

## Best Acknowledgments of 2011

By Margaret Heilbrun  
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*Last week, on our spanking new Reviews site, we posted our Best Books of 2011, with further genre-based lists to come as we bid goodbye to the year by noting its bibliographic highlights.*

As a former practicing librarian, I'd like to add this entry to our lists:

### The Best Acknowledgments of 2011



Librarians—like all mortals—love to be on the receiving end of gratitude. When the occasional library, archives, or special collections researcher publishes the results of all that research and expresses thanks to the library in the book's acknowledgments, *and includes the names of the staff who helped*, well, the staff in question are thrilled.

Natch.

You know what? It doesn't happen often. I've looked. I've now surveyed the acknowledgments in dozens of 2011 histories and biographies (the genres most likely to entail library research) that have come my way at *LJ*. Here's how I sorted what I found.

### No Acknowledgments at All

This unfortunate trait must be, well, acknowledged, and then dismissed as beyond the pale.

### Thanking the Staff Generally

Yes, the most common variety of history and biography acknowledgments does thank library staff—and leaves it at that: the author is grateful to “the invaluable interlibrary loan staff” or ruefully notes “I hope that a collective thank you will suffice.” Some authors put in a few words

of empathy for what libraries are facing in this era of budget cuts, with acknowledgments that imply the cuts had included staff names.

### Thanking the Important Person

Then there are the acknowledgments by the “important” author who only thanks the person the author considers a peer. Naturally, that’s the library or institutional director—who probably hasn’t actually helped a researcher in this millennium.

### Thanking the Architecture

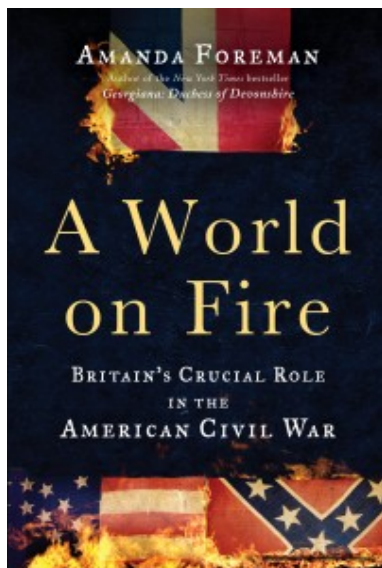
One of this year’s authors offered a paean to the “splendor” and “soul” of the main reading room of the Library of Congress, but was not tempted by alliteration to add any thanks to the “staff.” Another author did segue from architecture to staff: “I came to believe this library is the jewel of our civilization. The extraordinary scale and beauty of its landmark building, and the unfailing courtesy of its staff, express a profound respect for culture, for learning, and for human beings.” The “unfailing courtesy” shouldn’t be sneered at, of course.

### Thanking Everyone But the Staff

In a demographic all his own, one of this year’s biographers thanked his 19th-century subject for having lived and his parents for having given him life and many other relatives for being so congenial and supportive. Evidently librarians just didn’t treat him like family.

### Which Leads Me to This Year’s Winner!

## The Best Acknowledgments of 2011



In this book, which is among our best of 2011, Ms. Foreman personally names and thanks over 200 library, archives, and special collections staff members from around the world who helped her and her assistants with access to materials over the course of several years. Her acknowledgments are not only a tribute to all the women and men who enabled her work, but a tribute to her for the stamina and focus to keep track of them all systematically and name them with little fuss or muss. In an interesting twist, it’s “those at Penguin and Random House, who have worked on the book” who don’t get named!

On behalf of all public service staff, thank you,  
Amanda Foreman!

Amanda Foreman. *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*. Random. ISBN 9780375504945. \$35. pp.809-12. HIST