

## The 2012 Reading List

Most titles are new; some are classics worth discovering for the first time. They have been selected for their themes and for their capacity to broaden our understanding of emerging issues and inform the way we think about things. We began compiling an annual list in 2000, and it is a continuing work— additional titles are added during the year and compiled at the end of each year in a larger list.

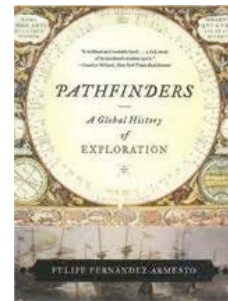
### RECOMMENDATIONS BY GUEST EDITORS

#### Non-Fiction

**Moises Naim** is Senior Associate in the International Economics program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and an internationally renowned columnist and commentator on globalization, international politics and economics. His columns are published every Sunday by Spain's *El País*, Italy's *La Repubblica* and Brazil's *Folha de São Paulo* and reprinted by more than forty leading newspapers worldwide. In April 2011 he was awarded the Ortega y Gasset prize, the most prestigious award in Spanish journalism. Professor Naim has authored numerous books and his *Illicit: How Smugglers Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy*, was published in 14 languages and was selected by the *Washington Post* as one of the best books of the year (and recommended on our 2005 annual reading list). A National Geographic documentary film based on *Illicit* won a 2009 Emmy award. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge isn't what it Used to Be* (Basic Books, Spring 2013). Before joining the Carnegie Endowment, Naim was the Editor-in-Chief of *Foreign Policy* magazine. Naim's recommended book for our reading list is [Pathfinders](#) by **Felipe Fernandez-Armesto** to us. Naim writes:

"These days, when we think about globalization we think about the Internet and its distance-reducing and information-spreading effects. We also think about money that moves at the speed of light from country to country, or border-crossing terrorists who use modern tools to fight for medieval goals. But there is another, and perhaps deeper, way of thinking about the international spread of peoples, commerce, conflict and ideas, that is, about globalization. This is a view that assumes that globalization is not a recent phenomenon but a permanent process fundamentally driven by human nature and that, therefore, is as old as the human experience. *Pathfinders* falls squarely in this genre. In what is one of the best books I have read on globalization, Felipe Fernandez - Armesto, a prominent British historian—yes, British—starts by stating that: 'History has two big stories to tell. The first is the very long story of how human cultures diverged -- how they parted, developed differences, in ignorance or contempt of one another. The second is the main subject of this book: a relatively short and recent history of convergence—of how human groups got back in touch, exchanged culture, copied each other's lives, and became more like each other again'. After this first paragraph,

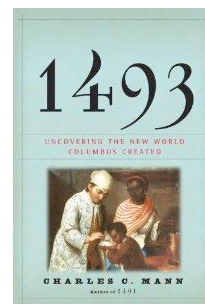
Fernández-Armesto proceeds to give us 400 pages tracing the fascinating and surprising history of world exploration. The word globalization never appears in *Pathfinders*, but the book is indeed the story of how, in the last 5000 years, daring explorers driven by basic human motivations brought the world together. Fernandez-Armesto richly complements a text that is as engaging as it is enlightening with 16 color illustrations and 44 in black and white, plus 48 beautiful maps. He takes his readers on long, multifaceted and hard-to-desert journeys that cover different ages, continents and cultures. He deftly uses the travels of the explorers, and the motives, troubles and machinations of their sponsors, to illustrate the forces that shaped their specific historical moment. He tells us about the economics and the politics, the sciences and the arts, the culture and the wars that shaped each period and, in turn, determine the nature of voyages and the encounters that serve as his narrative's main rails. In the process he gives us a marvelous story of the world. And of globalization”.



**Oliver Sparrow** is the Director of the Challenge Network. He is the author of many publications, including five books. He is the editor of, and has written extensively for, the highly esteemed [Challenge Network's Forum](#). He is known for his groundbreaking presentations and his Future Scenarios (please check out his new [Scenarios for 2025](#)), which are given to audiences totaling well over ten thousand people in the course of a year. Oliver is a director, board advisor or non-executive director of a number of companies and serves as a member of number of UK government projects. He was a commissioner on the World Commission on Globalization. Oliver spent the bulk of his career in Shell, chiefly in strategic planning, corporate renewal, public affairs and venture capital. After Shell, he spent five years as a Director at the Royal Institute for International Affairs, also known as Chatham House. Oliver has lived and worked in a considerable number of countries, predominantly in the Pacific, Asia and Latin America. Born in the Bahamas and brought up in Africa, he was educated at Oxford, with a science and economics background that has since expanded into many fields. He enjoys exploring wild parts of the world for orchids, particularly the Himalayas. Oliver's recommendation for us this year is [1493](#), by **Charles Mann**.

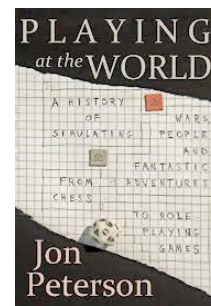
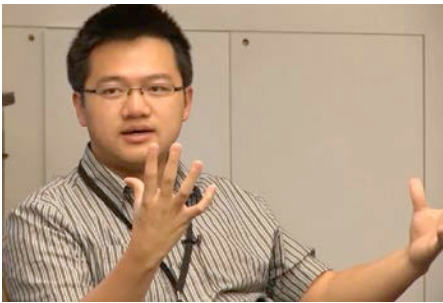
Sparrow says: “Charles Mann was known for his previous book *1491*, in which he explored the Americas before Columbus brought them to world attention. With *1493*, he charts the extraordinary and often catastrophic consequences of this connection,

termed the Columbian Exchange. This had an economic, a social and two biological components - disease and crops. Spanish invaders were, initially, obsessed with precious minerals and in Mexico and Peru they found immense quantities of, in particular, silver. The economic consequences of this fell primarily on China, where demand for silver currency was insatiable. The China trade introduced maize, ground nuts and sweet potatoes. These in turn led to virgin land being developed, followed by catastrophic erosion and the swamping of rice lands in silt. In this and other ways the trade contributed to turmoil in which perhaps fifty millions died. The fall of the Ming dynasty, and the subsequent imperatives on the Manchu conquerors to manage this chaos, radically altered the largest economy in the world. In Europe, the much lesser inflow of silver nevertheless destroyed the Spanish economy. It funded counter-reformation adventurism, including the Thirty Years war that killed a third of the affected population. The so-called General European Crisis - the Fronde in France, revolution in Spain, the English civil war - all resulted from a coincidence between this general inflation of the money supply, Spanish-funded religious conflict and a period of exceptionally cold weather. Mann discusses trans-Atlantic biological invaders in considerable detail. European diseases had extreme effects on American populations, as did their enslavement. Peruvian populations fell from an estimated 11 million under the Inca to a tenth of that a century later. We are familiar with the introduction of smallpox. Few know that malaria and its vectors were also introduced to the Americas, or that its lethal effects on the local population made plantation agriculture impossible. The solution to this was the (malaria-immune) African slave trade, which in turn brought with it diseases such as yellow fever - and even more lethal strains of malaria. Mann explores the long-run sociopolitical effects of the slave economies on both Africa and the Americas. The book abounds with fascinating minutiae: the Americas lacked both bees and earthworms until they were introduced. The British lost to the American colonists, at least in part, because Gen. Cornwallis' army was sapped by the very malaria that the British had unwittingly introduced. This is a book that sees connections everywhere, and perhaps serves as a warning towards the biological changes that we are inducing today, of course, at a far larger scale”.



**Tim Hwang** is the founder and managing director emeritus of the Web Ecology Project, a research community dedicated to building an applied science around measuring and influencing the system-wide flows of culture and patterns of community formation

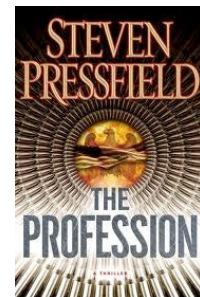
online. Formerly, he was a researcher with the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, where he researched the relationship between the design of online social spaces and emergent collaborative behavior. He is also the creator of ROFLCon, a series of conferences celebrating and examining Internet culture and celebrity. For his work, he has appeared in the New York Times, Wired Magazine, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal, among others. Currently, he is associate director of Robot, Robot, and Hwang -- a faux legal startup that seeks to bring quantitative analysis and computational methods to the practice of law. He also serves as a micro-trustee and coordinator of the Awesome Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, a worldwide philanthropic organization founded to provide lightweight grants to projects that forward small-scale amateur innovation. Tim's recommendation is [\*Playing at the World\*, by Jon Peterson.](#)



Tim tells us: “Self-published, exhaustively researched and weighing in at over 700 pages—Jon Peterson's *Playing at the World* is a cultural history of role playing games (RPGs) generally and Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) specifically. Beginning from its origins in obscure, scattered communities of war-gaming hobbyists in the 1960s, Peterson tracks the forces that would converge in the launch of the massively popular swords-and-sorcery game by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974. For retired role-playing veterans and tabletop board gamers like myself, *Playing at the World* is a real treat. Peterson has done some deeply substantive historical work here, and goes the extra mile to track down primary source material and unearth the obscure ‘zines’ and fantasy novels that are the keys to understanding the context in which the game emerged. But, I strongly recommend Peterson’s work because there is much more here even for those who are not already fans of the somewhat niche (certainly nerdy) subject matter it covers. First, *Playing at the World* goes at length to trace the origins of the game mechanics that drive D&D and allow players to simulate medieval combat and adventures in a fantastical world. It turns out that there’s surprising amount to see here: running under the hood of D&D are rule sets that draw directly from a rich tradition of war gaming. This leads Peterson to elaborate on a two hundred year old tradition that stretches back to Prussian military officers training with rounds of *kriegsspiel* at the opening of the 19th century, and traverses the work of RAND Corporation simulation researchers during the Cold War. What emerges is a fascinating intellectual history of how cultures have thought to properly model and simulate counterfactual scenarios through games. The second lesson is a more fundamental point about social dynamics

and innovation: the story of D&D is one in which a diffuse, loosely affiliated group of innovators from the periphery of 1960s popular culture gave rise to a meme that was at once wildly popular and highly disruptive to how we think about gaming. For those interested in replicating these sorts of success in other arenas, D&D offers many social design patterns to model after. The book emphasizes, for example, how the easy and open extensibility of the D&D platform to support new game mechanics helped to accelerate the popularity and growth of a vibrant community around the game. This book would likely have not been able to reach such a broad audience in an earlier era: much of the buzz around it has emerged online as bloggers and enthusiasts have spread the word. As a result, it remains one of the great underrated and unsung releases of 2012. Get it!”

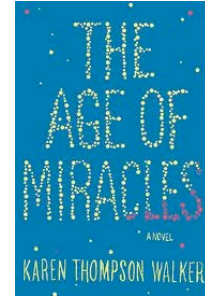
**Rosa Brooks** is a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, where she teaches courses on international law, national security, constitutional law, and other subjects. She also writes a weekly column for Foreign Policy, and serves as a Schwartz Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation. From 2009 to 2011 she served as Counselor to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy. In July 2011, Brooks received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service. She was previously a weekly op-ed columnist for the Los Angeles Times, and served as faculty director of GULC's Human Rights Institute. Professor Brooks has also served as a senior advisor at the US Department of State, a consultant for Human Rights Watch, a fellow at the Carr Center at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, a board member of Amnesty International USA, a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a lecturer at Yale Law School, and a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Fragile States. She received her A.B. from Harvard in 1991 followed by a master's degree from Oxford in 1993 and a law degree from Yale in 1996. Rosa has recommended a novel, [The Profession](#), by **Steven Pressfield**, author of one of our favorite historical novels, *Gates of Fire*. Rosa says:



“What happens when a risk-averse and increasingly corporatized society confronts an ever-riskier world? In *The Profession*, novelist Stephen Pressfield imagines a near future (2032) in which the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been succeeded by two decades of chaos and bloodshed in the Middle East and Central Asia. States, corporations, religious factions and terrorists jostle for control of the region’s oil, a dirty bomb has struck

California, and Iran and Iraq have fought their third war. America, sick of the expense and bloodshed associated with inconclusive foreign conflicts, has largely outsourced its national security to high-tech private mercenary armies. "The president and Congress had at last found a means of projecting U.S. power that was (a) mission-effective, (b) cost-effective, and (c) did not run foul of the extreme risk aversion of the American people," writes Pressfield's narrator Gilbert 'Gent' Gentilhomme, a former Marine now employed by Force Insertion, the world's largest private military force. Banks, oil companies and foreign states are also employing private armies: Force Insertion, for instance, has a contract with Exxon-Mobil and BP 'for all of Western Iraq,' in addition to numerous contracts with the US government. But as treacherous civilian leaders and an odd assortment of 'investors' vie for dominance, Gent begins to suspect that he and his comrades are being manipulated. Ultimately, Gent finds himself torn between his deep personal loyalty to James Salter, the disgraced but charismatic former US Marine General who runs Force Insertion, and his growing fear that Salter's disdain for his nominal "employers" could prove devastating for what little remains of American democracy. Pressfield is best known for his meticulously researched historical fiction (mostly set in ancient Greece), but in *The Profession* he paints a persuasive picture of a far from impossible future. From his richly imagined descriptions of just over-the-horizon military technologies to his matter of fact portrayal of war and death, *The Profession* is a chilling meditation on civil-military relations in a world in which the line between public and private has become irrevocably blurred".

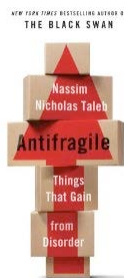
**Chanelle Hardy** is the Senior Vice President for Policy of the National Urban League and Executive Director of the National Urban League Policy Institute, with primary responsibility for developing the League's policy, research and advocacy agenda and expanding its impact and influence inside the beltway. She serves as editor-in-chief of the NULPI signature publication, "The State of Black America," and coordinates the NUL Legislative Policy Conference. She is the former Chief of Staff and Counsel to US Representative Artur Davis, who represented the Seventh Congressional District of Alabama and served on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee and the Committee on House Administration. Prior to coming to the Hill, Chanelle was a Staff Attorney at the Federal Trade Commission, a Policy Fellow and Legislative Counsel at Consumers Union, and a Teach for America Corps member, teaching fifth graders in Washington, DC. Chanelle received her JD from the Howard University School of Law, where she finished fifth in her class, and was a member of the Huver I. Brown Trial Advocacy Moot Court Team. She received her undergraduate degree in English, with Honors, and Piano Performance from the University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP). She is a member of the board of the UMCP College of Arts and Humanities, Vice President of the Howard University Law Alumni Association and Secretary of the board of Industry Ears, a non-profit think tank dedicated to improving media literacy for young people of color. Chanelle's recommendation to us is [\*The Age of Miracles\*, by Karen Thompson Walker](#). Chanelle told us:



“One reviewer called *The Age of Miracles*, by Karen Thompson Walker, a love song to a dying planet, and it is an apt description. Written in the voice of a young girl, this book tells the story of a slight and inexplicable shift to the Earth’s rotation that results in the gradual lengthening of a day. As the inevitable consequences follow – disruption of human sleep cycles, the disappearance of pineapples, eucalyptus trees and birds – humanity demonstrates our ability for endless innovation. Astro turf replaces grass lawns, backyard greenhouses become standard issue, families increase their mushroom consumption, children only play outdoors at night and the world agrees on the maintenance of a 24 hour day even when full days and nights pass with the sun blazing in the sky. At no point does humanity give up and stop developing solutions, even when people contract new illnesses and all homes are covered with metal shutters to keep out radiation. What could be a depressing story is instead both lyrically written and hopeful and perhaps my favorite note about this book is from the book jacket: the author wrote it in the mornings before work. If that isn’t inspirational, I don’t know what is”.

### BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY THE HIGHLANDS GROUP STAFF

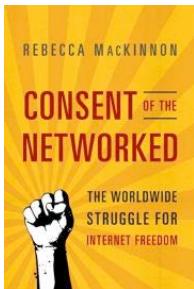
[\*Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder\*](#), by Nassim Nicholas Taleb



**Nassim Nicholas Taleb**, investor, philosopher, and the widely cited author of the highly influential book, *The Black Swan* (a term that has since become part of the global lexicon), has a new book out just in time for review here. Taleb delights in thinking about randomness, uncertainty, and risk. Here he takes these ideas and looks at systems, organizations, and lives, remarking on how complex or simple they are—all the

better to understand his main idea, resilience or “antifragility”. Taleb describes how systems, organizations, and lives can be seen in terms of their interactions with the forces of change and stress: they are fragile, robust, or antifragile. Fragile systems are most impacted under stress—they break. Robust systems (some argument is offered by critics on robustness or redundancy as to whether or not they actually do succeed or thrive in the face of challenge—whether robustness is actually possible or desirable), Taleb maintains, can successfully navigate this space. The key for Taleb is antifragility—resilience—or in popular parlance, “that which doesn’t kill me makes me stronger”. As interesting antecedents to *Antifragility*, he told us about robustness and volatility, citing Saudi Arabia as a place where one event makes a big difference; and why he considered New York City to be robust because it always comes back after a crisis (NYC is battle tested and resilient). Nobel laureate Danny Kahneman, whose book *Thinking Fast and Slow* was reviewed here last year, said of Taleb and his ideas: “Nassim is gradually convincing me that the real world of his describing is very different from the world for which I have been prepared all of my life...I have come to the conclusion that he is right”. We’ll take that as a strong recommendation.

***Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom,***  
**by Rebecca MacKinnon**

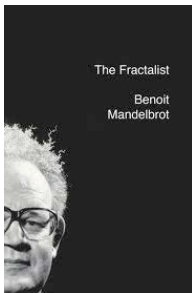


We have been exploring the changing nature of power, and one of the cases in question—Internet freedom—is comprehensively addressed by contributor **Rebecca MacKinnon** in her new book, *Consent of the Networked*. MacKinnon, who earlier in her career was a journalist for CNN in Beijing and the founding blogger on all things North Korea at NKZone in 2004, learned early on how closed governments can apply pressure to the open information sphere. NKZone was hacked and shut down. Her next project found her collaborating with Ethan Zuckerman; while at the Harvard Law School Berkman Center for Internet and Society they began a new effort called Global Voices Online. GVO is an international community of bloggers who report on blogs and citizen media from around the world, and a look at the topics they cover with local bloggers providing the content is remarkable: "Syrian Youth Against Tyranny", "Tunisian Facebook Users Demanding Their Rights", and a great deal more timely, localized insight. MacKinnon's book has two major threads: The first provides an introduction to readers to several debates surrounding Internet freedom, while the second is a



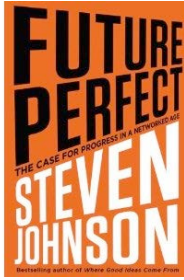
clarion call to *netizens* everywhere about the threats to online expression and assembly and the need to hold institutions (governments as well as corporations) accountable. An informed public is the first line of defense, and MacKinnon wants citizens of the Internet to be forearmed and forewarned about the need for transparent technology solutions—and to hold accountable even those institutions we believe in and support—as the issues surrounding online freedom continue to evolve.

**[The Fractalist: Memoir of a Scientific Maverick](#), by **Benoit Mandelbrot****



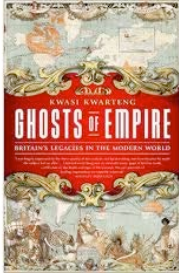
Nassim Taleb often extolled the greatness of the late **Benoit Mandelbrot**, the French-American mathematician who passed away in 2010. Mandelbrot was a pioneer and spent most of his life conducting research at the IBM Watson Research Center. In 1975 he coined the term fractal (a class of mathematically derived shapes “whose uneven contours could mimic the irregularities found in nature”) and became identified with the field of fractal geometry, which he applied not only to physics, but to biology and finance as well. In his memoir (just released in October, 2012) *The Fractalist: Memoir of a Scientific Maverick*, Mandelbrot details an exciting and quite un-ordinary life lived to the fullest (one might describe Mandelbrot himself as a fractal). From early years growing up in a Lithuanian family in Poland and France to the hardships experienced in the Depression and then fleeing the Nazis, Mandelbrot found sanctuary in intellectual pursuits across many diverse fields of study. This cross-disciplinary search for knowledge turned out to be the defining element of his professional life, continuously looking for inspiration in new places and finding applications for his ideas in fields far from his primary focus. Of this scientific maverick, Taleb recently wrote: “He was the only teacher I ever had, the only person for whom I have had intellectual respect”. Please enjoy reading *The Fractalist* and find what these two mavericks have in common.

[Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age](#), by Steven Johnson



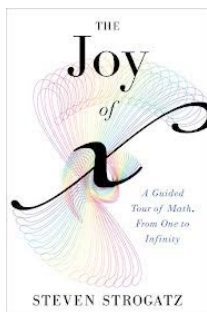
**Steven Johnson** is one of our most frequently reviewed authors. Johnson has written a number of remarkable books, many linked thematically by their attention to the concept of “connectedness”. His previously listed works here have included: *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*, a fundamental work worth revisiting periodically; *The Ghost Map: The Story of London’s Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How it Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World* (a personal favorite of ours); and most recently *Where Good Ideas Come From: the Natural History of Innovation*, which was a foundational work in our research for last year’s Forum on “Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation”. As in each of his earlier New York Times best-selling books, Johnson is a wonderful storyteller, using fascinating and often little-known episodes to weave a larger narrative and make a major point. Johnson begins here by exploring different organizational models, with particular attention paid to networks, noting that the distributed network is the most resilient of all. Johnson is less interested in technology, but follows a line laid out in related fashion by political scientist David Ronfeldt (see his video presentation here on the Highlands Group webpage on TIMN) and Australian political philosopher John Keane on “monitory democracy”. Johnson lays out the difference between state-centralized solutions to problems and the more resilient, and perhaps capable, model of peer networks—“webs of human collaboration and exchange”. Johnson believes, and is supported by David Rothkopf (see the review of his new book here, *Power, Inc.*), that “twenty-first century marketplaces are dominated by immense, hierarchically organized global corporations—the very antithesis of peer networks. The global marketplace that they have helped create is indeed a wonderful thing, but the power that has consolidated in the corner offices of those behemoths is not”. Johnson, who calls himself a “peer progressive”, tells us that being a peer progressive “is to believe that the key to continued progress lies in building peer networks in as many regions of modern life as possible: in education, health care, city neighborhoods, private corporations, and government agencies”. Instead of relying on government for the solution to everything, “our first impulse should be to build a peer network to solve that problem”. Johnson seems to regularly write about something that has or will transform the way that we see or live in the world. This is Johnson’s first really “political” book, in which he describes how we change the world. He concludes that “This is a future worth looking forward to. Now is the time to invent it”.

[\*Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World\*, by Kwasi Kwarteng](#)



*Ghosts of Empire*, by **Kwasi Kwarteng**—a Conservative Member of Parliament—is a new book this year on British leadership in its colonial history and its meaning for the future. In *Ghosts of Empire* he explores six historical cases: Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, Hong Kong, Kashmir and Burma. Among his findings were that although colonial policy was regularly constructed in London, the basis for British success in its empire could only be managed and sustained by creating institutions and then delegating power — either to Brits acting in place of the Crown or to indigenous agents who self-identified as part of the British establishment. But therein lies the rub according to Kwarteng, who contends, “the Empire granted far too much authority to the wrong people. Accidents and decisions made on a personal, almost whimsical, level have had a massive impact on international politics... Indeed, much of the instability in the world is a product of its legacy of individualism and haphazard policy making.” Kwarteng continues, "Officials often developed one line of policy only for successors to overturn it and pursue a completely different approach. This was a source of chronic instability in the Empire." This is the essence of the book's title: *Ghosts of Empire*, which he says provides the legacy for contemporary policy issues (viz., Iraq)—the ghosts continue to rattle around.

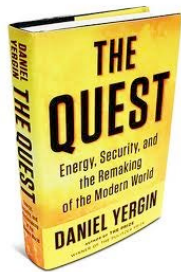
[\*The Joy of X: A Guided Tour of Math, from One to Infinity\*, by Steven Strogatz](#)



One of the joys of being in the car on a Friday afternoon trip of any serious duration is the chance to listen to the always fascinating NPR radio program, *Science Friday*, and its entertaining host Ira Flatow. On a recent sunny Friday afternoon in October, we settled in for a session with Ira and heard an interview with **Steven Strogatz**, a leading mathematician in the fields of chaos and complexity theory. Flatow and Strogatz hit the

sweet spot for us that day—an explanation of mathematics that was filled with humorous anecdotes that helped to take away the dreaded “fear of math”, and actually opened a new door to wanting to learn more. Strogatz’s book, appropriately titled (most playfully) *The Joy of X*, is the heart of that discussion. This is not a math book, but rather a book about mathematics and everyday life that any of us might relate to. Have you wondered exactly how Google’s page ranking works; do you know how and how often to rotate a mattress; what is zero and is it an even or odd number; how is the number one not exactly one; and how could an understanding of probability and statistics made a difference in the O. J. Simpson case? Strogatz writes with ease, with humor, and with a real appreciation for math and what it means to the world. Most importantly he writes with an understanding of his readers, and he clearly gives them all the “joy of x”.

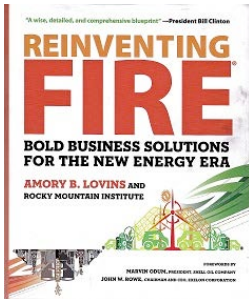
[\*The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World\*, by Daniel Yergin](#)



We have paid particular attention to energy and environmental issues over the course of our annual book lists, most recently with April Rinne on water, and going back to Amory Lovins and **Daniel Yergin** on energy and Dan Esty on the environment. Lovins and Yergin both have new books for us this year and we are pleased to call them to your attention. First, Daniel Yergin. Yergin is the 1992 Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil*, a comprehensive and remarkable history of the substance that seemingly runs the world. Yergin follows that achievement with another look at energy, with *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*. *The Quest* is no less than a history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century told through the lens of energy as a driving force, but it is also a look forward at our future and what we should be thinking about. From tackling questions such as the validity of Hubbert’s Peak (the controversial calculation that U.S. production of oil was “likely to hit its peak somewhere between 1965 and 1970”); the story behind the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico; the emerging use of “fracking” to increase production; environmental questions; political issues; and what this means for security, writ large. Yergin addresses every question imaginable in this exhaustive undertaking. He understands clearly that “the growing importance of the climate change question ensures that this ratio (of carbon based fuels to alternative energy) will be strongly challenged both politically and technologically as people strive to decarbonize energy”. Yergin holds out hope in that we may find our way: “The globalization of demand may be shaping tomorrow’s needs.

But it is accompanied by a globalization of innovation...This will fuel the insight and ingenuity that will find the new solutions". This is an essential book, and Yergin is in top form addressing everything you should know about energy, and relatedly about our security. Highly recommended.

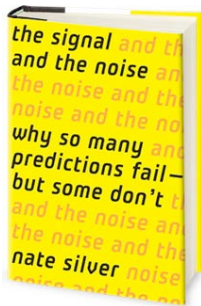
**[Reinventing Fire: Bold Business Solutions for the New Energy Era](#), by Amory Lovins**



It is likely that Daniel Yergin was referring to **Amory Lovins** and his colleagues when he wrote in *The Quest* that he was anticipating innovation that “will fuel the insight and ingenuity that will find the new solutions”. Lovins is perhaps the world leader on energy innovation, and his ideas command the attention of heads of state and global corporations alike. Lovins understands the world described so well by Daniel Yergin and Dan Esty, and finds solutions for energy challenges that cut across the political, economic, environmental, and security conundrums that arise whenever a change to the energy status quo is raised. In this clearly written and beautifully illustrated book, *Reinventing Fire: Bold Business Solutions for the New Energy Era*, Lovins “offers a roadmap for navigating the end of the fossil-fuel era”. His ideas will find appeal across many stakeholders and party lines because he is both pragmatic and passionate and he knows that the tipping point for changeover to alternative energies is now. He is working rapidly to build a base of people to both develop the new approaches and to support them. That requires both knowledge and skill, and Lovins navigates the competing camps effortlessly. Lovins tells us bluntly: “Business-as-usual is no longer an option: Too much is changing too quickly...this book outlines how we can grasp the shift to the new fire, speed it, integrate it, and help steer it along advantageous paths to prudent destinations”. *Reinventing Fire* should be a must-read in schools, in corporations, in government. Highly recommended for your reading pleasure, education, and action.

## *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't*

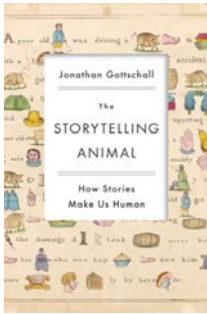
by Nate Silver



Several years ago a friend who was perhaps the most knowledgeable person we know of on all things baseball directed us to the website of an interesting young man who had insights on many new statistical measurements for baseball productivity. The young man was **Nate Silver**, and at the age of 24 he had developed a statistical measurement that accurately forecast performance of comparable players. It became a valuable tool, not just for “seamheads” (baseball fantasy league denizens who use [Sabermetrics](#) as tools for making determinations) but for baseball executives as well who make the real world decisions with ownership budgets. In 2008 Silver examined political polling and forecasting and thought it specious at best, so he decided to bring his methodologies to electoral predictions with his blog [FiveThirtyEight](#). He made his name in the broader world (away from baseball) of politics and media with again, stunning accuracy. What is interesting for us is Silver’s appreciation for the rigor applied to understanding prediction by Phil Tetlock. Silver, in his very influential new book, *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't*, says: “Tetlock’s conclusion was damning. The experts in his survey (*Expert Political Judgment*)—regardless of their occupation, experience, or subfield—had done barely any better than random chance, and they had done worse than even rudimentary statistical methods at predicting future political events”. Silver’s story is cautionary: he tells us early on, “We face danger whenever information growth outpaces our understanding of how to process it...Data-driven predictions can succeed—and they can fail. It is when we deny our role in the process that the odds of failure raise. Before we demand more of our data, we need to demand more of ourselves”. Perhaps that is why so many were taken in by misleading presidential polling results in 2012, with many pundits citing those that agreed with their choice of candidate (or worse, when pollsters asked questions or structured polls that were bound to give biased results and candidates, party loyalists, and voters believed them). Many were shockingly abysmal, and downright wrong. How did Silver do? Unlike most pundits, he called all fifty states correctly and was right in the margin on the popular vote. But Silver takes success in stride with a final warning in *The Signal and the Noise*: “May we arise from the ashes of these beaten but not bowed (unpredicted disasters of the past twelve years), a little more modest about our forecasting abilities, and a little less likely to repeat our mistakes”. Silver’s book is likely

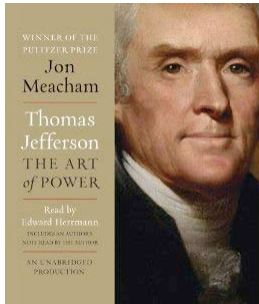
to be one of the more influential of this or other years as it is flying off the shelves—for those who read it, be sure to remember to think about the certitude of bold predictions, even by, and perhaps, especially by “experts” in any endeavor. Read this book (and thanks to Jim for the tip!).

**[The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human](#), by Jonathan Gottschall**



We have been interested in stories, narrative and shaping for some time. **Jonathan Gottschall**, in his fascinating new book *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, tells us that stories are not just important to human endeavor, but reminds us that we spend most of our time in story. From dreams, to movies or television, to books and cartoons, to video games, Gottschall maintains that story has enormous power over us and for us, and “how fiction subtly shapes our beliefs, behaviors, ethics—how it powerfully modifies culture and history”. John Hagel has been thinking about this a lot lately and he tells us that stories and narratives are related and have a powerful affect on the world: “Narratives are stories that do not end—they persist indefinitely...they amplify the dynamic component of stories...” Amy Zalman told us this year that “stories have global reach and power, and that “storytelling has long been associated with identity and survival”. Gottschall follows this trail to explain it in terms of neural functioning. He tells us that “Fiction is a powerful and ancient virtual reality technology that simulates the big dilemmas of human life”, and he wants us to understand that the “constant firing of our neurons in response to fictional stimuli strengthens and refines the neural pathways that lead to skillful navigation of life’s problems”. Our brains are simulators that allow us to practice how to handle some of the really tough challenges we face without risk. Gottschall ends the book by addressing critics who claim that literature is dying (and thus storytelling): “I don’t think traditional fiction is dying, and I don’t think the universal grammar will ever change. But I do think storytelling will evolve in new directions over the next fifty years. Interactive fiction, in the form of RPG’s (role playing games), will move from the geek fringe to the mainstream...and understanding the power of storytelling—where it comes from and why it matters—can never diminish your experience of it. Go get lost in a novel. You’ll see”.

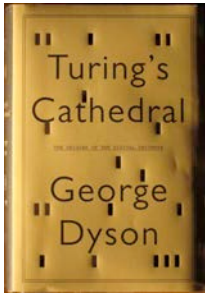
[Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power, by Jon Meacham](#)



Power is a key theme for us this year, but our focus has been on the changes taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that characterize the nature and practice of power. In examining the migration of power from West to East and from top down to distributed networks, we take a comparative look back at the power shifts brought about in Europe in 1848 with Professor Mike Rapport (his book, *1848: Year of Revolution*, is reviewed and recommended on this 2012 reading list). A new book that we highly recommend to you, takes us back a bit earlier in the nineteenth century: *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, by **Jon Meacham**. This is a highly detailed and enlightening treatment of Jefferson's life, which has often been contentious, seen unrealistically by both his supporters and his detractors. Meacham, a winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for his biography, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, covers the life of Jefferson through a political lens, from the Louisiana Purchase (using all his skills to expand the landmass of this new and still vulnerable country to transform American into a continental power with no rival) to his relationships to Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and John Adams. Of particular interest to contemporary readers is Jefferson's dealings with his avowed nemesis, Hamilton. Meacham gives us a highly nuanced appreciation of the fundamental chasm between them over taxes, the size of government, and government's continued functioning in the absence of a spending bill. Despite their strong disagreements and animus, Jefferson recognized in his pragmatism that they might be able to help each achieve much needed ends and reached out to Hamilton in compromise. While Jefferson was able to cultivate opportunities for agreement, it was likely a difficult thing for this scholarly and sometimes aloof man to do. Meacham's book is an immense achievement and provides us with far greater insight into the political adroitness of this remarkable Renaissance man and his accomplishments. Highly recommended.

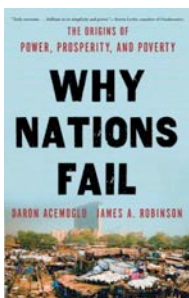


[\*Turing's Cathedral: The Origins of the Digital Universe\*, by George Dyson](#)



**George Dyson**, historian of technology and the author of *Darwin Among the Machines*, and *Project Orion*, two of our enduring recommendations on this annual list, has spent much of his life on this book, whether he realized it or not. His childhood was spent in the company of some of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century (including his father Freeman Dyson, Edward Teller, and Robert Oppenheimer); the first decade of this century was spent researching the files of other eminent pioneers, particularly John von Neumann. They and others, such as Hans Bethe, Benoit Mandelbrot (his memoir is reviewed on this year's list as well), and Alan Turing, are key players in the fascinating story that Dyson tells in *Turning's Cathedral: The Origins of the Digital Universe*. Dyson tells their personal and professional stories, bringing these little known people—many of whom were immigrants to America—to life in a larger-than-life history that changed the world. These are the people who built some of the earliest computers and the code that would become their DNA; these are the people who would tackle problems ranging from weather prediction to the building of nuclear weapons. Dyson continues to amaze us, and we recommend *Turing's Cathedral* to you as history, as “creation story” (not myth), and as appreciation of imagination, creativity, and innovation.

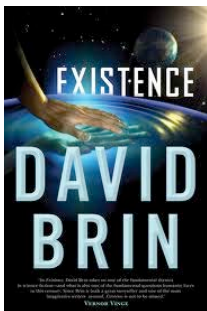
[\*Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty\*  
by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson](#)



Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart (in their highly influential book *Fixing Failed States*—reviewed on our 2008 annual reading list) focused on a major source of global poverty: state failure. In their massive new study turned into one of the major books of this year, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, authors **Daron**

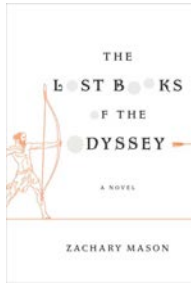
**Acemoglu** and **James A. Robinson**, professors of economics at MIT and Harvard respectively, find common ground with Ghani and Lockhart and find that most of the factors of poverty that we attribute to failure are wrong. *Why Nations Fail* is a comprehensive survey of the conditions of poverty, correlated with the forces that enrich others. What is essential, they conclude, is that deficient organizational structures and economic institutions are at fault (in company with Kwarteng's *Ghosts of Empire*, reviewed above, this makes for insightful reading). What is needed is the creation of inclusive institutions which distribute power broadly, but that requires trust and the willingness to give up total control. Nations which are "extractive", that is those which take from the system and its people, while protecting the power of the ruling class, are bound to fail. Current political climates are analyzed for probability of rising from chronic poverty: "Egypt is poor precisely because it has been ruled by a narrow elite that have organized society for their own benefit at the expense of the vast mass of people. Political power has been narrowly concentrated, and has been used to create great wealth for those who possess it, such as the \$70 billion fortune apparently accumulated by ex-president Mubarak...this interpretation of Egyptian poverty, the people's interpretation, turns out to provide a general explanation for why poor countries are poor". It all makes sense, and that is too bad. This is a brilliant and damning work—and it deserves to be read.

***Existence*, by David Brin**



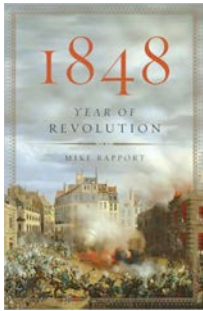
Over the years we have featured Neal Stephenson, Greg Bear, Orson Scott Card, Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Charlie Stross, **David Brin** and others on this list. Brin has given us another gift to enjoy this year, a new novel aptly titled *Existence*, a story that is sweeping on a grand scale. *The Los Angeles Times* suggests that this may be Brin's masterwork. The story is set in the not too distant future, and features (as one might guess from the title) a discovery of other life existence. There is a reverent thread, perhaps an homage to Clarke, with the discovery by a "space garbage collector" of an object waiting for "contact". *Existence* contains multiple story lines that will fascinate, infuriate, and resonate (particularly with reference to politics and the wealthiest few). Along the way Brin's wonderful imagination kicks in with curious technologies, adventures, and cautionary moments. In sum, this is classic Brin. Thanks to Barry Horton for setting us on this path eighteen years ago. It has enriched us all.

[The Lost Books of the Odyssey: A Novel, by Zachary Mason](#)



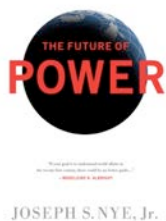
Among the small and select group of novels that we have recommended over the years, most are award-winners which take an unusual look into the future; books such as *The Road*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Pattern Recognition*, *Halting State*, *Ender's Game*, and *Wasp* have delighted our readers. This year we feature four novels, but one of them, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, takes a decidedly unique look at the past. First time author **Zachary Mason**, a computer scientist and artificial intelligence expert by day, has gone back in time to reimagine the story of Odysseus and his journey home from Troy. The conceit of this engaging and thoughtful page-turner is that Homer's *Odyssey* was a collection of many stories previously told that became the canon—so here is a new group of the stories—the “lost books” of the *Odyssey*—that are being retold, sometimes with a twist. These stories, or chapters (or single pages) bring the exploits of Odysseus and the gods to life for the modern reader in most lively language. One of our favorite “lost books” is the chapter of “Agamemnon and the Word”, a surreal experience in which “Agamemnon wanted a fortress on the wide plain before the walls of Troy but there was nothing to build with but a few trees and an unlimited quantity of sand. Therefore (at Odysseus’s suggestion) the Greeks dug the negative image of a palace in the white plain, a convoluted warren where cascades of fine grains trickled endlessly down the walls and into the tenuous corridors irregularly shored up with masonry”. Agamemnon kept asking for solutions to his knotty problems and seemingly insoluble riddles, with Odysseus presenting remarkable answers on each occasion. This story concludes after Agamemnon grew frustrated by Odysseus’s creative responses to his increasingly demanding requests, with one final order to Odysseus: “Bring me everything, the skies and their clouds and the rain pouring into the oceans and every grain of sand on all the beaches, every ant crawling on a stone and every god in his pomposity, *all in a single word*”. What did Odysseus do? Pick up *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* and find out. This is a wonderful adventure and a highlighted book.

**1848: Year of Revolution**, by Mike Rapport



Dramatic as they are, the impact of the Arab Spring revolutions is dwarfed by those of 1848 Europe, where governments fell in France, Austria, several Italian states, and across much of latter-day Poland, Hungary, Germany, Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. **Mike Rapport's** excellent and timely book, *1848: Year of Revolution*, takes a panoramic view of the sprawling set of rebellions, suppressions and invasions that helped to create today's Europe, and offers insights into contemporary uprisings as well. Rapport implies that revolutionaries' level of success depended on whether they ultimately sought simple *political* change or combined political and *social* change. As psychologists have shown, people will take risks in the hope of gain but are several times less willing to risk losing what they already have. *1848* is a sweeping and complex narrative and as in any epic and heroic tale it requires attention to myriad actors, numerous monarchs, ministers, advisors, generals, reformers and revolutionaries. Moving from broad view to intricate detail is a feat in itself; but through it all, Rapport's conclusions are sharply drawn. He reminds us that: *"The events of 1848 gave millions of Europeans their first taste of politics: workers and peasants voted in elections and even stood for and entered parliament. The civil liberties that flourished all too briefly that year also provided Europeans with the free space in which they—including women—were politicised, through participation in political clubs and workers' organisations."*

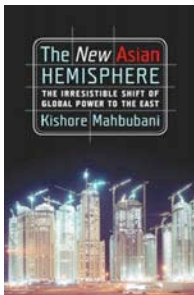
**The Future of Power**, by Joseph S. Nye, Jr.



**Joseph S. Nye, Jr.**, is an esteemed Harvard professor and National Intelligence Council chair under President Bill Clinton. His recent book, *The Future of Power*, outlines his

observations on the changing nature of power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To the surprise and delight of many, this is not a diatribe on the loss of American power, but rather a good news story for America, assuming our leaders recognize the shifts underway and take the actions necessary to keep America in a leadership position. Nye explains that power is more distributed and diffuse than before and that this is going to be the way of the world; he paints a picture in which power is shared and exercised in surprising ways, a delicate balance among large corporations (see the review of David Rothkopf's recent book, *Power, Inc.*), states, NGO's, terrorists, and IT-enabled interest groups. Nye pays particular attention to the role of information and technology, and in his chapter on "Diffusion and Cyberpower", he tells us: "Power transition from one dominant state to another is a familiar historical event, but power diffusion is a more novel process. The problem for all states in today's global information age is that more things are happening outside the control of even the most powerful states...The cyberdomain is both a new and a volatile human-made environment. The characteristics of cyberspace reduce some of the power differentials among actors and thus provide a good example of the diffusion of power that typifies global politics in this century".

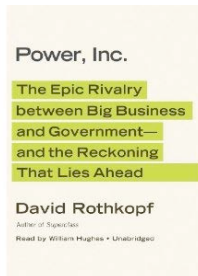
***The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East***  
by Kishore Mahbubani



A student of philosophy and history, **Kishore Mahbubani** has had the good fortune of enjoying a career in government and, at the same time, in writing on public issues. While in the Singapore Foreign Service for four decades, he had postings in Cambodia, Malaysia, Washington, and New York, where he served two stints as Singapore's Ambassador to the UN and as President of the UN Security Council. His recent book, *The New Asian Hemisphere*, details the forces that underlie the changing balance of power in the world. Simply put, Mahbubani tells us that "although European countries are still significant, their economic and demographic growth does not match those of either the emerging powers (including China and India) or the United States", and that we should be prepared to act in different ways with new and old powers. For almost two millennia, he notes, the locus of economic power was in Asia. From about 1820 until just recently, China and India were dormant. He may surprise readers when he asserts: "Asian societies are not succeeding because of a rediscovery of some hidden or forgotten strength of Asian civilizations. Instead they are rising now because though a very slow and painful process they have finally discovered the pillars of Western wisdom

that underpinned Western progress and enabled the West to outperform Asian societies for the past two centuries. The surprise is not that China and India are rising so fast, but that they (together with many other Asian societies) discovered these pillars so late. Mahbubani thoughtfully concludes that most modern societies apply, directly or indirectly, the key Western principles of domestic governance (democracy, rule of law, and social justice). The challenge in the twenty-first century is to apply them globally in a careful and prudent fashion. “The world has changed irrevocably...global government is not the answer. Global governance is needed urgently. We need to develop both institutions and rules to manage the world as a whole, institutions and rules that reflect the wishes and interests of 6.5 billion inhabitants”.

***Power, Inc.: The Epic Rivalry Between Big Business and Government--and the Reckoning That Lies Ahead***  
by **David Rothkopf**



Scholar and former economic policy maker **David Rothkopf** is a former Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Policy and then Managing Director of Kissinger Associates, he is now the CEO and Editor-at-Large of the journal Foreign Policy. He writes in his new book, *Power, Inc.*, “In a world in which the state is limited by its own laws as well as emerging international ones, in which multinational private actors can influence the formation of those laws or dodge their application altogether through global operations, in which global threats and challenges are increasingly beyond the ability of national actors to manage, and in which states and corporations are actors on equal footing whether before courts or in terms of the resources or tactics they can bring to bear to achieve a desired outcome, has something changed so fundamentally that it affects even the nature of the social contract and irreversibly alters the way global civil society is likely to work?” What’s a state to do? He believes we are living in a world where the old rules don’t apply and the new rules have not been written yet. Is the state’s monopoly on power eroding? Rothkopf is focused on striking the right balance between private and public power as “the fundamental challenge of our age”.