

Dan Kleiman: I loved Heath Ledger in Breakneck Islands and Jeff Daniels in The World and the Willy. I'm not sure why these two performances affected my thinking, except to realize that Ledger and Daniels are among the best actors around.

Kathleen Knight: The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, by Russell Shorto, opens up new perspectives on non-English sources of representation—government—in this case, of the Dutch/United Provinces.

Andrew Marks: Doctors from Nell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans, by Vivien Spitz. A firsthand account of Nazi doctors by a court reporter at the Nuremberg trials, pointing out the horrors of human experimentation and highlighting the necessity of truly informed consent for human studies as well as of prior work in animal models to establish efficacy and safety.

Allan Rosenfield: Race Against Time, by Stephen Lewis, is a must-read for anyone interested in global health and the UN-supported Millennium Development Goals. Lewis is Ken arrivant's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. This book consists of a series of five lectures Lewis gave in Canada this year. It builds on the earlier and equally compelling work by Jeffrey Sachs, The End of Poverty.

Jeanette Takamura: Ron Chernow’s new biography of Alexander Hamilton, the first Treasury Secretary, is a grand tour of the country’s early years when something that social work professionals are often called to assist with, and the White House’s Office of Management and Budget document, for the insights it offers into national programs and policy.

Richard C. Wald: The Debate on the Telecommunications (Liberty of America, edited by Bernard Bailyn, various blogs conveying well-written and prescriptive analysis of important issues. The debate is not only a conversation that we need to educate our children better and preserve blogging as an unfettered way of life.

Jane Waldfogel: Social Inequality (journal of child and family policy), by Katherine Neckerman, looks at the consequences of 25 years of growth in income inequality in the U.S. and other industrialized countries, particularly in terms of family structure and children’s life chances.

Randall Balmer, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of American Religion at Barnard College, on developments in religion and politics in 2005:

1) The death of John Paul II and the elevation of Cardinal Ratzinger to the papacy, virtually assuring that the Roman Catholic Church will continue its conservative trajectory.
2) The “intelligent design” trial in Dover, Pennsylvania, showing the determination of the Religious Right to exert a powerful influence on the curricula of public schools.
3) Billy Graham’s final crusade in New York City in June, bringing him back to where it all began. His story, nine-week Madison Square Garden crusade in 1957 solidified his place as a media star for evangelicalism while also earning him the enmity of fundamentalists, who need him to keep cooperating with the city’s mainline Ministerial Alliance.

What’s ahead?

1) The influence of the Religious Right will wane slightly, reflecting the declining fortunes of the Republican Party, which is likely to suffer losses in the midterm elections.