

Nightstand

We asked activists and leaders around the country to share with us what they've been reading lately. We were particularly interested in anything they found inspirational or relevant to their work. Below are some recommendations for holiday reading.

SCOT NAKAGAWA, Executive Director,
Mackenzie River Gathering Society, Ptld., OR
***The Origin of Consciousness in the
Destruction of the Bicameral Mind***
– Julian Jaynes

Julian Jaynes' book takes the position that consciousness is a socially constructed thing — that it has a historical context that has changed over time. And when you look at things from that perspective, you realize that much of what we think is true may also be socially constructed. It still has relevance, because what we believe now has relevance, but it is not necessarily absolute.



Going back to ancient Greece, Jaynes makes the argument, pretty strongly I think, that the Greeks interpreted the internal conversations we have in

our own heads as divine communication. So essentially people went around constantly thinking God was telling them things.

It raises the possibility that Greece, ancient Greece which in Western civilizations is deified as a magnificent indication of the supremacy of occidentalism, is the result of what we would today consider insanity. All of your assumptions are challenged at this really fundamental level, which I think it is one of the most important things that people can do now. Not necessarily to read Julian Jaynes, but because one of the fundamental problems facing our society is this sort of occidental domination of our culture. We are identified as a Western civilization, and we really are culturally rigid and inflexible. That's why I think that the kind of book that studies the history of consciousness can be useful for people.

DENIS HAYES, President and CEO,
The Bullitt Foundation, Seattle, WA
***Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of
Human Societies*** – Jared Diamond

In an era when scientific acclaim flows to narrow specialists, Jared Diamond has won wide honors despite his polymathic interest in everything. A distinguished physiologist, evolutionary biologist, and biogeographer, Diamond drew deeply on fields as diverse as civil engineering and epidemiology to write this environmental history of our species.

Guns, Germs and Steel has everything you could ask for — sex, conflict, the demolition of long-standing myths, serious scholarship and deadpan hilarity. Like Diamond's earlier book, "*The Third Chimpanzee*," *Guns Germs* offers readers a deeper understanding of themselves, and their fellow beings. Of special interest to some of Western States Center's associates, Diamond does a masterful job of dismantling race-based explanations of history. By a wide margin, it is the best book I've read this year.

JUDY HATCHER

The Funding Exchange, New York, NY
I'm usually reading a few books at a time, mostly novels. Right now I'm reading some especially inspirational non-fiction. ***We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey***, by Bernice Johnson Reagon and various past and current members of the singing group. It's a wonderful book, full of songs and politics and personal epiphanies. It's a definite gift-idea for the music lover on your holiday list.

I've just started ***Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu***, by Michael Battle. It examines Tutu's approach to spirituality and community, as it incorporates issues like oppression and resistance, the African world view, and the relationship between individuals and society. ■