


changing television, makes *Three Blind Mice* a tour de force of reporting and an example of what business journalism should be. So why is everyone complaining?

The overnight verdict on Auletta's book is that it's longwinded and underedited. Hogwash. Sure, you could cut 50 or 100 of its 600 pages and no one would notice. But the same is true of any Dickens novel. When a book's ambition is to paint an entire industry, there must be at its heart a supreme effort of reporting and, equally important, a bias to err on the side of inclusion. Every business—not just “glamorous” ones like television—has its Dickensian story waiting to be spun. Ambitious journalists with the stamina to unearth them should eye Auletta's example and find their own lode to mine.

In Auletta's case, all the data builds to pretty damaging effect. If you already thought network news basically consisted of blow-dried video stenography, Auletta proves you weren't jaded enough. Imagine you're a network owner who must cut costs to survive. The news division's budget, you learn, has tripled between 1978 and 1987, from \$100 to \$300 million. As a result, the division is now losing more than \$50 million per year. Meanwhile; CNN is putting on 24 hours of news daily (compared to the network's 3 to 4 hours) at one third of your annual cost and is making a healthy profit to boot. Rational people presented with these facts know there's room to cut—with no impact on “quality.”

Even if they lack other skills, network news organizations are geniuses at publicizing any threat to their bureaucracy and controlling the spin on their own stories. After all, that's their business. Thus they succeed in peddling the preposterous myth that any attempt to make the network news run efficiently actually threatens the workings of democracy itself.

Auletta's reporting reveals how hollow this claim really is. Consider this: None of the networks conducted any internal post-mortem on their vacuous campaign coverage in 1988. ABC has difficulty getting correspondents to volunteer for “American Agenda” pieces because it means giving up a nightly fix of airtime to prepare



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longer, more substantive segments. And what about Dan Rather's famous walk off the set, which resulted in CBS going dark for six minutes and was billed internally as a protest over some serious threat to “news values”? That's true only if you think postponing footage of the Pope's visit to Miami in favor of the finale of a tennis match could have undermined the republic.

—*Matthew Miller*

The Kingfish and His Realm: The Life and Times of Huey P. Long. William Ivy Hair. *Louisiana State University Press*, \$24.95. For me, born in Louisiana just after the Second World War, the question is at once hypothetical and unavoidable. Ask yourself, as I have many times, would you have voted for Huey Long?

Put yourself in Louisiana just before the Great Depression, a time of minimalist government, concentrated eco-

nomic power, and rampant poverty, and consider the real-life choices offered to voters when Long ran for governor and for U.S. senator. While struggling with that question helps deepen your understanding of history, it's self-revealing as well.

The question impels you to come to terms with incidents such as the clash between Long and the Shreveport establishment in 1928, the first year of his one-term governorship. The local school board had declined to accept the free textbooks that Long had prod- ded the legislature to provide—too humiliating to take such charity, the community's leaders said. At the same time, Shreveport wanted the legisla- ture to approve the transfer of 80 acres of land for the Army Air Corps to build a new base just outside the city.

Long used the leverage. He not only informed Shreveport that he wouldn't support the land transfer until the free textbooks were distributed, but he also demanded, among other things, that

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its representatives support all his bills in a special session of the legislature. In the end, the schoolchildren got their free books and Shreveport got its air base. "I didn't coerce them," Long said. "I stomped them."

Do you vote for the Huey Long who provides free school books, or do you vote against the Huey Long who wants to "stomp" his adversaries into submission? Hair, a professor of history at Georgia College in Milledgeville, accentuates the negative, delivering a case, in effect, for voting against Long. Long emerges as a dictator with nasty nicknames for his many enemies and with little interest in promoting fundamental change in the condition of blacks in a rigidly segregated society. Hair writes that the "conclusion is inescapable that everything he did in politics was for the purpose of augmenting his own power."

In arriving at that judgment, Hair seems to have an implicit goal: to rebut the treatment of Long in T. Harry Williams's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Huey Long*, published in 1969. Williams, writes Hair, was

"overly sympathetic to Long." To be sure, Williams is more sympathetic than Hair, but the Williams biography is richer in analysis. Both Hair and Williams, for example, tell the textbook-air base story. Hair figures that Long was "mainly bluffing" in issuing demands, and he drops the story after repeating the "I stomped them" quote. Williams points out that Shreveport's leaders "did not think the state should give anything to the people" and that they "epitomized in extreme degree the psychology of conservatives of their class." Williams assesses Long's actions as "those of a typical pragmatic American politician" who sought a compromise and whose "fierce threats were only strategy, designed to frighten his foes."

Hair might have come closer to his goal of rebutting Williams had he achieved fully his explicit purpose—that is, to tell the Long story in the broader context of the economic, political, and racial situation of Louisiana in the twenties and thirties, to put the emphasis more on the "times" than on the "life." He succeeds only to a limited extent.

His book offers a chilling account of the deep-down racism that ran rampant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it serves as a reminder of the historical roots of the forces that have allowed David Duke, even with Klan and Nazi ties on his resume, to emerge now as a state legislator from a New Orleans suburb. Hair also reports that when Long became governor, Louisiana had only 331 miles of paved roads and no bridges over the Mississippi River.

Ultimately, however, Hair is more fascinated with Long's life than his times. And that story is indeed one of the most fascinating of twentieth century America—a story of a restless soul, an obsessive personality, a hunger for power, and the will to use it. From age 25 to 42, Long became a utilities regulator, won one term as governor, barely survived an impeachment, won a U.S. Senate seat even before completing his term as governor, ruled Louisiana from the Senate, and sought to position himself as a political threat to President Franklin Roosevelt.

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Then, in September 1935, he was struck down by an assassin in the skyscraper state capitol he had built. Dr. Carl A. Weiss, who shot Long, was married to the daughter of an anti-Long judge, and Hair claims Weiss was motivated by a rumor that Long was preparing to revive a "racial slur" that his wife's family had black blood. "In the Louisiana of 1935, few calamities could be worse than being stigmatized as 'colored,'" Hair writes.

Unfortunately, Hair does not explore in sufficient depth the political and economic structures that existed in Louisiana when Long burst onto the scene. What exactly was the role and power of Standard Oil in the state? How did the New Orleans political machine function, and what was its base? What economic interests swayed the legislature before Long wrested control for himself? While Long financed his political operations by skimming a percentage of his appointees' government salaries and placing the money in the infamous "deducts box," how did the opposition forces finance their politics? What was the gap between rich and poor, and what were the conditions of everyday life in Louisiana just before and during the Depression? In terms of context, Hair does not significantly improve upon Williams's biography or Alan Brinkley's *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*.

In the self-examination that goes into deciding how you might have voted, it is crucial to know not only Long but also his opposition. If it is unsettling to nineties sensibilities to think that a vote for Long is remotely possible, was there any other choice available to a Louisiana voter not part of the conservative, affluent elite? Was another choice possible for a voter who wanted a government that would respond to genuine human needs?

At the time of Long's death, a third force was emerging—the force of the New Deal. The Roosevelt White House played political hard ball against Long, but it also began delivering hope and assistance to people striving to make ends meet. Had Long lived longer, the New Deal may well

have coopted him and shown Louisiana voters that they need not continue to vote for a candidate with dictatorial tendencies.

Long gave voice to aspirations that had gone unfulfilled—at least until Roosevelt's Democratic party responded. Circumstances have changed dramatically in the past half century—America, and even Louisiana, has a more middle-class electorate—but an alienation and an economic uneasiness once again course through the body politic, and once again they await a compelling response from the Democratic party.

—Ferrel Guillory

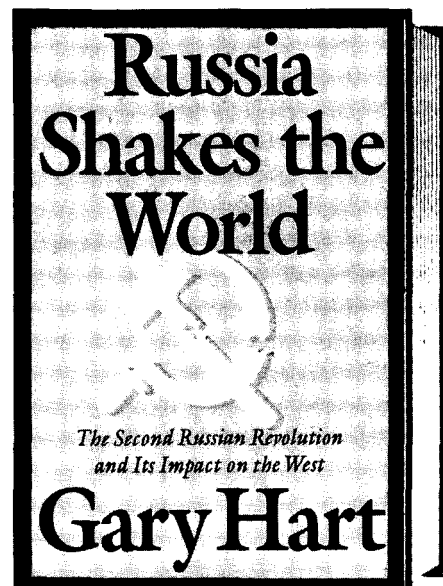
Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World. David Rieff. *Simon & Schuster*, \$20. I was hoping this guy would at least spare us the kosher burrito, that neatly wrapped foodstuff sold conveniently near the *Los Angeles Times* office building that writers love to use as a metaphor for Los Angeles. And close to the end of this book, which is devoted to examining the new influx of immigrants here, I began to get excited: Although he hadn't missed many other clichés about Los Angeles, Rieff hadn't raised the specter of the kosher burrito one time. Then he began telling us about a breakfast he'd had with a "disting-

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