

[From the Editors](#)

The WQ's Top 10 Books of 2011

The best books reviewed in the WQ this year.

Dear Readers,

The process of selecting the 10 best books reviewed in the WQ's pages this year occasioned some spirited debates in our offices. There was so much good stuff to choose from! The 10 titles we finally settled on, a few of which will appear on many best-of lists, and others of which were simply the particular favorites of our editors and reviewers, offer a veritable feast of scholarship, inquiry, and fine—even brave—writing. Compliments of the season, from our shelves to yours.

THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE: Why

Violence Has Declined. By Steven Pinker. Viking. 802 pp. \$40

A monumental book that draws on anthropology, psychology, history, neuroscience, and other fields to show that humans have grown less violent over time.



DENG XIAOPING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF

CHINA. By Ezra F. Vogel. Belknap/Harvard. 876 pp. \$39.95

An exhaustively researched portrait of the leader who transformed 20th-century China.

HOW TO LIVE: Or a Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer. By Sarah Bakewell. Other Press. 389 pp. \$25

An unconventional biography of the French nobleman who invented the essay.

THE IMMORTALIZATION COMMISSION: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death. By John Gray. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 273 pp. \$24

A philosophical and historical treatise about the ultimate futility of pushing against death's outer limit.

IS MARRIAGE FOR WHITE PEOPLE? How the African American Marriage Decline Affects Everyone. By Ralph Richard Banks. Dutton. 289 pp. \$25.95

A Stanford law professor's nuanced exploration of the wide gap that persists between the marriage rates of blacks and whites.

MALCOLM X: A Life of Reinvention. By Manning Marable. Viking. 594 pp. \$30

The crowning achievement of a scholar who made his last great work, before his death earlier this year, the definitive biography of the radical black leader.

ODESSA: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams. By Charles King. W. W. Norton. 336 pp. \$27.95

An elegant history of Odessa, the Russian Black Sea city whose past is studded with tragedy along with periods of dynamism and creativity.

THINKING, FAST AND SLOW. By Daniel Kahneman. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 499 pp. \$30

A book about the irrational ways that humans make decisions, by the psychologist who made a science of the study.

THE WILD LIFE OF OUR BODIES: Predators, Parasites, and Partners That Shape Who We Are Today. By Rob Dunn. Harper. 290 pp. \$26.99

A biologist proposes that some of the parasites and bacteria modern life has scrubbed away are necessary for human health.

A WORLD ON FIRE: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War. By Amanda Foreman. Random House. 956 pp. \$35

A sweeping account of Britain's multifaceted role in the American Civil War.

--The Editors

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