



The Korean War: A History (Modern Library Chronicles)

By Bruce Cumings

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A BRACING ACCOUNT OF A WAR THAT IS EITHER MISUNDERSTOOD, FORGOTTEN, OR WILLFULLY IGNORED

For Americans, it was a discrete conflict lasting from 1950 to 1953. But for the Asian world the Korean War was a generations-long struggle that still haunts contemporary events. With access to new evidence and secret materials from both here and abroad, including an archive of captured North Korean documents, Bruce Cumings reveals the war as it was actually fought. He describes its origin as a civil war, preordained long before the first shots were fired in June 1950 by lingering fury over Japan's occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. Cumings then shares the neglected history of America's post-World War II occupation of Korea, reveals untold stories of bloody insurgencies and rebellions, and tells of the United States officially entering the action on the side of the South, exposing as never before the appalling massacres and atrocities committed on all sides.

Elegantly written and blisteringly honest, *The Korean War* is, like the war it illuminates, brief, devastating, and essential.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For many, the Korean War is remembered more for Hawkeye and Klinger than General MacArthur and Syngman Rhee. But for Cumings (*Korea's Place in the Sun*), professor at the University of Chicago, the critical issue is not one of memory, but of understanding. In this devastating work he shows how little the U.S. knew about who it was fighting, why it was fighting, and even how it was fighting. Though the North Koreans had a reputation for viciousness, according to Cumings, U.S. soldiers actually engaged in more civilian massacres (including dropping over half a million tons of bombs and thousands of tons of napalm, more than was dropped on the entire Pacific theatre in World War II, almost indiscriminately). Cumings deftly reveals how Korea was a clear precursor to Vietnam: a divided country, fighting a long anti-colonial war with a committed and underestimated enemy; enter the U.S., efforts go poorly, disillusionment spreads among soldiers, and lies are told at top levels in an attempt to ignore or obfuscate a relentless stream of bad news. For those who like their truth unvarnished, Cumings's history will be a fresh, welcome take on events that seemed to have long been settled. (Aug.)

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From [Booklist](#)

An academic specialist on Korean history, Cumings believes Americans have amnesia about the Korean War of 1950–53. Or is it the Korean War of 1931 to the present? Cumings goes back that far for an origin to hostilities, seating them in the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and characterizing what happened in June 1950 as an intensification of a Korean civil war, though one definitely escalated by North Korea. These contexts, including the American occupation of South Korea from 1945–48, are more important in Cumings' treatment than the specifically military history of the war, which is dominant in popular American memory of the war. The picture Cumings presents does not flatter American policies, which take hits for supporting a ruthless South Korean government and for destroying North Korean cities. Chronicling atrocities perpetrated by the South, Cummings does not exonerate those committed by the North; the comparison serves his proposition that America intervened in a civil war, to its detriment. Cumings' historical expertise will be highly informative background material for those watching the current explosive potential of the North Korean situation. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

“A powerful revisionist history . . . a sobering corrective.”—*The New York Times*

“Worth reading . . . This work raises the question of what Korea can tell us about the outlook for Iraq and Afghanistan.”—*Financial Times*

“Well-sourced [and] elegantly presented.”—*The Wall Street Journal*

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