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## Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950

*Bruce Cumings*

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**Bruce Cumings : Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950:

30 of 51 people found the following review helpful. A Readable History of Modern Korea... and U.S. PolicyBy A CustomerThis is a popular edition of the causes of the Korean War by the author of the most exhaustive and well-researched analyses of the causes of that "conflict," which in the American psyche, mistakenly begins in June, 1950. The dynamics of the origins of this war are rationally explained within the context of the Korean people's strivings for independence before and after liberation from overt Japanese military and colonial rule in 1945. This book includes important mention of an issue of very great concern in Korea these days of the secrets of the American military occupation from 1945 to 1950 during which time the U.S. military forces (according to recently declassified information) oversaw the operations of the right-wing death squads of the Northwest Youth and the Korean National Police. The most egregious of these incidences was a massacre on Cheju Island of suspected communists which amounted to massive firing squads of tens of thousands of village men, women, children and the elderly, an incident referred to universally as Sa-sam-sa-t'ae (the April 3rd massacre), which took place in the first weeks of April, 1948. It is an issue which Americans will be hearing much more about in coming days... That was before the entire country was destroyed and as many as 4 million Koreans killed in blanket bombing operations , while subjected to the first

massive military application of Agent Orange, and suspected employment of experimental biological warfare methods, all in a backwards military stratagem of making the country safe for democracy by making it entirely useless and unlivable for anyone... Korea's Place in the Sun offers a detailed overview of the dynamics of that period from a diplomatic and economic perspective, while choosing to omit any discussion of popular political opposition to the war in the U.S. and internationally. The peace movement had been co-opted by Dean Acheson who cleverly named it a "peace offensive" by the Soviet Union. Having said this, the U.S. refused all offers to peacefully resolve the Korean conflict that were made by the Soviet Union as some devious Comintern-inspired plot. American international peace efforts are best remembered in Paul Robeson's remark at the Paris Peace Conference in 1949 that Black U.S. workers would not fight in a war against other working people, even if they were Russians and they were supposed to be our 'enemy.' For this statement, he was nearly tried for treason, but it gets no mention in Cumings' history. As with many a history involving Black Americans, it is categorized 'only' as "African-American history." The author contends that the scope of this book is sufficient as a treatment of 'good' and 'bad' liberals and cold war warriors of that period; yet there is a superficial attempt to cover opposition to the war on the left in another volume, *Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2, in one brief reference to a relatively obscure independent socialist named Scott Nearing, as being the 'only one' who knew about Acheson's "spring offensive." Nearing was better known for his philosophy of "living simply in the woods," and for books by he and his wife on their owner-builder housebuilding experiences. There is no mention of the mainstays of the left, as in Henry Wallace's campaign for president on the Progressive ticket in 1948, based entirely on calls for no war. Neither is there any reference to W.E.B. DuBois' formation of the Peace Information Center and subsequent arrest or the campaign for circulation of the Stockholm Peace Petition by DuBois, Albert Einstein, and other notables to ban the use and manufacture of nuclear weapons of mass destruction internationally. Since democracies are not based merely on diplomatic and economic considerations, but also on the forces of public opinion, I considered the omission of that perspective to take away from what might otherwise be considered a very complete history. Public opinion and propaganda were forces which U.S. policymakers did not overlook in defining any and all criticism as being tantamount to disturbing the stability of government and society, thus providing a rationale for censorship and criminalization of dissent. This book further exemplifies how none are willing to tackle the difficult task of criticizing Stalinism and those who supported his policies while leaving room to appreciate many of the same who had the personal and intellectual fortitude to make a moral stance in an atmosphere of terrifying political 'purification' here at home in the Smith-McCarran Act and HUAC hearings. These hearings mirrored the Stalinist purges with the destruction of lives and careers for no good reason, and culminated in the summary execution of the Rosenbergs. Cumings' latest work comparatively illustrates how Korea developed as a world industrial economy, and how that development was skewed by colonial structures as well as benefited by infrastructure development through Japanese investment in this outer 'frontier.' From conversations and correspondence with various Korean scholars and journalists, I have learned that many feel repelled by this argument due to patriotic sensibilities every bit as much as from the very suggestion that such a cruel and racist military occupation could be credited for benefiting the Korean nation overall. Cumings would not, however, be the first to make this assertion, as a visiting Korean history professor from Humboldt University in Berlin who was on fellowship to Berkeley in 1989-90 named Ingeborg Goethel made the same point in her lectures. Although a very good case is made for understanding Korea as a civil war waiting to happen from internal healing processes and age-old land tenure and taxation struggles, there is a failure to put it in the context of worldwide similar emergence of many countries on various continents who also found themselves suddenly released from colonial subservience and for whom DuBois and other peace activists urged that we had a moral obligation to support their individual struggles for national independence and their pursuit of their own cultural destinies, according to arguments he presented as a delegate to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco.<sup>10</sup> of 21 people found the following review helpful. Did Cumings write volume one? By Devil's Advocate In volume one we have nothing but crap from Cumings, and the book reads like socio-cultural and statistical study of Korea after the Japanese surrender, a lot of boring, dry facts. But in volume 2 Cumings did a much better job on the politics of the war, though I find his distinction between rollback and containment a bit too forced. You can forget about volume one, just buy volume 2 to get to one version of the causes, and consequences of the Korean War from a revisionist perspective, with which Cumings points out that the ROK was a puppet regime run by Japanese colonization era collaborationists and war time traitors (ethnic Korean police and Imperial Japanese Army members), who were constantly raiding North Korea to provoke a war of unification, while the DPRK was run by communist partisans who were the only ones fighting the Japs (as well as the Chinese Nationalists in China), whose desire to unify Korea under her own brand of Stalinist communism, led her to respond to the constant provocations, raids and incursions by the ROKA across the 38th Parallel with a massive counterattack once her volunteers returned from China, and that the unexpected collapse of the ROKA in turn led to a full scale invasion on her own initiative. There are food for thought in Volume 2 about the duplicity, complicity and treachery of the ROK, the Chinese nationalist, McArthur and the US Army and CIT in enlisting the defeated Japs to re-invade China and Korea, all in the name of democracy!<sup>8</sup> of 15 people found the following review helpful. Sloppy Research By Edward C. Parmenter *Origins of the Korean War*, Vol. 2: *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* On page 614, his statement about the US knowing about the attack in

advance is a word for word repeat of I.F. Stone's on page 2 of his "The Hidden History of the Korean War". In both cases, there is no documentation for that statement. The mere fact that the largest single evacuation of people was by a Norwegian freighter, the Reinholt, which evacuated 676 persons on a ship with sleeping and toilet accommodations for 10 men supports my contention that there was no advance placement of ships for evacuation because if there had been, something with better accommodations would have been provided. The Reinholt had just unloaded its cargo of fertilizer. On that same page, he writes that, as another proof that the US knew of the upcoming attack, that five days before the attack, General Ridgeway was looking to divert from Indo-China to Korea, military aid items such as Naval "Hellcats, among other things. Cumings has an endnote 119 after this statement. That endnote specifies a box number for G-3 files but at the end of the citation he writes that he was unable to find the document. To find any document at the National Archives, you need Records Group, Stack Area, Row, Compartment and Shelf numbers in addition to a box number or numbers. My question is: If he could not find a source document, why even write about something which at this point, is pure speculation on his part? If this statement were factual, Ridgeway should also have been trying to find out how many Hellcat pilots and ground crews were available. Information about the Reinholt came from the G-1 Daily logs of the 24th Infantry Division for June 1950. On page 659, in the first full paragraph, he writes that when the KPA (Korean Peoples Army) threatened a full envelopment as early as July 26th, General Walker ordered a military withdrawal from Taegu and that the next day, MacArthur flew to Korea and demanded that further withdrawals cease, and that shortly thereafter the 2d Infantry Division landed at Pusan and was rushed to the line at Chinju. First, There was NO military withdrawal from Taegu. Second, MacArthur did NOT tell General Walker to cease any more withdrawals. General Walker did not issue his "Stand or Die" order until July 29th. Had MacArthur given him that ultimatum on July 27th, Walker would not have delayed for two days to issue his order. Third, the 29th Infantry Regiment arrived in Korea on July 25th and was attached to the 19th Infantry Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division. They moved to the Hadong, Anui and Chinju area with the First Battalion of the 19th Regiment arriving there by 5 PM (1700 hours) on July 27th (The same day that MacArthur Arrived in Korea to see General Walker). At NO time did any elements of the 2d Infantry Division get within 30 miles of Chinju. When I confronted Professor Cumings with this documentation, he had two comments: "I wish I had this information 25 years ago." and "I was not doing military history." Most of the documents supporting this information was declassified and available to anyone well prior to 1970. On page 651 he wrote that by September 8, 1950, MacArthur had been sent all available combat trained units except the 82d Airborne. The U.S. also had fully trained and staffed combat units in Europe, but maybe Professor Cumings meant to say ..stationed in the U.S. The 11th Airborne Division was also fully trained and staffed, but it also remained in the U.S. The 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 11th Airborne was not sent to Korea until early October 1950. They did not make their first combat drop until late October 1950. Many of Professor Cumings end notes are incomplete when it comes to citing complete locations to documents. Additionally, he often includes multiple source documents in each endnote. For example endnote 135 for Chapter 21, page 749/750 refers to a Records Group 319, but gives no location. Later on in the same end note he mentions Hoyt S. Vandenburg Papers and Harry S. Truman Library. In most cases he does not provide complete location information, mostly Records Group (RG) and box number. If the location is the National Archives, a researcher needs all of the location information listed towards the end of the first paragraph of this review. Beginning on page 753 he writes about napalming everything ahead of the advancing Chinese and North Korean forces and behind retreating UN forces to create a wilderness of scorched earth. To support his point, at the top of page 755 he quotes PART of an article by New York Times reporter George Barrett's "a macabre tribute to the totality of modern war" in a village north of Anyang. The entire article is quoted with the part he quoted printed in Capitals: "A napalm raid hit the village three or four days ago when the Chinese were holding up the advance and nowhere in the village have they buried the dead because there is nobody left to do so. his correspondent came across one old woman, the only one who seemed to be left alive, dazedly hanging up some clothes in a blackened courtyard filled with the bodies of four members of her family. THE INHABITANTS THROUGHOUT THE VILLAGE AND IN THE FIELDS WERE CAUGHT AND KILLED AND KEPT IN THE EXACT POSTURES THEY HELD WHEN THE NAPALM STRUCK - A MAN ABOUT TO GET ON HIS BICYCLE, FIFTY BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING IN AN ORPHANAGE, A HOUSEWIFE STRANGELY UNMARKED, HOLDING IN HER HAND A PAGE TORN FROM A SEARS-ROEBUCK CATALOGUE CRAYONED AT MAIL ORDER NO. 3,811,294 FOR A \$2.98 'BEWITCHING BED JACKET - CORAL.' There be almost two hundred dead in the tiny hamlet." The complete story was quoted on page 298 of I.F. Stone's "Hidden History of the Korean War" and also in George Barrett's obituary, which was published in the New York Times on November 22, 1984. Professor Cumings deliberately omitted part of the article because it did not support the point he was trying to make. The fact that George Barrett made up the entire story doesn't excuse Professor Cumings action! My reasons for believing the story to be false follow: FIRST, napalm kills primarily by burning and no one hit by flaming jellied gasoline is going to remain in the same position they held when hit by it. There is also a rare occurrence in which napalm kills by asphyxiation because napalm ignites, it uses up all of the oxygen in the immediate area, so people die from lack of oxygen, but their bodies are also severely burned. SECOND, there is an online archive of Sears-Roebuck catalogs. One item from the 1959 Fall and Winter catalog is a Housecoat, mail order number O27 KM

7735, \$3.95. Another is a Secretary desk-Cabinet Number 20 KM 3065, shipping weight 133 pounds, \$174.95. Therefore the mail order number given by Barrett is obviously a phony! The pattern of mail order numbers that I have listed is consistent in all four catalogs that I looked at for 1949 and 1950. THIRD, it seems highly unlikely to me that there would be fifty orphans in a village of about 200 people. FOURTH, why would a woman whose village had been occupied by Chinese troops for the previous six to nine weeks be filling out a Sears-Roebuck catalog form? When I questioned Professor Cumings, He insisted that mail order catalogs were common in Japan for soldiers to give them to their girl friends. In my two and a half years in Japan from April 1947 through November 1949, I never even heard of such a thing. Professor Cumings insisted that the soldiers who came to Korea from Japan must have brought catalogs with them. The first soldiers in the Anyang area were from units of the 7th Infantry Division who made the landing at Inchon. I am sure they had more important things to bring than a 1,300 plus page Sears-Roebuck catalog. They were involved in almost continuous combat in the area until they left to take part in the landings on the other (East) coast. The troops coming up from the Pusan perimeter were also pretty involved in combat, and likewise, they had more crucial things to pack in their field and combat packs than a large, heavy catalog. During the major Chinese offensive beginning in late November 1950, troops retreated through that same area, again preoccupied with saving their lives, not handing out catalogs to local women. In the counter-offensive which began in mid January, all troops passing through that area were pretty heavily involved in combat.

In continuing his argument that the Korean War was civil and revolutionary in character, Bruce Cumings examines the internal political-economic development of the two Korean states and the consequences, for Korea, of Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. He investigates the intense border fighting and internal political instability that preceded the Northern invasion and challenges the notion of sudden Soviet-sponsored intervention. "A decade ago, Bruce Cumings opened a new chapter in Korean War studies by arguing that this horrible conflict was above all a civil war. *The Roaring of the Cataract* is on a grander scale and narrated in a freer, more indignant voice than the first volume....there is no better camera obscura for those daring to revisit the bloodbaths that convulsed Korea at mid-century."--Far Eastern Economic Review

About the Author Bruce Cumings is Norman and Edna Freehling Professor of History at the University of Chicago. He is the author of many books, including *North Korea: Another Country* and *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*.