

Second Visit: Learn How to Play Chess

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It is Saturday April 28 around 3:50pm as I arrive at the Chess place on 135th and 5th Ave. the area is a little bit noisy because of different sporting activities taking place at the Abraham Lincoln Playground. Some boys are playing basketball, spitting, constantly uttering the "f-word" and occasionally moving up their tops to reveal their well built bodies. Some teenagers (both boys and girls) are sitting around the pitch as if they were paying spectators.

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I constantly look at my cellphone clock to see if John is just late or not coming at all. As time goes by without him showing up I decide to observe the on-going games in the basketball pitch. This time all the chessboards are in use. There are six older men. Two of them are just waiting for their turn to play while the two pairs fully apply themselves to the game. The man that John described as the owner of the place is nowhere to be seen today. I sit closely to directly what they are doing but instead of only paying attention what they are doing, which is obviously playing chess, I try to listen to what they are saying as they play. To my surprise, these men rarely talk. One man, though, seems to be entirely drawn to the game as he talks to himself when his term to play comes. For 45 minutes that I am here these men are not joined any other group. Instead a pair gives way to the one that has been waiting. I notice that even though everyone is black there is one Chinese man.

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I do not think these guys not to mention asking them questions. Surprisingly, no one seems to care or bothered by presence. I am sitting so close to them that I can see

how things proceed and hear everything they say. Today the focus seems to be on chess. No one is playing drums or the bongos. In both chess and basketball playing I have not seen females, it is only men. The streets are busy with well dressed people [one would assume that they are from church]. As I leave the place I think about what the day would have been with John there teaching me chess. I still have not gotten to know exactly what the mission of this "place" is.