2011

THE YEAR IN REVIEW:

2011 has offered many wonderful books…if one knew where to look. The MIBYs serve as a resource for the discerning reader. Because the best-seller lists and mainstream media coverage focus on much of the garbage published each year, this is a way to help those readers seeking edification find the few (often un-sung) gems.

The year got off to a great start with the publication of four fantastic books. On new year's day, we saw the soft-cover (revised and expanded) edition of Norman Finkelstein's **This Time We Went Too Far** (about Operation Cast Lead), Lance Taylor's **Maynard's Revenge**, Dumenil's **The Crisis of Neoliberalism**, and Daniel Todgers' **Age of Fracture**. This was followed by George Kateb's **Human Dignity** on January 3, then—the next day—the publication (in America) of Ha-Joon Chang's book, **23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism** (which had been release the previous year in Britain). Also, French philosopher Stephan Hessel's **Indignez Vous!** booklet was finally released in english. Of course, one would never know that these books even existed if one simply paid attention to best-seller lists and media hype.

Chang's book is the most important book of the year simply because it provides basic information that is crucial for every responsible citizen to know. (If only free copies could be provided to every American—especially rank and file people who've tended to find right-wing economic policy alluring.) If every person in the country read this simple book, economic policy would soon cease being the calamity that it has been for the past generation. The myths on which supply-side economics and free market fundamentalism are based are cogently and decisively debunked in this concise evaluation.

One of the major works to be published this past year was the long-awaited opus by Derek Parfit. That such a highly-anticipated work (by one of the world's greatest living philosophers) never even broke into the New York Times Top-40 Bestseller list speaks volumes about our society. Poetically, the week it was released (in late June) was the same week that radical-right-wing shock-jock Ann Coulter released her latest screed. The result: Tens of thousands flocked to purchase pulp trash by an

absurdist political pundit…while almost nobody paid attention to **On What Matters** by one of the most profound thinkers in the world. This single fact illustrates the present state of American culture. (For the next 6 weeks, **Demonic** was on the top-10 best-seller list.)

2011 had its fair share of curiousity books, such as James Miller's **Examined Lives** (interesting, though not very edifying). Also released was Nicholas Wapshott's **Keynes / Hayek**, about the personal feud between the two iconic 20th Century economists (interesting, though not very well done). The problem with both books is that neither really teaches the reader what the "verdict" has been on important matters. Indeed, Wapshott fails to make very clear that one of the men (Keynes) was mostly correct with his theory while the other (Hayek) was mostly wrong. This is irresponsible–if not disingenuous.

Appearing in soft-cover during 2011 were several very important books. Especially notable: Nicholas Carr's **The Shallows**, Amartya Sen's **The Idea of Justice**, Pierson / Hacker's **Winner-Take-All Politics**, Tony Judt's **Ill Fares The Land**, Eugene Rogan's **The Arabs: A History**, Siddhartha Mukherjee's Pulitzer Prize-winning **The Emperor Of All Maladies**, Norman Finkelstein's **This Time We Went Too Far**, Chalmers Johnson's **Dismantling the Empire**, and Andrew Bacevich's **Washington Rules**—all landmark works (though none of them made the paperback bestseller list).

Fareed Zakaria published version 2.0 of 2008's **The Post-American World**. Also, Noam Chomsky's landmark book, **9-11**, was re-released for a slightly-augmented, ten-year anniversary edition, **9-11: Was There An Alternative?** An updated and expanded edition of Matt Taibbi's indispensible **Griftopia** was published in paperback—certainly worth reading again. A ten-year anniversary edition of David E Hoffman's **The Oligarchs** (revised and expanded) was also issued. Meanwhile, Laura Hillenbrand's inspiring account, **Unbroken**, continued to sell like hotcakes, as did Rebecca Skloot's blockbuster, **The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks** and Jon Krakauer's **Where Men Win Glory**. (As these last two were "human interest" stories, they didn't qualify for the MIBYs.)

Be reminded that the MIBYs do not include "special interest" books or what I call "curiosity" books (memoirs, human interest stories, and accounts of specific, non-world-changing events). Thus, only a portion of the year's non-fiction publications is

of the right type to even be relevant to the qualification process. That is to say, there are many high-quality non-fiction books not mentioned in the MIBYs simply because they aren't the type of book with which the MIBYs is concerned.

52 Noteworthy Books That Didn't Make The Listings This Year:

Three fascinating books on "evil" were released: Simon Baron-Cohen's **The Science of Evil**, Steven Pinker's **The Better Angels of Our Nature**, and Alan Wolfe's very insightful, **Political Evil**. Stephen Greenblatt's **The Swerve** offers an interesting account of Lucretius' influence in the Enlightenment. Susan Greenfield's **ID** and David Eagleman's **Incognito** provide Malcolm-Gladwell-style "food for thought" for the layman. Ron Suskind penned a Bob-Woodward-like "inside scoop" on the Obama administration, **Confidence Men**. Janet Reitman came out with a very well-researched book on **Scientology** and Julia Scheeres with a poignant book on **Jonestown**—both very disturbing reads. William M. Arkin wrote a book about the dysfunctions of the American intelligence world, **Top Secret America**. James Gilligan wrote an important political polemic, **Why Some Politicians Are More Dangerous Than Others**, as did Suzanne Mettler, **The Submerged State**, and Greg Palast, **Vultures' Picnic**. An interesting book by Eric Mann, **Playbook For Progressives**, was also published.

Science writer Michio Kaku wrote a speculative book, **Physics Of The Future**, while Frank Close wrote an intriguing book on the search for the Higgs Boson, **The Infinity Puzzle**. Richard Dawkins did a fun book on science for younger readers, **The Magic Of Reality**. Sylvia Nasar wrote a mediocre book on the history of modern economics, **Grand Pursuit** (though not nearly as good and worthwhile as Jerry Z. Muller's **The Mind & The Market** and Heilbroner's **The Worldly Philosophers**). John Paul Stevens released a memoir on his Supreme Court years, **Five Chiefs**. Two very insightful book on the effects of Google were released: Siva Vaidhyanathan's **The Googlization of Everything** and Steven Levy's **In The Plex**. Finally, Francis Fukuyama tried to redeem himself (from his embarrassingly wrong **End of History**) with a new book, **The Origins of Political Order**.

Chris Hedges published a great collection of his articles (**The World As It Is**), as did Katrina Vanden Heuval (**The Change I Believe In**), Christopher Hitchens (**Arguably**), Bernard Lewis (**Faith & Power**), and Stephen Hawking (**The Dreams That Stuff Is Made Of**). All these collections are thought-provoking. An investigation into right-wing American politics was also done by Paul Street and Anthony DiMaggio: **Crashing The Tea Party.**

2011 brought new biographies on Malcolm X (by Manning Marable), Karl Marx (by Mary Gabriel), Emma Goldman (by Vivian Gornick), two on Kurt Vonnegut (by Charles Shields and Gregory Sumner), Leon Trotsky (by Joshua Rubenstein), Tolstoy (by Rosamund Bartlett), Catherine the Great (by Robert Massie), George Kennan (by John Lewis Gaddis), Ben-Gurion (by Shimon Peres), Margaret Sanger (by Jean Baker), Steve Jobs (by Walter Isaacson), and Gandhi (by Joseph Lelyveld). John Patrick Diggins' posthumously-published, little book, **Why Niebuhr Now?** was also released.

There were some worthwhile releases in history that were "curiosity books" (and thus didn't qualify as MIBYs). Jackie Kennedy's transcripts were released and published. In addition to the book on the Civil War that made the list (by Goldfield), Adam Goodheart released an informative book about the beginning of the war, **1861**, and Amanda Foreman released an interesting book about Britain's role in the conflict, **A World On Fire**. (Meanwhile, Eric Foner's Pulitzer Prize-winning **A Fiery Trial** was released in paperback.) Charles Mann came out with a follow-up to his acclaimed **1491**, **1493**. Richard Miles published a great book on Hannibal, **Carthage Must Be Destroyed**. James Romm penned a book on the transition from the Macedonian Empire to the Roman Republic, **Ghost On The Throne**.

Jonathan Hansen offered a critical history of Guantanamo. In addition to Marc Favreau's, **A People's History of WWII**, three new books on the Second World War were published (by Gordon Corrigan, Andrew Roberts, and Max Hastings). A history of philanthropy in America was published by Olivier Zunz. David McCullough wrote a book about Americans in 19th century Paris and Erik Larson wrote a book about Americans in Nazi Berlin. Finally, scholar of Nazism Ian Kershaw came out with an interesting book about the last days of the Third Kingdom, **The End**.

2011 saw its fair share of pulp trash—dominated, as usual, by ultra-right-wing political pundits. Moreover, Rumsfeld, Rove, Rice, and Cheney all released memoirs—directly following Bush's release of his own—thus completing the cabal's full compliment of revisionism. Amusingly, Glenn Beck also embarked on a sojourn into revisionism by releasing his own version of the (selected, re-jiggered) Federalist Papers. Also, a "Reader" by one of the nation's most infamous academic frauds, Thomas Sowell, was published. As usual, the charlatans outsold the scholars by a landslide. (This may well indicate why so many in our country hold such nutty beliefs.) Pulp by right-wing commentators (from Thomas Friedman and David Brooks to Peter Bergen and Niall Ferguson) was released as well.

Meanwhile, those of us who pursue edification had plenty of great books from which to choose. Even amidst the mountains of trash-pulp being churned out, there were some noble works issuing from the erudite corners of the publication world. Though hardly any attention was paid to the few gems, the MIBY listing is here to generate awareness of them. During the course of the year, there were at least 60 notable non-fiction books to appear—more than one per week (in addition to the 52 noteworthy titles mentioned above). These were the candidates from which the twenty-four 2011 MIBY nominees were selected. As usual, the top-ten were selected from the nominees, while the remaining 14 are listed as "Honorable Mentions". (The balance of the candidates are listed at the end, as "Other Notable Books".)

As usual, we can imagine a world in which the books in the MIBY listing were the most widely read books of 2011. (In a healthy society, it would have been commonplace to see people reading these books during the past year.) In such a world, the citizenry would be much better informed, and we'd live in a far more civil society. In such a world, not only would people love to read serious exposition, they'd be judicious in what they chose to read. Perhaps the MIBYs can help bring about such a world.

2011

1. **23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism** –Ha-Joon Chang
2. **The Price of Civilization** –Jeffrey D. Sachs
3. **State vs. Defense** –Stephen Glain
4. **The Crisis of Neoliberalism** –Dumenil / Levy
5. **Republic Lost** –Lawrence Lessig
6. **Human Dignity** –George Kateb
7. **On What Matters** –Derek Parfit
8. **Unwarranted Influence** –James Ledbetter
9. **The Reactionary Mind** –Corey Robin
10. **The Black Banners** –Ali H. Soufan

15 Honorable Mentions:

Constructions of Neoliberal Reason –Jamie Peck

The Strange Non-Death Of Neoliberalism –Colin Crouch

The Globalization Paradox –Dani Rodrik

Capitalizing On Crisis –Greta Krippner

Academically Adrift –Arum / Roksa

The Fair Society –Peter Corning

American Dreamers –Michael Kazin

The Folly of Fools –Robert Trivers

Religion In Human Evolution –Robert Bellah

Maynard's Revenge –Lance Taylor

Justice For Hedgehogs –Ronald Dworkin

Creating Capabilities –Martha Nussbaum

Age of Fracture –Daniel T. Rodgers

Democratic Enlightenment –Jonathan Israel

The Expanding Circle –Peter Singer

(Note: Finkelstein's revised and expanded, **This Time We Went Too Far** would have qualified for this list, save for the fact that the original edition was released in 2010.) If we lived in a country that valued education, these would have been the new books that people were talking about around the water cooler during 2011.

Following is a list of other candidates for the MIBYs that didn't quite make the cut.

50 Other Notable Books from 2011:

Capital & Its Discontents –Sasha Lilley

The Illusion of Free Markets –Bernard Harcourt

Age of Greed –Jeff Madrick

Forged –Bart Ehrman

Beyond The Invisible Hand –Kaushik Basu

Oligarchy –Jeffrey Winters

Machiavellian Democracy –John P. McCormick

Get Up, Stand Up –Bruce E. Levineâ

This Time Is Different –Carmen Reinhart

A World On Fire –Amanda Foreman

Exorbitant Privilege –Barry Eichengreen

The Darwin Economy –Robert Frank

The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report –Financial & Economic Crisis Inquiry Commission

Capitalist Revolutionary: John Maynard Keynes –Backhouse / Bateman

The Pentagon Labyrinth –George Scialabba, et. al.

Responsibility For Justice –Iris Marion Young

With Liberty & Justice for Some –Glenn Greenwald

The Future of Power –Joseph Nye

Bush's Wars –Terry H. Anderson

A Book Forged In Hell –Steven Nadler

The Idea of America –Gordon S. Wood

America Aflame –David Goldfield

The Birth of Classical Europe –Price / Thonemann

Jerusalem, Jerusalem –James Carroll

Jerusalem: A Biography –Simon Sebag Montefiore

The Unmaking of Israel –Gershom Gorenberg

The Forgotten Palestinians –Ilan Pappe

The Bureaucracy of Evil: The History of the Israeli Occupation –Ilan Pappe

The Goldstone Report: The Legacy of the Landmark Investigation of the Gaza Conflict –ed. Naomi Klein, et. al.

The Hidden Reality –Brian Greene

The Beginning of Infinity –David Deutsch

The Information –James Gleick

The Myth of Choice –Kent Greenfield

Thinking, Fast & Slow –Daniel Kahneman

The Believing Brain –Michael Shermer

Braintrust –Patricia S. Churchland

Incomplete Nature –Terrence W. Deacon

Who's In Charge –Michael Gazzaniga

Brain Bugs –Dean Buonomano

Alone Together –Sherry Turkle

The Net Delusion –Eugeny Morozov

Making The Future –Noam Chomsky

I Shall Not Hate –Isseldin Abuelaish

The End of Growth –Richard Heinberg

The End of Illness –Davi Agus

What's the Economy For, Anyway? –Batker, de Graaf

The Penguin & The Leviathan –Yochai Benkler

The Gardens of Democracy –Eric Liu, Nick Hanauer

The United States of Fear –Tom Englehardt

The Future Of European Social Democracy –ed. Meyer / Rutherford

LOOKING FORWARD:

2012 promises to be a jam-packed year for publishing because it is an election year. Inevitably, there will be a plethora of political punditry hitting the shelves as the propaganda push goes into full swing. (Rumor has it that Mark Levin will rear his head again.) Indeed, the campaigns ahead should elicit the usual surge in pulp trash from celebrity charlatans; yet we mustn't lose sight of the few quality works that will be published.

The year ahead looks to offer some great books: Tony Judt's posthumously published, **Thinking The Twentieth Century** and a new translation of Roland Barthes' 1957 classic, **Mythologies**. Lawrence Krauss will be kicking off the year with the release of, **A Universe From Nothing**, which will surely be a thought-provoking work. **The Case For Sanctions Against Israel** will (finally) be released. And after a decade since the publication of volume 3, Robert Caro will publish volume 4 of his series on LBJ, **The Passage of Power**.

We can look forward to other notable works by some of the world's great thinkers… and take care that the gems don't get lost in the inevitable avalanche of garbage. 2012: Stay tuned.