



2012

Welcome to the 2012 MIBY listing. Even as we live in a nation where fewer and fewer people have the time (or the desire) to read great works of non-fiction, it is prudent to offer this reference for what is becoming a dying breed. The MIBYs is for those who make the effort to edify themselves (via autodidactic means), yet may not have the time to devote to the requisite due diligence to ascertain what is worth reading.

Some food for thought:

The primary grievance expressed in previous MIBY installments has been that Americans have become so egregiously ill-informed that it is little wonder our beleaguered democracy is plagued with so many systemic dysfunctions. Indeed, one need only peek at the best-seller listings to see why this is so (a matter to be discussed forthwith). To put it mildly, we Americans are beset by endless distractions—a trend that accounts for our intellectually impoverished culture. From our chronic preoccupation with tabloid rags and gossip mags to watching sports and talk shows, we are perpetually distracted by utterly inane—yet captivating and enthralling—diversions. Of course, there is nothing wrong with reading *People* magazine or watching a ballgame now and then; but when that is ALL that we do, problems invariably arise.

Indeed, between listening to our i-pods and fiddling with the latest smart-phone apps, we have little time or attention remaining to cultivate erudition. Whether it's engrossing ourselves in Reality TV or compulsively perusing Facebook, we devote the vast majority of our leisure time to vapid activities...leaving little time (or incentive) to read (objectively) important works of non-fiction. Many of us would much rather partake in some inane amusement than in any activity that would actually edify us. We're relentlessly conditioned to be passive-minded.

And—here's the kicker—in the event that people DO opt to read non-fiction, it is often garbage: vapid pop lit or preposterous political punditry or mystical mumbo-jumbo or salacious scandal pieces or sensational stories of people going to heaven...ad nauseum, ad infinitum. Even as we relentlessly stimulate our amygdalas, our stagnant prefrontal cortexes slowly atrophy. The result: we feel good, yet know



nothing...and lose the capacity to engage in critical reflection. We think in Tweets and communicate in texts...acclimating ourselves to a stunted attention span deliciously tailored to pop culture trends.

The demands that run our lives keep us chronically occupied. For most of us, our jobs (and the commute) dominate five days each week. Then there's keeping house, paying bills, making repairs, cleaning, cooking, dish washing, recycling, laundry, taking care of the kids (doctor's appointment, baseball practice, friend's house), running errands, walking the dog, going to the gym, going to a sporting event, shopping for this and that, Sudoku, the "local news", traffic reports, weather reports, watching prime time dramas, seeing a movie, watching the ballgame on TV, playing video games, surfing the internet, gossiping on our social network, hanging out with friends, meeting up for a couple drinks, going out to eat...It's a wonder Americans sleep at all. Who has time to read Kant?

It is no surprise, then, that VERY few people have even a basic understanding of the insights of elementary sociology...or of fundamental macro-economic principles...or of even the most basic facts of history. As un-luck would have it, these are the very things necessary for a well-informed citizenry—and thus for a healthy democracy—to exist. Without a rudimentary aptitude in such things, a genuine democracy (i.e. a deliberative democracy) cannot abide.

Bottom line: With American pop culture as it is, there's almost no time to READ... other than a Harry Potter or Twilight installment here and there...or perhaps a self-help book and a provocative-yet-vapid memoir. It's no wonder, then, that so many Americans are so horrendously misinformed about so many important things...and, consequently, make idiotic voting decisions (if they even bother to vote at all). After all, hyper-consumerism is antithetical to participatory democracy.

The few people who ARE inclined to actually take the time to read something other than tabloid fodder (or the latest piece of commercial charlatanry) often end up overlooking the (objectively) most important books of the year. So, tragically, those who opt to make the effort—to dedicate themselves to a non-fiction book—end up settling for the latest piece of pulp trash—selecting whatever hot seller happens to be in fashion that season.

The MIBYs are a public resource, offered by Mason Scott to help remedy this unfortunate state of affairs...and hopefully contribute to a more erudite citizenry.

TRASH PULP: A YEAR IN REVIEW:

2012 got off to a slow start. A month into the year, the best-selling book in America was—embarrassingly—a vulgar tirade from a proto-fascist radio shock-jock. Indeed, the year saw its fair share of celebrity charlatans—making millions off of whatever credulous target audience could be duped into purchasing their material. Regrettably, those who were persuaded to contribute to the “Mark Levin retirement fund” were exposed to some of the most venal pulp-trash conceivable... while being encouraged to support the very radical right-wing policies that have caused our society so much harm. Threshold Editions should be ashamed. (Levin seems only one step away from writing a sequel to “The Turner Diaries”.)

By early February, neocon Robert Kagan released his latest tract, “The World America Made”, a book that attempts to make the case that, since World War II, the world has been **better off** due to U.S. military interventions. Such a patently false thesis is easily disproven by mountains of dead bodies as well as mountains of evidence to the contrary. Alas, Kagan’s right-wing readership will eagerly buy into a book that validates their specious ideology.

Illustrative of American ignorance was the reaction by many to a very mild critique of right-wing Zionism: Peter Beinart’s “The Crisis of Zionism”. Even though it was overly sympathetic to its subject, it was castigated by zealots. Due to the fact that the book was LESS to the right than is Revisionist Zionism, it was harangued by the far-right wing for committing the heresy of being too critical of their ideology. It is a decent book that didn’t go nearly far enough in its critique. That such an innocuous book (he walked on egg-shells on every page) elicited such strident vitriol from the ultra-far-right is testament to how fanatical Revisionist Zionism has become in the U.S.

By mid-June, the two top selling non-novel books in the United States were extremist right-wing tirades. Each was an absurdist rant haranguing and chastising the moderately right-wing president for (entirely chimerical) malfeasance (i.e. for being too far to the “left”). Predictably, Edward Klein’s “The Amateur” and Glenn Beck’s “Cowards” were both big hits for the target audience. By the end of June, the former had been the nation’s (non-novel) **bestseller** for a sixth week in a row (the latter was in its second week at #2). This is—to put it mildly—a national embarrassment. To reiterate: During June, these two publications were selling better than EVERY OTHER (non-novel) book in the country.



Even worse, on that third week in June, the third best-selling (non-novel) book was by Bill O'Reilly...while the sixth was another radical right-wing screed, David Limbaugh's "The Great Destroyer". Appallingly, Limbaugh's vulgar tirade spent several weeks on the (misleadingly titled) New York Times Top 10 "Non-fiction" Bestseller list. (Apparently, his target-audience was hungry for vitriol at the vehemently despised Obama.)

Also in the top ten non-novel bestsellers (starting in mid-June) was Edward Conard's preposterous "Unintended Consequences"—a piece of trash-pulp so absurd as to be breathtaking. Conard, a hedge fund tycoon at Bain Capital, advocates a turbo-charged version of supply-side economics. The thesis of his diatribe is that growing inequality in America is a wonderful thing...and that the increasingly concentrated wealth / power of the nation is good for everyone.

No kidding. That more than just a few right-wing fanatics opted to buy Conard's pulp is tremendously disturbing. These are the same people that buy David Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Dinesh D'Souza, Ann Coulter, Mark Levin, and David Barton books. Right-wing propaganda continues to be a booming market in the publishing world...and certain imprints are eager to cash in on the opportunity.

Note that the latest work by Joseph Stiglitz, **The Price of Inequality** (arguably the most important non-fiction book of the year) was released that same month (June). Stiglitz's book did not even debut in the top fifteen New York Times "Non-fiction" Bestsellers. In a world where more people are reading Edward Conard than Joseph Stiglitz, we should be very, very worried. (Tellingly, this is the same world where far more people read astrology books than astronomy books.) It is no wonder that our society is beset by the egregious dysfunction that it is.

Meanwhile, yet another ridiculous Dick Morris book was selling like hotcakes. Moreover, ultra-right-wing pundits Michael Savage, John Stossel, David Horowitz, and Johan Goldberg released their latest polemics...and Zionist fanatic Joel C. Rosenberg published another screed. John C. Goodman produced more material on why the "healthcare" system should be EVEN MORE privatized. Uber-charlatan Dinesh D'Souza even released TWO books (plus a preposterous movie).

And this was all before the year was half over.

By mid-July, five of the seven New York Times best-sellers were by ultra-right-wing pundits. (Meanwhile, not a single Progressive work could be found in the top 20 sellers.) This should all come as little surprise, as 2012 was an election year, and

was thus an incubator for right-wing punditry. As for the New York Times top-ten sellers: Limbaugh's "The Great Destroyer" and Beck's "Cowards" went on to be on the list for five weeks each. Most absurdly, Edward Klein's "The Amateur" was on the top-ten list for over FOUR MONTHS.

Ann Coulter would wait until October to release her latest piece of trash-pulp (the thesis of which was that Progressives don't REALLY care about civil rights for minorities.) In a nation where—at any point—the #1 best-selling book is by a preposterous charlatan like Dinesh D'Souza (as happened for a week in September), something is woefully amiss.

Other pulp trash from the year included: "Spreading the Wealth" by Stanley Kurtz, "The Communist" by Paul Kengor, "Coming Apart" by Charles Murray, "Still the Best Hope" by Dennis Prager, and "The New Leviathan" by David Horowitz.

The cavalcade of trash-pulp on "heaven" and the afterlife continued with Eben Alexander's "Proof of Heaven"—a book that (tragically) made it to the top of the New York Times best-seller list. A woman named Mary C. Neal also got in on the action—with her own "near-death experience" (NDE) account. (For more on the NDE pulp craze, see my "Carnival Of Distractions 6".)

Just as bad, Jesse Prinz (from the CUNY Graduate Center) released an anti-Evolutionary Psychology tract, "Beyond Human Nature"...another in a line of absolutist behaviorist diatribes that deny the existence of human nature.

The success of such books can be directly attributed to the egregiously uneducated (horrendously ill-informed) American citizenry. This embarrassing condition is largely responsible for many of the nation's current dysfunctions. People read absurd books because they are ignorant; and they are ignorant because they read these absurd books. It is a positive feedback loop.

COMMENT ON A DEFECTIVE TAXONOMY:

Tragically, right-wing propaganda typically dominates best-seller lists. Oddly, this perverse strain of fiction is generally listed as "non-fiction" by mainstream sources. In reality, it is non-novel pulp that masquerades as non-fiction—and is consequently often (misleadingly) categorized as "non-fiction" in the MSM (presumably, because it is something other than "conventional" fiction).

An elementary point thus goes unacknowledged: Just because a book is not a novel doesn't mean it is non-fiction. (When a book doesn't openly admit it is fiction, it doesn't follow that it is non-fiction.) In fact, the point of propaganda is to pass fiction off as non-fiction. Unfortunately, most best-seller lists are complicit in this fraudulent labeling scheme. So we will continue to see the likes of Dick Morris, Jonah Goldberg, Mark Levin, Ann Coulter, et. al. listed as "non-fiction" in spite of the fact that such celebrity charlatans have never written anything of the sort.

This contorted categorization scheme is illustrative of the larger problem of misinformation: mainstream sources routinely allow blatant charlatanry (e.g. "The Purpose Driven Life", "The Secret", etc.) and absurdist political punditry to be included in non-fiction best-seller listings...even though it is all largely fictional in nature. It is for this reason that a new category is required: non-novel pulp.

("Regular" fiction is self-identified fiction: novels, plays, parodies, and short stories. Christian apologetics, political propaganda, astrology, mysticism, and the miscellaneous commentary by charlatans are forms of ersatz-non-fiction that can only be treated as genuine non-fiction in a glaringly Orwellian way.)

In a world where tens of millions can't tell the difference between farce and fact, between charlatanry and scholarship, we should expect severe problems. To put radical right-wing propaganda in the same category as works of genuine scholarship is a bizarre categorization scheme...and should be eschewed whenever it is encountered. Only then will a well-informed citizenry be possible.

If a work has not been vetted (or reviewed positively) by bona fide (and impartial) scholars (or experts in the relevant field who have no conflicts of interest), a categorization as "non-fiction" is highly suspect. More to the point: a book promoting ideas that have been conclusively established to be fraudulent (e.g. supply-side / trickle-down economics and New Age mumbo jumbo) should not be considered "non-fiction" by any honest party.

In Sum: A book that makes demonstrably false claims is, by definition, fiction—regardless of what it claims itself to be. Listings should be adjusted to reflect this. It is therefore necessary to have a listing for books that are neither novels (conventional fiction) nor genuine non-fiction. For such publications, "Non-novel Books" is a diplomatic label that everyone should be able to agree on. Unsurprisingly, most of the best-selling books in America would be found in that

category. The non-fiction category would then be limited to actual non-fiction.

GOOD BOOKS: A YEAR IN REVIEW:

2012 saw the publication of a few works by some of the world's best thinkers and greatest humanitarians—from E.O. Wilson to Elaine Pagels, from Tony Judt and Andrew Bacevich to Naomi Klein and James Galbraith. (Unsurprisingly, few of them made any appearance on the best-seller lists.)

Some great books from 2011 were released in paperback. Most notably: revised editions of Chang's **23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism**, Chomsky's **Creating The Future**, Robin's **The Reactionary Mind**, Alexander's **The New Jim Crow**, Sachs' **The Price Of Civilization**, Greenwald's **With Liberty & Justice For Some**, and Gleenblatt's Pulitzer-prize-winning, **The Swerve**. Also released was the expanded paperback edition of **Eyes In Gaza** by Gilbert & Fosse. These are all must-reads.

After being extremely popular for over a year and a half, Christopher McDougall's **Born To Run** and Rebecca Skloot's **The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks** are still blockbusters. And, even after being a best-seller for TWO YEARS, Laura Hillenbrand's **Unbroken** continues to sell like hotcakes—a remarkable feat.

In politics, Eric Alterman penned a history of contemporary liberalism: **The Cause**. There was great political commentary by Daniel Oppenheimer in his fascinating **Turncoats**. Eli Zaretsky came out with a mildly interesting book, **Why America Needs A Left**. Alan Ryan released a 2-volume history of political philosophy, **On Politics**. Peter S. Wenz released a clarion call, **Take Back The Center**. A worthwhile collection of essays was released: **Occupy The Future**. Mike Lofgren offered an insider's indictment of the G.O.P.: **The Party Is Over**.

Three interesting books were written on hypocrisy in politics: Martin Jay's **The Virtues of Mendacity**, John Mearsheimer's **Why Leaders Lie**, and David Runciman's **Political Hypocrisy**. Meanwhile, Skocpol and Williamson released an interesting book, **The Tea Party & The Remaking of Republican Conservatism**.

Sage insight on the current economy can be found in **End This Recession Now!** by Paul Krugman and **Back To Full Employment** by Robert Pollin. MIT's Simon Johnson and Yale's Robert Shiller released mediocre books on our current economic

situation—though overly apologetic to the financial services industry. Neil Barofsky released a worthwhile book on the 2008 **Bailout**. And Michael Lind came out with **The Land of Promise: An Economic History of the U.S.**

Morris Berman released the third in his trilogy on America's decline: **Why America Failed**.

Katherine Boo released a poignant book on the disenfranchised: **Behind The Beautiful Forevers**.

A new translation of Roland Barthes' classic, **Mythologies**, was published.

Sam Harris released an insightful book on **Free Will**.

Sean Faircloth released a thought-provoking book on theocracy in America.

David Brock (with Ari Rabin-Havt) released a great book on Roger Ailes: **The Fox Effect** (the result of their work with Media Matters).

Bernard Lewis published his thoughts on the Middle East: **Notes On A Century**.

Akhil Reed Amar released a follow-up to his work on **America's Constitution** from 2006: **America's Unwritten Constitution**.

Matthew Gross wrote a book on the history and social psychology of American credulity: **The Last Myth**.

Robert Skidelsky wrote a book on materialism: **How Much Is Enough?**

Steve Coll wrote a fascinating book on Exxon-Mobil: **Private Empire**.

A book by Noam Chomsky on the **Occupy** movement was published.

Stephen Asma wrote an interesting (though very flawed) book with a heterodox view of morality: **Against Fairness**.

Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein (of B.U.) released a two-volume work on the history of the Jewish people: **The Chosen Few**. Also released was **The Invention Of The Land Of Israel**, Shlomo Sand's follow up to his landmark work, **The Invention of The Jewish People**. And the Israeli human rights organization, **Braking The Silence**, published a seminal work:



Our Harsh Logic: Israeli Soldiers' Testimonies From The Occupied Territories, 2000-2010

Two interesting expositions on war came out: **War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences** by Mary Dudziak and **The End Of War** by Scientific American's John Horgan.

Other notable books from the year included: **As Goes Texas** by Gail Collins, **Imagine** by Jonah Lehrer, **The Shareholder Myth** by Lynn Stout, **What's the Matter With White People?** by Joan Walsh, **Who's In Charge** by Michael Gazzaniga, and **The Betrayal of the American Dream** by award-winning investigative journalists Barlett & Steele. Nassim Nicholas Taleb came out with a book on disorder, **Antifragile**, Jim Holt came out with "an existential detective story" entitled, **Why Does The World Exist?**, historian Anthony Everitt came out with **The Rise of Rome**, and Jane McAlevey came out with a book on organized labor, **Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell)**. We also saw interesting new books from Ray Kurzweil and Oliver Sacks.

There were a few worthwhile biographies released in 2012:

Kitty Ferguson released, **Stephen Hawking: An Unfettered Mind**. Douglas Brinkley did an extensive biography on **Walter Cronkite**. William Manchester released the final book in his **The Last Lion** trilogy (on Winston Churchill). Masha Gessen did a book on **Vladimir Putin**. James F. Simon wrote a book on **FDR & Chief Justice Hughes**, David Von Drehle did a book on **Abraham Lincoln**, two books were done on **Thomas Jefferson** (one overly romantic, by Jon Meacham; one overly critical, by Henry Wiencek), H.W. Brands did a book on **Ulysses S. Grant**, Candice Millard did a book on **James Garfield**, David Maraniss did a book on **Barack Obama**, and Jean Edward Smith released **Eisenhower: In War & Peace**. Most notably, Robert Caro's fourth installment of his renown LBJ tetralogy was (finally) published: **Passage Of Power**.

Three interesting memoirs were also released: Greg Smith's **Why I Left Goldman Sachs**, Salmon Rushdie's **Joseph Anton**, and Jane McAlevey's **Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell)** (about organized labor in contemporary America). A short addendum to Christopher Hitchens' memoir "Hitch 22", **Mortality**, was also published-regarding his thoughts on death. And Peter Dreier published a compilation of **The 100 Most Important Americans Of The 20th Century**.

All the above “special interest” publications didn’t quite make the cut, but are worthwhile for those interested in the respective topics.

As usual, most of the top-selling books of the year were among the lowest quality publications on offer. As usual, very few blockbusters are written by bona fide scholars (or by the advocates of noble causes). In the “book world”, as in other hyper-commercialized industries, supply meets demand. Consequently, most of the American readership devotes its time to titillating memoirs and provocative “how to” books rather than to works of scholarship. Americans are hungry for transient amusement rather than a long-term project of procuring erudition. Such is the case with an intellectually impoverished society.

Feel good “inspiration”, not genuine edification, sells.

The point is clear: If we lived in a nation where the top ten MIBYs were—roughly—the ten best-selling books of the year, our society would become a very different place. In such a scenario, millions and millions would be much better informed...and command a significantly better understanding of the most important issues of our day. As a result of such improved conditions, America would (start to) become a genuine (deliberative) democracy. Meanwhile, under such conditions, the right wing would—inevitably—steadily erode...as its ersatz credence would disintegrate amongst a better-educated (and less dogmatic) citizenry.

The moral of the story is quite clear: Much of what determines whether or not a society is civil (or egregiously dysfunctional) has to do with WHAT its population reads and HOW MUCH it reads. For the sake of the weal of our society, we can hope that more people read the books that are worth reading. In a well-educated society, THESE are the books that most people would be reading and talking about:

2012

1. **The Price Of Inequality** –Joseph Stiglitz
2. **The Untold History Of The United States** –Oliver Stone, Peter Kuznick
3. **Thinking The Twentieth Century** –Tony Judt
4. **Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy** –Christopher Hayes
5. **Predator Nation** –Charles Ferguson
6. **The Republican Brain** –Chris Mooney
7. **Drift** –Rachel Maddow
8. **The Great Divergence** –Timothy Noah
9. **The Assumptions Economists Make** –Jonathan Schlefer



10. **Inequality & Instability** –James K. Galbraith

86 Honorable Mentions:

Liberation Square –Ashraf Khalil

Beautiful Souls –Eyal Press

Enemies: A History of the FBI –Tim Weiner

Turing’s Cathedral –George Dyson

The Short American Century: A Postmortem –Andrew Bacevich

A Universe From Nothing –Lawrence M. Krauss

Da Vinci’s Ghost –Toby Lester

Pity The Billionaire –Thomas Frank

Billionaires’ Ball –McQuaig, Brooks

The New New Deal –Michael Grunwald

The Operators –Michael Hastings

Power Inc. –David Rothkopf

The Collapse of American Criminal Justice –William J. Stuntz

Philanthropy In America: A History –Olivier Zunz

The New Hate –Arthur Goldwag

God & The Folly of Faith –Victor Stenger

Proving History –Richard Carrier

Did Jesus Exist? –Bart Ehrman

Revelations –Elaine Pagels

Ayn Rand Nation –Gary Weiss

Fairness & Freedom –David Hackett Fischer



The Race For What's Left -Michael T. Klare

Why Nations Fail -Acemoglu, Robinson

Connectome -Sebastian Seung

The Science of Language -Noam Chomsky (w/ James McGilvray)

Demand The Impossible -Noam Chomsky

Plutocrats -Chrystia Freeland

Beyond Outrage -Robert Reich

What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets -Michael Sandel

Participatory Democracy: The Dream of Port Huron -ed. Tom Hayden

The Path To Hope -Stephane Hessel & Edgar Morin

The Social Conquest of the Earth -E.O. Wilson

In Praise of Reason -Michael Lynch

Moral Origins -Christopher Boehm

Wired For Culture -Mark Pagel

The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human -Jonathan Gottschall

Masters of the Planet: The Search For Our Human Origins -Ian Tattersall

Ignorance: How It Drives Science -Stuart Firestein

Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist -Christopher Koch

The Self Illusion -Bruce Hood

The End of Loser Liberalism: Making Markets Progressive -Dean Baker

99 To 1 -Chuck Collins

Corporations Are Not People -Jeffrey Clements

The Invention of Religion -Alexander Drake



The Case For Sanctions Against Israel –ed. Roane Carey

Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale –Debra Satz

The Self-Made Myth –Brian Miller, Mike Lapham

Days of Destr –Chris Hedges

The Servant Economy –Jeff Faux

Knowing Too Much –Norman Finkelstein

Rule & Ruin –Geoffrey Kabaservice

Governing The World: The History of an Idea –Mark Mazower

In Our Name –Eric Beerbohm

Dignity –Michael Rosen

Affluence & Influence –Martin Gilens

The Making Of Global Capitalism –Gindin, Panitch

Unveiling Inequality –Korzeniewicz, Moran

Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence In A Brand Culture –Sarah Banet-Weiser

America's Stolen Narrative –Robert Parry

The Power of Habit –Charles Duhigg

Design In Nature –Bejan / Zane

Unaccountable –Marty Makary

â€œ**Democracy At Work: A Cure For Capitalism** –Richard Wolffâ€œ

The Making Of Global Capitalism –Leo Panitch, Sam Gindin

â€œ**Land Of Promise** –Michael Lind

â€œ**Deconverted: A Journey From Religion To Reason** –Seth Andrews

â€œ**The God Problem** –Howard Bloom



The Triumph Of Israel's Radical Right –Ami Pedahzur

Governing The World –Mark Mazower

On Politics –Alan Ryan

500 Days –Kurt Eichenwald

Doing Capitalism In The Innovation Economy –William H. Janeway

Bull By The Horns –Sheila Bair

Rights At Risk –David K. Shipler

The Rights Of The People –David K. Shipler

The Passion Of Bradley Manning –Chase Madar

The Betrayal Of The American Dream –Barlett & Steele

The Rich & The Rest Of Us –Tavis Smiley

The Servant Economy –Jeff Faux

Weapon Of The Strong –ed. Bailes, Aksan

Constructing The World –David Chalmers

From Normativity To Responsibility –Joseph Raz

The Making Of Global Capitalism –Gindin, Panitch

Democracy At Work: A Cure For Capitalism –Richard Wolff

The Sources of Social Power Vol. 3 –Michael Mann

A NOTE ON THE SELECTION PROCESS:

The “About The MIBYs” section explains the philosophy behind the MIBYs. Here, I’ll address selection criteria.

Though no process can be perfectly impartial, the MIBY listing is governed by objective criteria, not on personal taste / sentiments. The selection process is careful and meticulous. It is based on the following:

- The reputation of the author
- Reviews in respected journals
- Peer review (where applicable)
- References in other important works
- Relevance of the work in the respective field
- Conversations with scholars / professors in the relevant area
- An on-going survey of what's being discussed in the bookstores of Princeton, M.I.T., Harvard, NYU, and Columbia Universities

I also make ad hoc use of miscellaneous, informal means to ascertain whether or not a book is objectively important: various discussions on the internet, traveling / exploring other cultures, and having conversations with all of the highly intelligent, well-educated people I can possibly find. Fascinatingly, the verdicts of such explorations are often close-to-unanimous.

Unfortunately, most publishers have no standards for publication other than one thing: PROJECTED SALES. That is to say, objective merit has almost nothing to do with what ends up on bookshelves. After all, business is business—and the bottom line is the bottom line. Consequently, popularity, not quality, determines what warrants attention—by imprints, and consequently by the target consumer. Meanwhile, the following fact is impossible to avoid: In a healthy society, the vast majority of the pulp that ends up on bookshelves wouldn't be given the time of day. Alas, we live in a disconcertingly dysfunctional society—as best-seller lists consistently illustrate.

If a book does NOT appear in the MIBYs, there is essentially one of two explanations: It is (objectively) not an important book (the more likely explanation) ...or I somehow overlooked it. (If you think the latter is the case, please bring it to my attention.)

Sifting through mountains of garbage to find a handful of gems is no easy task, but it is **tremendously rewarding**—especially if I see that my efforts are benefiting others. Of course, the vast majority of people simply don't have the time to do this. I figure: SOMEBODY should do it; it may as well be me.

Perhaps someday people will look to resources like the MIBYs instead of to the (often disturbing) best-seller lists to help themselves make judicious reading choices. Maybe (hopefully) somebody somewhere someday—a person who is more qualified than I to undertake such a task—will do a better job at providing this vital public service. It is rather astonishing, though, that to this day the MIBYs has been the only serious attempt to do this.

Though I certainly do not (indeed, CAN not) read all of the books listed, I try to read many of them, and ALWAYS (eventually) read the top ten selections. The process is, of course, not perfectly scientific, but it is certainly a rough estimate of what one should read if one wants to cultivate erudition on the most important matters of the day. Of course, reading books isn't the only way to edify oneself; essays and articles in respected periodicals, serious conversation with serious people, and—of course—life experience also play an integral role in becoming a well-informed person.

That said, reading important works of non-fiction is certainly a significant part of becoming a responsible citizen... while much of what most Americans CURRENTLY do in order to “learn about stuff” (e.g. listening to MSM, reading blogs, talking only with friends) plays almost no role whatsoever in that vital process—and is more often than not counter-productive.

Bottom line: If more people read the MIBYs, our society would be much better off. In the end, discerning readers must have standards.

LOOKING AHEAD:

2013 already has some great works in the pipeline, including **The Contradictions of “Real Socialism”** by Michael Lebowitz, **Newton & The Origin of Civilization** by Buchwald / Feingold, **Constantine** by David Potter, and the next installment in the acclaimed Oxford history series, **Reawakened Nation** (by Boston University's Bruce Schulman).