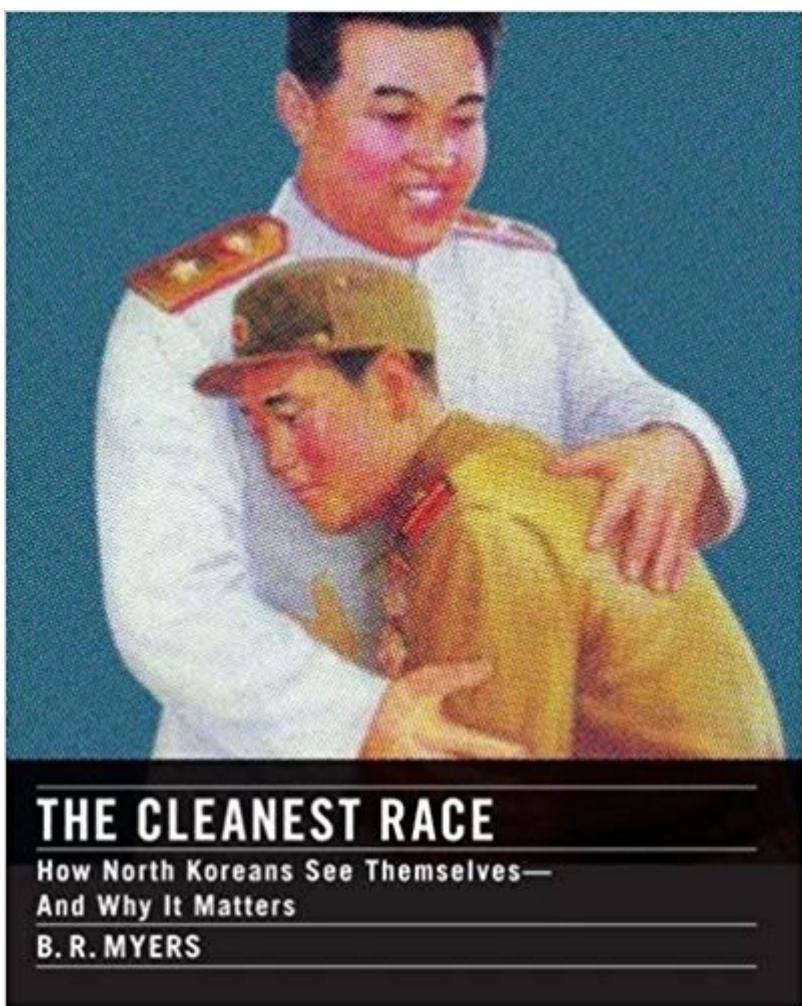


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# The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves And Why It Matters



## Synopsis

Understanding North Korea through its propaganda: A newly revised and updated edition that includes a consideration of Kim Jong Il's successor, Kim Jong-Un. What do the North Koreans really believe? How do they see themselves and the world around them? Here B.R. Myers, a North Korea analyst and a contributing editor of *The Atlantic*, presents the first full-length study of the North Korean worldview. Drawing on extensive research into the regime's domestic propaganda, including films, romance novels and other artifacts of the personality cult, Myers analyzes each of the country's official myths in turn: "from the notion of Koreans' unique moral purity, to the myth of an America quaking in terror of the Iron General." In a concise but groundbreaking historical section, Myers also traces the origins of this official culture back to the Japanese fascist thought in which North Korea's first ideologues were schooled. What emerges is a regime completely unlike the West's perception of it. This is neither a bastion of Stalinism nor a Confucian patriarchy, but a paranoid nationalist, military-first state on the far right of the ideological spectrum. Since popular support for the North Korean regime now derives almost exclusively from pride in North Korean military might, Pyongyang can neither be cajoled nor bullied into giving up its nuclear program. The implications for US foreign policy, which has hitherto treated North Korea as the last outpost of the Cold War, are as obvious as they are troubling. With North Korea now calling for a "blood reckoning" with the "Yankee jackals," Myers' unprecedented analysis could not be more timely.

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## Customer Reviews

A particularly nasty strain of racist propaganda has enabled North Korea's dictatorship to maintain power, according to this fascinating cultural survey. An American-born, South Korea-based instructor of North Korean literature, Myers (A Reader's Manifesto) combines his cultural and linguistic fluency with sharp analysis to throw light on one of the world's most closed-off cultures. Examining North Korean books, news broadcasts, and films, Myers finds that the country's supremacist propaganda can be traced to imperial Japan, which sought to convince Koreans that they were part of the "world's purest race." Myers acidly discredits Western interpretations of North Korea as "hard-line communist" or "Confucian," noting the prevalence of maternal rather than paternal imagery and the societal scorn for the former Soviet bloc. Esoteric cultural markers-e.g., the heavy use of flashbacks in film and literature-are mined for compelling clues to the North Korean sensibility. Myers' greatest feat is his explanation of how the regime has maintained power despite its failures in almost every area of governance-how it has convinced average North Korean citizens that shipments of U.S. food aid, for example, are actually reparations for past "Yankee" crimes. A sharp and smart introduction to one of the world's most secretive societies. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Electrifying... finely argued and brilliantly written." Christopher Hitchens, *Slate* "Provocative... A fascinating analysis." Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* "[A] scary... close reading of domestic propaganda [that] goes a long way toward explaining the erratic behavior and seemingly bizarre thought processes of Dear Leader Kim Jong II." The *Wall Street Journal* "Myers' book is worth buying and reading." The *Quarterly Review* "The definitive book on the subject." The *Atlantic* "There are few books that can give the world a peek into the Hermit Kingdom. The Cleanest Race provides a reason to care about how those in North Korea see themselves and the West. It is possibly the best addition to that small library of books on North Korean ideology." Andrei Lankov, *Far Eastern Economic Review* "Myers renders great service to the global foreign policy establishment with his lucid and well documented profile of the North Korean polity. If only it were made mandatory reading for all the stakeholder leaders, particularly the American establishment, who feel compelled to deal politically with North Korea. Maybe then, Myers' wisdom might lead them to adopt the only possibly policy toward North Korea that will work: that of 'benign neglect.'" Mike Gravel, *US Senate 1969-1981* "In his new survey of North Korean propaganda, The Cleanest Race, B.R. Myers insists that the ongoing support of the North Korean public for the regime doesn't

reflect any great faith in communism. Instead, he argues, it is rooted in a kind of paranoid racial nationalism adapted from the Japanese fascism that flourished before World War II.... Myers feels that the racialism at the heart of the regime's ideology will sustain it even as it fails to provide the prosperity it promises." â "Laura Miller, Salon.com"The text offers a clear picture of the peculiar worldview of this profoundly inward-facing country, its character and continuous subtle alterations, and its under-appreciated ramifications in world affairs." â "Reference & Research Book NewsFrom the Hardcover edition.

Great book. It didn't change my opinion on North Korea, but it certainly helped solidify some thoughts. Its language is very accessible and it follows a logical progression of argument. I thought it ended somewhat abruptly; with a conclusion that could be expanded. I'm looking forward to reading Myers more recent book on North Korea.

The Cleanest Race starts with a level of analysis often missing from studies of North Korea -- the cultural. The explanations of how North Koreans see themselves as a people, not just a political entity, are often persuasive and reflect some similar concepts in the South. Having watched the Northerners for years, and visited them, it's clear to me the appeal to this cultural factor is a key component of the regime's indoctrination system. The concept of "Korean-ness" was forged long before, and far longer, than the influence of communism and capitalism. It also brings a special poignancy to the accounts of Americans and other foreigners trapped in the DPRK, including the US POWs reported alive after the Korean War:Â American Trophies

The author explains in precise terms what is really going on with North Korea. I now have a much clearer understanding of the history of the region and a rational explanation for why the North Korean leaders do such strange things. Very detailed information but presented in an entertaining way. Enjoyed it greatly.

At first glance the idea of investigating a nation via its official propoganda does not seem useful, but in the case of the two Koreas- a people driven by conformity- it provides a valuable key to their elusive mindset. Myers traces the government narrative of Korea back to the Japanese colonial era and earlier. This is another book with fascinating research that sheds much light on the motivation and belief systems of todays Koreans, and the legacy of racism and xenophobia that has been encouraged and manipulated by its leaders for centuries. This book provides much insight into the

ROK as well as the DPRK. The same racial myths permeate both societies. The only difference is that the South is changing, while the north is trapped with attitudes that belong to prehistory.

This is not a book I would have read was it not for the book club I belong to. I live in South Korea and have seen and/or heard many stories/videos about North Korea. That made me form my own opinions, with very little understanding of psychology behind it. I found the first part boring and felt it lead to nowhere but after about 1/3rd of the book it became very interesting. I found it interesting, well written and definitely another take on why - and I believe it. Lastly, I really enjoyed the writers tongue-in-cheek way of writing. It is seriously subtle.

An absolutely splendid book. I am not a Korea specialist and ordered this book on a whim, but once I opened it I couldn't put it down. Myers hypothesizes that we in the West have fundamentally misunderstood the Kim regime and that, as a result, we consistently adopt the wrong policies with respect to the DPRK, and in chapter after chapter he delivers convincingly on that hypothesis. Myers argues that by shoehorning the Pyongyang regime into the "totalitarian dictator" model, we overlook the depth to which the regime's politics and ideology are rooted in Korean identity. The Kims, he argues, have not created a "fascist" dictatorship but a dictatorship predicated on a sense of racial purity and superiority that validates their self-imposed "hermit" status and their claims to leadership not only of North Korea but of a notional unified Korea that spans the peninsula. By dealing with the regime on our terms -- as a rational actor nation-state amenable to the usual carrots and sticks (we'll embargo you, we'll provide you with humanitarian aid), we miss important diplomatic opportunities and squander others. When we think we've "won," the North sincerely believes we've lost. Myers wants us to see the strategic interaction between the DPRK and the West (and even China) through the DPRK's eyes, rather than our own.

For anyone with an interest in geopolitical thought, I cannot recommend this book enough. B.R. Myers is an american professor of Korean studies in south Korea, and by taking an in-depth look at North Korea propaganda, it's propagated myths, and their actions, surmises and some say proves conclusively that everyone you have ever read or heard about North Korea is wrong. It is a fascinating look at the North Korean people, and the Kim regime that enjoys a much higher degree of popular support than most realized.

Myers' book is an interesting read about the nature of North Korean propaganda. Though he

presents great examples of how the North Korean government manipulates information, he doesn't present any suggestions for solutions on how to counter the influence of the propaganda. He is somewhat left leaning in his retelling of historical events and presents an interesting counter balance to more hawkish authors like Victor Cha.

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