

thousands of potential customers. And Robert Enlow, executive director of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, dismisses Stern for citing a tired list of “greatest hits

of teachers’ union talking points,” for making unfounded claims that school choice hasn’t made significant improvements in public schools, and for failing to mention

evidence that contradicts his views. The blistering retorts to Stern’s points suggest that hell hath no fury like the school choice movement scorned.

PRESS & MEDIA

Nut Gets Nukes!

THE SOURCE: “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist Gets Nuclear Weapons” by Hugh Gusterson, in *Nonproliferation Review*, March 2008.

PART OF THE REASON JOURNALISTS are about as highly esteemed as termite inspectors and telemarketers is their failure earlier in this decade to challenge U.S. government estimates of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Press critics charge that reporters downloaded the assertions of government officials and Iraqi exiles into news stories as uncritically as songs from iTunes. Then, even after Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction failed to materialize, writers repeated the same credulous performance in covering North Korea.

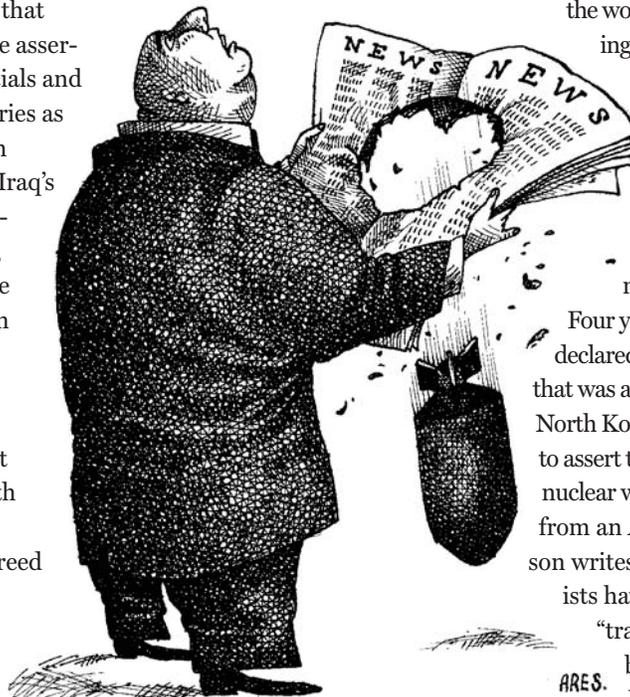
America’s largest newspapers presented a “simplistic narrative” that focused “entirely on North Korean duplicity” in the breakdown of a 1994 “agreed framework” between the United States and North Korea that was designed to persuade Pyongyang to abandon

its quest for nuclear weapons, writes Hugh Gusterson, an anthropologist at George Mason University. In truth, he says, neither side fully lived up to the agreement, but leading publications covered only accusations of North Korean perfidy. They relied almost entirely on anonymous diplomatic sources, retired gov-

ernment officials, and specialists in nuclear nonproliferation, rather than academics or other students of the Korean peninsula. They also failed to make enough international phone calls to experts monitoring the situation from South Korea.

Pundits tend to portray Kim Jong Il as a paranoid pygmy who watches Daffy Duck cartoons and spends nearly \$1 million a year of his impoverished country’s treasury on rare cognac. Entertaining reading, but it hardly advances understanding of what a former secretary of defense called “the most dangerous spot” in the world, Gusterson says. Relying mostly on unnamed American officials for their facts, reporters wrote in 2002 that North Korea admitted it had been cheating for years on its commitment to freeze its nuclear weapons program.

Four years later, *Newsweek* declared that “diplomats now say that was a translation error.” What North Korea had actually done was to assert that it was “entitled to have nuclear weapons” to safeguard itself from an American threat, Gusterson writes. (Some Korea specialists have since dismissed any “translation errors” as quibbling in light of North Korea’s announcement in 2006 that it had



The media dwell on odd or talkative people, sometimes missing the story.

detonated a nuclear weapon.)

But details do matter, and so does a judicious attitude, Gusterson says. Reporters should identify U.S. government officials who make accusations about Pyongyang, diversify their pool of Korea specialists, occasionally dial the 011 international access code instead of turning exclusively to District of Columbia analysts, and separate news about nuclear developments from opinion about Kim Jong Il's personal peculiarities. More objective reporting would yield better national debate and sounder foreign policy regarding one of the world's gravest areas of concern.

PRESS & MEDIA

News Virgins

THE SOURCE: "Young People Flee From the News, Whatever the Source" by Thomas E. Patterson, in *Television Quarterly*, Winter 2008.

A GENERATION AGO, AS THE Watergate scandal threatened President Richard Nixon, knots of readers stood outside the entrance of *The Washington Post* each night waiting to buy the next day's news-

paper, which would go on sale at 10:15 P.M. Many of these eager consumers were teenagers and twentysomethings who were as interested in public affairs as they were in the new Stones album.

That was a time when more than half of all adults under 30 were regular readers of a daily newspaper, and most of them also watched the evening news. Today, only one in 12 young adults reads printed news. Twice as many watch news on television—one in six. One young person in eight checks out Internet news.

So how does this generation get the news? Much of it doesn't.

Roughly a fourth of all younger Americans pay no attention to news from any source, writes Thomas E. Patterson, of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

A large national survey found that only a fifth of younger respondents could accurately dredge up a factual element about the top story of the day. And though some proponents of new media say that young Americans merely get their news fix through a "different distribution system" such as *The Daily Show*, the

survey uncovered only a tiny number of such individuals.

The decline in exposure to news is part of an overall cultural shift. Two or three decades ago, news had a near monopoly on dinner-hour television, Patterson says. Watching TV while preparing—or eating—dinner meant watching news. But television's ability to force-feed news ended with the rise of cable, which offered alternatives, even at six o'clock. Fewer parents watched news, and even if they did, their children were usually in another room watching something else. The development of "news habits" in children and teenagers slowed dramatically.

The Internet has even less ability to build new audiences for news. Users gravitate to the sites they like, and news is about as popular with many of them as spinach. Even if they call up the news, they spend less time reading it than in the past, and are less likely to do so as a matter of habit. New media, Patterson says, reinforce interests rather than create new ones.

HISTORY

Currying Maximum Favor

THE SOURCE: "France Under the Nazi Boot" by Filippo Occhino, Kim Oosterlinck, and Eugene N. White, in *The Journal of Economic History*, March 2008.

IT TOOK DECADES FOR HISTORIANS to shatter the political fable that the French fought back fiercely

against their German occupiers during World War II. Now, researchers have debunked the economic myth that the Nazis were solely responsible for the pervasive hunger and deprivation in occupied France during the period. In

fact, the French government voluntarily turned over far more money and manpower to the Hitler regime than the terms of the armistice required.

In 1941, French leaders, expecting Britain to surrender quickly, maneuvered to curry favor with Germany to boost French standing in a new Europe dominated by Adolf Hitler, write economists Filippo Occhino and Eugene N. White of Rutgers and Kim Oosterlinck of