

tion's Patriot Act.

Whatever that kind of accommodation may be doing to Laura Bush's psyche (and she's not about to tell), this arrangement works beautifully for her husband. In his words, "I have the best wife for the line of work I am in. She doesn't try to steal the limelight." And another time: "Laura is the perfect complement to a camera hog like me." So, when she's in her official capacity, she simply takes her intelligence underground. At times, the results are poignant—and, to Gerhart, disturbing.

"As I watched Laura Bush in those first months moving through her public events, I noticed how much more animated and commanding she was when acting solo. When she traveled with the president, she faded to background. It made me wince..." And she also observed that when Laura Bush spoke in her official capacity or about her relationship to the president, she reverted to simple sentences, reminiscent of the Dick-and-Jane primers. On her initial impressions of her future husband: "I thought he was fun. I also thought he was really cute. George is very fun. He's also slightly outrageous once in a while in a very funny and fun way, and I found that a lot of fun."

But when she talked about books, or libraries, or education—her passions—her sentences grew far more complex. They became those of an accomplished grown-up.

Is it reasonable to believe that thinking 21st century women will keep playing this strange role for eight years (or even four)? Is it still acceptable for an American institution to insist, however implicitly, that a woman's survival in her "job" include near-complete sublimation of her ideas? Is this only a problem when husband and wife are such wildly different people?

Gerhart quotes Hillary Clinton on the subject: Being First Lady "is really a complicated calculation. It's very difficult." And as gender roles grow farther and farther removed from the Mamie Eisenhower model ("Ike runs the country and I turn the lamb chops"), it's not going to get any easier.

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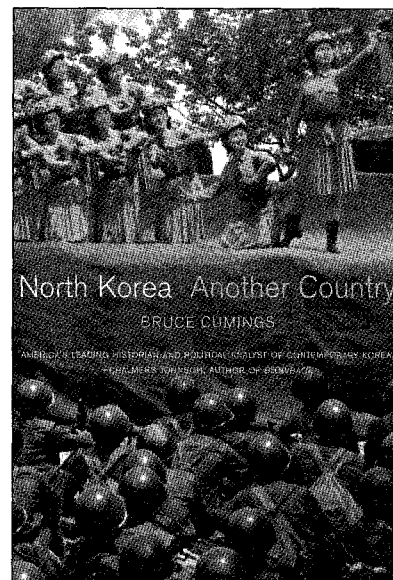
Pacific Hieroglyphic

What the Bush administration doesn't know about North Korea.

By Soyoung Ho

Smart diplomacy has always required an empathetic understanding of the adversary's point of view as well as a clear-eyed sense of one's own interests—and using the latter to advance the former. But it can be hard to get the balance right. Too much empathy and one becomes captive to the rival's agenda. Too little, and one makes dumb mistakes.

Exhibit A of the latter danger is the Bush administration's decision in December 2002 to suspend fuel-oil shipments to North Korea after learning that the regime was secretly enriching uranium. The administration hardliners who pushed the decision had little specialized knowledge of the Korean Peninsula; but according to *The Washington Post*, they had been convinced by reports from a single defector that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's hold on power was shaky, and that his regime might collapse if the United States stood tough. The defector turned out to be unreliable, and the North Koreans reacted with a heedless fury that anyone who knew anything about that regime could have predicted. They expelled international inspectors who had been monitoring plutonium from a nuclear facility shuttered in a deal brokered by the Clinton administration, and subsequently withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. This plutonium gave Kim the ability to make nuclear



North Korea: Another Country

By Bruce Cumings

The New Press, \$24.95

weapons quickly (the uranium route would have taken years), and indications are that he has now done so. Meanwhile, the Bush administration, having vowed not to negotiate with North Korea, is now doing just that—though it will be difficult even to get matters back to where they stood last year (with Pyongyang's plutonium under international lock and key).

This time, administration negotiators might want to pick up a copy of *North Korea: Another Country* by University of Chicago scholar Bruce Cumings. Though he falls into the trap of feeling too great an empathy, Cumings

is one of the few American experts who read Korean and possess a deep, sophisticated grasp of modern Korean history and culture. Hence, his book is full of insights that help explain *why* Pyongyang behaves as it does—and possible clues to how to make it behave better.

Perhaps the book's biggest revelation, one little known even to most Western historians of the region, is the depth of the suffering visited on North Korea by the Korean War. Cumings describes the ferocious and sustained air campaign that virtually leveled the entire country and took millions of civilian lives. Cumings details horrific effects of fire bombings on a man he encountered in 1968 in South Korea: He "had a peculiar purple crust on every visible part of his skin ... He was bald, he had no ears or lips, and his eyes, lacking lids, were a grayish-white, with no pupils ... I did not know ... that this purplish crust resulted from a drenching with napalm, after which the untreated victim's body was left to somehow cure itself." The public's memory of this real and rather recent devastation, plus its profound awareness of the peninsula's long record of brutal invasion over the past seven centuries, help sustain support for, or at least compliance with, the regime and its policies. The ability to manipulate these public memories is one reason why the regime may be less prone to collapse than the hawks predicted. The regime has so far maintained its governing system with total isolation unprecedented in world history, in part by cunningly and ruthlessly indoctrinating its people. Cumings vividly captures the doctrine of *juche* or self-reliance whose insane obsessiveness breeds the pathological isolationism we see. This is further reinforced by the North Koreans' fear that the South and its allies will not hesitate to use nuclear weapons against them—a belief accentuated by Bush's inclusion of North Korea as part of the "axis of evil."

With so little information coming out of the hermit kingdom, policymakers and the American media tend to spin those few hints we do get into narratives that reinforce the craziness

that all glimpses of North Korean behavior suggest to outsiders. For example, American media profiles of Kim Jong Il portray him as a pudgy, five-foot-nothing hereditary dictator with a perm and a taste for tall Swedish blondes, French wine, and haute cuisine. Cumings paints quite a different picture. "Kim is a homebody who ... doesn't drink much, works at home in his pajamas, scribbling comments in the margins of the endless reams of documents brought to him in gray briefcases by his aides ... He is prudish and shy, and like most Korean fathers, hopelessly devoted to his son and the other children in his household." In truth, both the media and Cumings are probably right, though neither one captures the entire picture. Korean society—North and South—has long allowed men of means to live double lives as both doting fathers and carousing womanizers. South Korea, for instance, is packed with room salons—ultra expensive (tabs can run up to \$1,500 for two) deluxe bars with private rooms, where wealthy or powerful men, single and married alike, relax after a hard day's work in the company of attractive young women, drinking,

singing, and dancing. Corporate Korea patronizes these salons to win contracts as standard business practice. The escapades are a form of patriarchy, men's rule over women, dominant in East Asian cultures. Kim, in this sense, is just behaving like a typical Korean male hotshot.

For all of his insights, however, Cumings—who professes empathy for the underdog—has written an apologia for a regime that brutalizes its citizens, is openly hostile to the United States and South Korea, and heedless of international law. In particular, although he does not condone Kim Jong Il's gulag, Cumings discusses a system of family support at labor camps that allows prisoners to survive. But can one gloss over systematic executions, distorted food rations that exacerbate starvation, and perverted idolatry of its leader? The trick for wise policymakers reading *North Korea: Another Country* is to look past the apologetics in order to glean valuable insights that can't be found in memos from administration hawks who make ignorance about the world a virtue.

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Rod Coddington

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il

Paper Boy

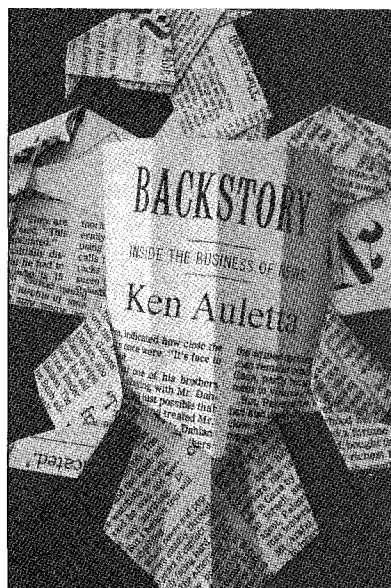
Ken Auletta's Gotham-centric musings on the media.

By James Warren

One can safely wager that Roger Ailes, the remarkably successful uberfuhrer of FOX News, frowns on Ken Auletta, media writer for *The New Yorker*. In a revealing portrait of Ailes and FOX included in *Backstory*, Auletta captures the metaphysical absurdity of their "We Report, You Decide" marketing mantra and lures the brainy, combative boss to rail about stuffy, self-righteous, liberal-dominated media elites at the very time Auletta gently disdains Fox in a manner common to self-righteous, liberal members of the media elite. He even lets a Fox competitor, CNN's Aaron Brown, whom Ailes scornfully lampoons on air for resembling a dentist, get the last, and negative, word. Ouch.

That both would talk to Auletta is no surprise since the reporter's Larry King aplomb in drawing A-listers into his interrogations is the hallmark of an author's effective, unthreatening modus operandi which, (and I speak having submitted to it myself), appears to have been learned at the Brian Lamb School of Interrogation. Diligence and a poker face have served him in good stead, as one is reminded in what is largely a compilation of revealing *New Yorker* stories of the past decade.

Indeed, one of the oldest, a 1993 look at changes at *The New York Times* under a then-new publisher, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr., may be



Backstory-Inside the business of news

By Ken Auletta

The Penguin Press, \$24.95

more insightful now than at the time. Auletta takes us on a journey through the paper's attempt to shake up a hidebound culture and improve internal communication, replete with touchy-feely retreats for executives of the nation's premier news organization. A task force had even been assembled to democratize the institution and alter a fear-laden, top-down culture. In light of the Jayson Blair episode, which at the very least revealed that the hierarchy's monarchical top was insulated against admonitions from below essentially to "stop this guy before he kills!," it would appear that very little was learned.

It's the same with a wonderful

1994 recitation of the "fee speech" which is a fixture of a top sliver of the Washington press, with four-and-five figure speaking fees common for stars and hacks alike, assuming the latter regularly appear on television. Cokie Roberts, Robert Novak, Mark Shields, William Safire, Tim Russert, Fred Barnes, Chris Wallace, Morton Kondracke, Wolf Blitzer, Gloria Borger, the list went on and on and on, back then, and the buck-raking is unabated today. Shaking his head all the way, Auletta heard the strained, "I'm not an elected official" defense, which is matched by the "I don't say anything any different than I would on the air or my column." It's situational ethics run amok, a straining to justify unadulterated greed and ethical conflicts generated by first-class airfares and chauffeured sedans to and from the airport. It's no less unseemly than the craving of well-known reporters and anchors to gain the good will of radio's Don Imus, a symbiosis Auletta details in another piece, where he catches the opinion-flinging journalists' scripted "ad-libs" and frequent disdain for those they cover, all to the pleasure of the cannily manipulative Imus, puppeteer of newsies craving designation as hip.

Not all of Auletta's best evinces old but timeless quality, since he tracks developments of distinctly recent vintage, notably the coming of the Internet and the Keystone Kops hunt for instant riches. His account of the creation of what was originally called InsideDope.com (later Inside.com), envisioned as "a must-read online site for members of the cultural elite," is a New York-based saga of unadulterated hubris and wasted millions, on a par with any from Silicon Valley's golden age. It also comes with an important lesson about trying to sell content on the Internet: namely that getting online subscriptions remains a vexing challenge for entrepreneurs and Big Media alike. As one investor with an uneven track record tells the author, "The mentality of the information seeker is: I can find it if I