

LETTERS

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

Slavic Review publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* website with opportunities for further discussion. Letters may be submitted by e-mail, but a signed copy on official letterhead or with a complete return address must follow. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I recently came across a review of my book, *Bringing Stalin Back In: Memory Politics and the Creation of a Useable Past in Putin's Russia* by David Brandenberger in *Slavic Review*, and was troubled by the mischaracterization of my main findings.

Brandenberger portrays my book as asserting that Russian state has a hegemonic “virtual monopoly” over discourse formulation, which quells all dissenting voices. Nowhere do I say this, however, and I take considerable pains to note that this is specifically NOT the case. The Russian state’s attempts at discourse control are so troublesome precisely because they are not (usually) overt or monolithic, and therefore do not trigger warning mechanisms that otherwise might cause one to doubt, disregard, or contradict state narratives. I note this on the very first page of the preface. Regarding the existence of alternative narrative voices, nowhere do I say that these do not exist. Rather, I show that these narratives are marginalized through different co-optation strategies, limiting their number, and disadvantaging those who champion them when seeking discursive access. This was the point of an entire chapter comparing the Memorial and Nashi organizations. Brandenberger makes other points about aspects of my work that I take no issue with. For example, my discussion of the educational sphere should have been expressed as part of the trend toward more concrete measures of state control, culminating in the educational reforms of 2013. It is helpful to be taken to task, but it should be for things I am actually saying.

Kind regards,
Todd

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David Brandenburger responds:

In my review of Todd Nelson's provocative 2019 monograph, I expressed enthusiasm for the book's use of Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and as such did not find it to posit the existence of some sort of monolithic propaganda state or all-powerful censor. That said, I did find this refreshingly nuanced analysis of official messaging to exaggerate the control that the Russian government wields over popular historical memory today.

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