Monuments have been destroyed both in the United States and in countries of the Old World; monuments to people who are guilty only of having lived at another time.

However, people should probably be laying flowers at the monument to Henry Ford. So what that the automobile king sponsored the proven fake, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, published with a circulation of half a million copies? So what that he won the praise of Hitler himself in Mein Kampf and subsequently received the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle for Foreigners.

However, in response to the question on the colour of the first model of his car, Ford was short and concise: any colour, as long as it is black.

In concluding his interview, Pontus Carlsson said, 'Be honest to yourself. Accept there is a problem, and make sure you listen to each other.'

I accept that. There is indeed a problem. But it is only one of many problems now facing humanity. And it is not the overriding problem, for there are others that are more important. Life and death, for example. Especially today, faced with an anxious time that has befallen us all and to which there is no end in sight.

And as far as the Chess.com question is concerned, What can be done about racism in chess and beyond? at the very least it is inaccurate, for its first part already assumes that racism in chess is a universally acknowledged and established fact.

The film Amos and Andrew (1993), made over a quarter of a century ago, introduces public activist figures who could be called professional anti-racists. However, as the fight against racism soon became their profession, they became preoccupied not with justice, rather with their careers.

One of the film's central characters, played by Nicholas Cage, asks the successful black journalist who writes about racism what he does for a living. The journalist (played by Samuel L. Jackson) replies, 'I'm a thorn in the side of white racists [sic].'

'Apart from being a thorn in the side [of the white man], have you got a regular job?' the other man asks.

No one can prevent chess players from being a thorn in the side of 'white racists' or a thorn in the side of anything else for that matter. However, presenting chess as a case in point and raising the alarm about the situation in the world of our black and white armies and black and white boards is not only unethical, but it does not reflect reality either. This is because, as Matocha writes in the above-mentioned article, 'We cannot talk about any systemic racism existing in chess related to individuals or organisations.'

A recently published open letter by 150 writers, academics and activists recognises that heightened attention to racial justice as a whole is a positive thing. At the same time, they assert that this attention should not lead to a restriction of debate when Editors are fired for running controversial pieces; books are withdrawn for alleged inauthenticity; journalists are barred from writing on certain topics; professors are investigated for quoting works of literature in class; a researcher is fired for circulating a peer-reviewed academic study; and the heads of organisations are ousted for what are sometimes just clumsy mistakes.

Political correctness, which came about from respect and sensitivity, has gradually transformed into a kind of social censorship and, from this, we get self-censorship. Self-censorship, not only of writers and journalists, but of the representatives of many other fields of activity.

With hand on heart, I admit that, in writing these lines, I too resorted to self-censorship, albeit in microscopic doses, although the content of the text does speak for itself. I am well aware that my reasoning and arguments will be heeded by those on the aggressive side, who prefer to dissolve facts in emotions.

The author of these lines could have tried to hide behind some odd title but, let's face it, his position is as clear as day and the only word the facts he has presented will evoke is 'racist', and that will be the end of any discussion.

How can I not recall the Dutch chess master who, in response to all reasoning that failed to fall in line with his own theories, was short and to the point: 'Fascist! Take him out and shoot him!'

Two and a half thousand years ago, they put an end to democracy in Athens when Pisistratus came to power and ruled like a tyrant. No one was brave enough to stand for the protection of the law and only Solon came each day to the Agora to make daring speeches. 'What do you hope to achieve?' the Athenian people asked the Greek wise man. 'Old age,' Solon replied.

Embarking on an article like this at a time where the political correctness and uproar of the anti-racism campaign, now affecting chess, have reached laughable degrees, I am well aware I am walking on thin ice and I am prepared to face ostracism.

But what can I do? I will remember the words of the ancient philosopher. It has to be said, of course, that despite all his courage, Solon still donned a helmet and prepared to defend himself.

I too will lock my door. I will not answer the telephone. I will turn off the Internet. I will put on a mask. I will stock up on provisions and I will sit out this time of troubles.