

Behind the White House Curtain: A Senior Journalist's Story of Covering the President—and Why It Matters

Steven L Herman

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As the senior White House correspondent for the nonpartisan Voice of America news network, Steven L Herman had the difficult assignment of covering the Donald Trump administration while it routinely attacked VOA for its commitment to the news. He shares those experiences, and covers his career more generally, in his engaging memoir *Behind the White House Curtain*.

First, Herman takes readers through what it's like to work as a White House correspondent, sharing behind-the-scenes details about logistics and daily experiences. He explains how pool duty works, what it's like to fly on Air Force One, and the technology that correspondents use to file stories while covering presidential visits abroad.

Herman then shifts into his own story, sharing experiences from throughout his journalism career. He describes starting his work while still a teenager in Las Vegas, covering the Nevada nuclear test site in the 1970s. He discusses the challenge of reporting on the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. These on-the-ground anecdotes highlight the importance of reporters giving the public verified information.

The book's final section returns to more recent events, including detailing the specific challenges of covering Donald Trump's administration. That includes the administration's complaints about VOA's nonpartisan and independent nature—and its attempts in 2020 to turn the network into a propaganda outlet for the administration itself by attacking and replacing its leadership. Herman explains the difficulty of reporting under such conditions. This work concludes with a consideration of the risks to the country represented by the politicization of information.

At a time when serious journalism must compete with partisan outlets, social media rife with misinformation, and bad actors who treat truth as an opponent, *Behind the White House Curtain* is a potent reminder of the importance of journalists taking the work seriously and trying to inform the public.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2024)

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