

Nov 04, 2016 by *Adam Clayton Powell, III*

The View from Down Under: It's More Cruise than Hughes ^[1]

WASHINGTON, July 12 - There's truly no business like show business.

That old song title was reinforced during a recent visit to Australia and New Zealand, where coverage of the U.S. was frequent, detailed and prominently played. But the lens through which America was presented to the South Pacific was not Wall Street or Capitol Hill.

Day in and day out, coverage of Washington is trumped by coverage of Hollywood. True, the latest news from the White House merits a news spot or a brief story on the inside international news page. But it's Hollywood that gets the big play, the expansive layout, and of course the best photos.

Take television: Australia's national morning "Today" show is immediately familiar to visiting Americans, right down to similar formats, studio design and absolutely identical graphics -- yes, the very same graphics package and logo. Go check out the Web site: don't they look like Matt and Katie?

But the U.S. is thousands of miles away. As everywhere in the world, local news dominates.

Regionally, Australia and New Zealand seem to be paying more attention to Asia than, say, a decade ago. Some of this is the rise of China, a rapidly growing trading partner for Australia. Japan is enormously important for New Zealand.

And there is more and more attention devoted to Indonesia and the Philippines. Australia's international broadcaster invests heavily in broadcasting to its neighbors in languages ranging from Mandarin and Vietnamese to Indonesian and Khmer.

In the other direction, CCTV television from Beijing is everywhere – in English – fully competitive with the BBC and far more sophisticated than VOA-TV from the U.S. More about that in a later report.

The preponderance of international reporting was not from Iraq or the European Community. Rather, the major overseas stories were filed from Indonesia and the Philippines, often live. Both were focused on Australians abroad, one an evidently disabled Australian citizen deported, perhaps by accident, to the Philippines.

The other was a daily running story of an Australian woman on trial in Indonesia for smuggling drugs into that country concealed inside her surf board. Her photo was on page one day after day, and Australia's TV networks devoted hours of covering the sentencing hearing, live from Indonesia. Many Australians are charged and convicted of drug smuggling every year, but newspapers and TV loved this case, involving an attractive young woman. It was great for ratings. Think of it as the Down Under counterpart to American networks' devoting hours of air

time to coverage from Aruba.

But what of news of the U.S.? What is the predominant image of America in media there? Once again consider Australia's "Today" show.

In the U.S., "Today" on NBC features a mix of politics and hard news with fluffy features and show business items. If there is a live report on international news, more often than not it is a live shot from the NBC bureau in London.

In Australia, the "Today" show goes one better, institutionalizing international coverage by placing a co-host in the U.S. who is part of every hour, every morning. And with the time difference, morning in Sydney is afternoon in New York and Washington, where the business day is almost over and the American news cycle is nearing its end.

But that is not where Australian television invests its reporting resources. No, it's not New York or Washington that merits the live segments every hour. Instead, the "Today" co-host is anchoring live via satellite from. . . Los Angeles.

Forget the White House or Wall Street: it's Burbank and Hollywood that dominate the morning news Down Under.

Again, this is not to the complete exclusion of U.S. politics or economics: those topics are covered in news spots supplemented by regional reaction and analysis – when warranted. But Hollywood is locked into the hourly format of the program.

Forget the News Hour. Think "Entertainment Tonight."

The takeaway lesson for public diplomacy: Karen Hughes is trumped every time by Tom Cruise.

There was one exception to that golden rule. More on that tomorrow in my next report.