

## Softcover: US

## Out goes the baby with the bathwater

The longstanding critic of US policy would be more persuasive if he dared to acknowledge America's achievements

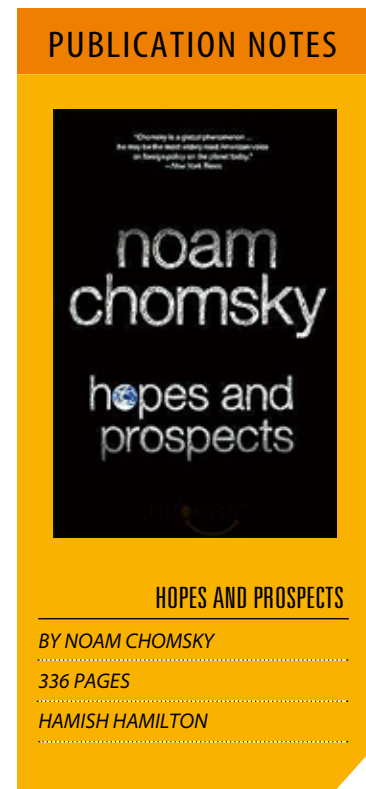
BY RAFAEL BEHR  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Only the most zealous American patriots believe that their country's foreign policy always lives up to its stated aims of promoting freedom and democracy around the world. The more interesting question is whether it sometimes comes close or even really tries. It is possible to attack US interventions overseas as horribly misguided and murderously bungled while recognizing that they contain some kernel of authentic moral aspiration. Many US policymakers in the early part of this decade genuinely felt that liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein was a noble thing to do.

The more skeptical view is that the US perception of itself as a force for good in the world is a dangerous, irrational delusion. Further down the skeptical spectrum is the view that US political evangelism is a grotesque hypocrisy, cunningly deployed to mask imperialistic ambitions. Further still, off the scale entirely, is Noam Chomsky. *Hopes and Prospects* is the latest barrage in a lifetime's assault on US political vanity by the 81-year-old linguistics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Chomsky took up a sideline in political writing in opposition to the Vietnam War and has kept anti-Washington cudgels at hand ever since. He has dedicated followers who see him as guru and gadfly, speaking unwanted truth to power. He is the closest thing to the intellectual far left has to a rock star.

In that sense, *Hopes and Prospects* is like one of those live albums that veteran bands release when they've stopped producing new singles; slightly different versions of familiar hits bashed out for an easily pleased audience. The book is a compilation of lectures and articles produced over the past few years. There is no single thesis, rather a constant interweaving of favorite Chomskyan themes: the capture of the US state and subordination of democracy to a narrow commercial and financial elite; the media's complicity; the uniquely high penalty paid by Latin America for the misfortune of being in Washington's backyard; the function of Israel as America's military client in the Middle East; the threat of nuclear apocalypse. Throughout, Chomsky sustains caustic disdain for the myths that Western societies tell themselves to justify their savage colonization of planet Earth. He dismisses vast tracts of history in a few splenetic paragraphs, as if no alternative interpretation is worth considering.

The worst catastrophe to befall our species, Chomsky implies, was Columbus' collision with an uncharted continent in 1492. From there, it is a short step to the genocide of indigenous American people and the formation of a mercantile dictatorship run by white Europeans, consolidated by war and terror. The US imperial model that emerged in the 20th century, Chomsky reminds us, borrowed heavily from the earlier British one. In particular, the younger cousin mimicked the older with its technique of prizing foreign



markets open at gunpoint, suppressing local competition until a comfortable monopoly had been secured and then proclaiming support for "free trade" on "a level playing field."

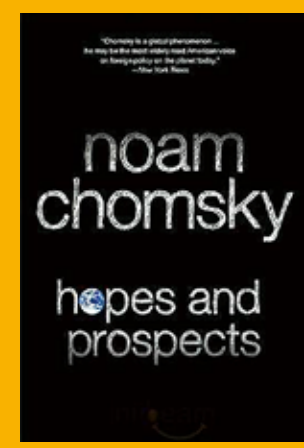
Chomsky shares with many radical left thinkers a studied reluctance to adopt the mainstream vocabulary of "globalization." The word implies everyone's inclusion in a unified economic enterprise. But for Chomsky, the only "global" element in the whole business is the one-size-fits-all policy template, dictated by the West to developing nations with a view to expropriating their resources and assets.

It is a cripplingly bleak philosophy. No one defends Western capitalism on the grounds that it is the perfect system, only that it is the best available. Likewise, the US comes out badly in comparison with an abstract ideal of beneficent global stewardship, but it comes out better in comparison with most available alternatives. Globalization under the Chinese Communist party, anyone? Anti-American exile in Tehran? At least a dissident in the US can sustain an academic career while constantly denouncing his leaders.

Perhaps Chomsky's analysis of all that is wrong with the West would resonate more if he modulated it with some occasional flicker of admiration for the achievements of Western civilization. His critique would also be strengthened by some recognition of the irony that he owes his considerable success to the system he despises. Does it bother him, perhaps, that he has lived the American dream?

Note: Chomsky is scheduled to give two talks in Taiwan, one at Academia Sinica in Taipei on Aug. 8 and the other on Aug. 9 at National Tsing Hua University (清華大學) in Hsinchu. For more details go to [ling.nthu.edu.tw/chomsky2010/timetable.html](http://ling.nthu.edu.tw/chomsky2010/timetable.html) (Chinese only).

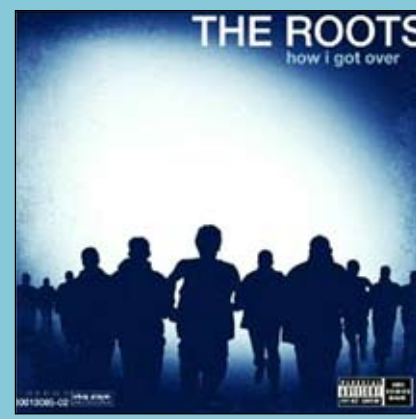
## PUBLICATION NOTES



## HOPES AND PROSPECTS

BY NOAM CHOMSKY  
336 PAGES  
HAMISH HAMILTON

BY TAYLOR BRIERE



The Roots  
How I Got Over  
Def Jam

The Roots have been pumping their brand of instrumental, intellectual and independent hip-hop for more than two decades now. Over that time they have released 10 albums, been nominated for six Grammy awards and been named one of the top 20 live bands in the world by *Rolling Stone*.

A band with a resume this impressive carries with it extremely high expectations. But on *How I Got Over*, their eleventh album, The Roots live up to their reputation.

*A Peace of Light* is the album's quiet opener, on which a vocal a capella of harmonizing "dos" and "daps" create a sonically arresting progression that quickly evolves into a head-bobbing jam.

After setting the right mood, the first flows drop on the second track, *Walk Alone*, a hip-hop treatise on the virtues of being independent, on which Black Thought raps: "Forced to face the music like a graduate of Juilliard/Walk alone, talk alone, get my Charlie Parker on." It isn't the sort of verse you'd ever expect to hear blasting in a club, and it's a good example of what sets The Roots apart from many of their hip-hop contemporaries: They've never been in the business of crafting commercial hits.

The Roots have also never shied away from collaborations with a diverse range of artists, so it should come as no surprise that they'd choose to rework folk songstress Joanna Newsom's song, *The Book of Right-on*. The Roots' version of *Right On* preserves Newsom's original bassline and features her nasally delivery of its chorus hook, "We should shine a light on/a light on/And the book of right on is right on/It was right on."

The instrumentation and production on the record is as tasteful as it gets, inviting reviewers to use all the words we fall back on to describe sounds like these: "natural," "warm," "enveloping," "organic." But ultimately the quality of a rap record comes down to its flows, and this record has stellar ones in spades. For anyone who is a fan of hip-hop, it's a must-listen.

Ariel Pink was discovered by indie-rock heroes Animal Collective in 2003, and became the first artist (outside of members of the band themselves) to be released on their label, Paw Tracks. In the years that followed, he developed a reputation akin to that of lo-fi DIY legend R. Stevie Moore: an odd lonely genius quietly toiling away at audio experiments and selectively releasing them to the world.

In 2008, Ariel Pink formed a legitimate band for the first time, called Haunted Graffiti, which did a lot to shore up his hit-or-miss live shows and lend a greater sense of cohesion to his releases, which had previously felt a bit like completely random collections of tracks.

*Before Today* is Ariel Pink's best album to date. It sounds like the sort of music you pick up on the AM dial during a long road trip and find yourself helplessly jamming to against your better judgment — hits buried in the refuse of years long gone. The band is self-conscious of this link, it seems, as the record includes several samples of engines revving and cars passing by.

Highlights include a faithful rendition of *Bright Lit Blue Skies*, a song penned by the Rockin' Ramrods in 1966, on which lovely organ synths mesh with a rollicking bassline and a singalong 60s-style chorus.

The band unleashes the funk on *Beverly Kills*, with Pink singing in a hilarious falsetto atop a bassline dripping 70s groove.

The album's star track, however, might be *Menopause Man*, which juxtaposes light and dark to great effect. "Break me, castrate me, make me gay," Pink sings in a deadpan before the track erupts into a rich falsetto explosion of a chorus, eventually devolving into a noise jam replete with crashing cymbals and goofy sound effects.

This is easily both Ariel Pink's most accessible and his most accomplished release, bursting at the seams with pop nuggets that finally deliver on the promise of his prior work. If you have an urge to recall forgotten sounds, give it a spin.



Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti  
Before Today  
4AD



Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings  
I Learned the Hard Way  
Daptone

Sharon Jones' career is a study in perseverance. The diva first began performing in the 1970s, during the glory days of R 'n' B. But despite those early efforts to break into a career as a professional musician, she remained undiscovered until 1996, when she got work as a backing singer for legend Lee Fields. That became just the spark she needed for her solo career.

Now Jones and her backing band, the Dap-Kings, stand together at the head of a new movement to reclaim retro R 'n' B sounds for the next generation. That movement gained significant steam with the rise of Amy Winehouse following her *Back in Black* release, an album which the Dap-Kings made a hefty musical contribution to before touring as Winehouse's backing band.

Comparisons to Winehouse are, therefore, inevitable. But their vocal styles actually bear little resemblance to one another. Winehouse's voice is a true original, while Sharon Jones sounds familiar, like an old leather couch you keep in the basement because you can't bear to let go of something so comfortable.

*I Learned the Hard Way* is Jones' fourth release with the band, and its central theme seems to be that of relationships gone wrong. On *Better Things to Do*, atop some funky guitar and a simple repetitive bass riff that persists for virtually the entire song, she sings: "I've got better things to do/better things to do than remember you." The track lacks a slamming chorus, instead building up a simple jam in stages, relying on Jones' voice to carry it through to the end.

*If You Call* is an old-style R 'n' B ballad, with arpeggiated guitars giving it a sense of sullen, quiet desperation. Jones belts out its lines like they were bullets. "Am I dead or am I living?/I feel no blood in these veins."

The album's closer, *Mama Don't Like My Man*, might be its greatest track. It is simple, charming and beautifully rendered, with only a springy guitar riff and a couple of chorus girls backing Jones up as she pleads for her Mama to reconsider the virtues of her man.

Although Sharon Jones has not "endeared" herself to the press in the same way Winehouse has, she has been quietly growing a base of fans who appreciate her efforts. To top it off, she's not addicted to crack, which, when taking a long view, may ultimately give her a leg up.

Julian Lynch is graduate student of ethnomusicology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and this makes an excellent starting point when talking about his music. His new record, *Mare*, sounds like the work of a man who has been hitting the music books.

The album opens with the sound of shakers atop a synthesized drone. A guitar riff that is bendy in all the right places is then layered on top, sounding vaguely like an Indian raga. Vocals drift in soon after, in the form of a woozy psychedelic mumbling of indistinguishable lyrics. The song then fades and listeners are left with the job of piecing together exactly what it was they just heard. *Just Enough* seems like an apt title for it, because it seems to have just enough music to qualify as a song.

And that is exactly what makes this record so engaging. Lynch juggles numerous musical references with extreme ease, brimming with a confidence that reverberates throughout *Mare*'s tracks. There is no need here to conform with stylistic expectations. This is, first and foremost, an album of sounds and textures. Verses? Choruses? Lyrics? Who really needs them?

On the exquisite *Travelers*, guitars and voices bubble in and out of a quiet soundscape grounded in a simple groove created by bass and hand drums. On *Ears*, Lynch pairs an energetic drum beat with mangled falsetto vocals to create an atmosphere pregnant with possibilities before the track tumbles into a searing fuzz guitar solo. The effect this creates is hard to put into words and completely defies attempts to classify it — it's that weird.

Despite its eclecticism, *Mare* does not suffer from any lack of cohesion — on the contrary, it feels quite smooth throughout. While certainly not for everyone, *Mare* is likely to generate some interest among music aficionados looking for something different.



Julian Lynch  
Mare  
Olde English Spelling Bee

## Hardcover: US

## When new-wave drug dealers run afoul of a cartel

Don Winslow has taken his craft to a higher level with 'Savages,' his 13th and most uproariously stylish crime novel

BY JANET MASLIN

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK  
"Don Winslow is an author currently living in the US, most recognized for his crime and mystery novels." That's the one-sentence entirety of the biographical notice Winslow has attracted on Wikipedia, though he has a dozen novels, a couple of movie deals, a slew of ardent reviews, a whip-cracking way with words and a whole lot of Southern California surfer baditude to his credit.

Those earlier books (11 published in the US, one available in the UK with no set American publication date) have much sparkle to recommend them. But they aren't *Savages*, the one that will jolt Winslow into a different league. *Savages* is his 13th and most boisterously stylish crime book, his gutsiest and most startling bid for attention.

It's clear that *Savages* has no dearth of nerve from the snow-white, one-page opening chapter, which consists of exactly two

words. The first one isn't "thank." The second one is "you." As opening gambits go, this one is pure kamikaze, and it could have backfired accordingly. But Winslow has written the killer book to back it up.

*Savages* is full of wild-card moves. And it's not afraid to risk missing its mark. But its wisecracks are so sharp, its characters so mega-cool and its storytelling so ferocious that the risks pay off, thanks especially to Winslow's no-prisoners sense of humor. About a Latino neighborhood: "You hear English here it's the mailman talking to himself." About skewering the bourgeoisie: "Every great wine-tasting should end with arsenic." About an Iraq war veteran who feels overlooked in Orange County's smug atmosphere: "Without men like me, the clubhouse whores would be wearing burqas, my friend."

The Iraq vet, a former member of the Navy Seals, is the ostensible reason for that note of hostility on the book's first page. He calls

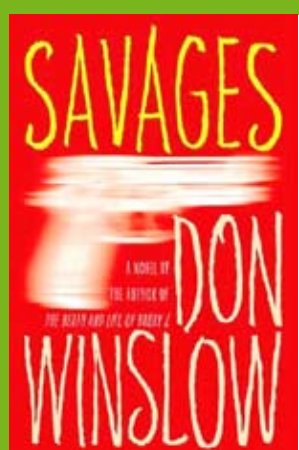
himself Chon (though his given name is John), and he's half of a pragmatic new-wave drug-dealing partnership in Laguna Beach. Chon and his partner, Ben, aren't tired old *Scarface* types. They represent a more creative kind of illicit entrepreneurship. Chon's case of what this acronym-filled book calls "PTLOSD" ("Post-Traumatic Lack of Stress Disorder") has empowered him to sign on as a private-security mercenary in Afghanistan and to come home carrying the most potent marijuana seeds he could find.

When Chon entrusted these seeds to the wonkier Ben, the book says, it was "like giving Michelangelo some paintbrushes and a blank ceiling and saying — 'Go for it, dude.'"

(The occasional free-verse layout is another of Winslow's potentially dangerous tricks.)

Ben bred the seeds until they were even stronger. He created "a plant that could almost get up, walk around, find a lighter, and fire itself up." But Ben and Chon have grown

## PUBLICATION NOTES



SAVAGES  
BY DON WINSLOW  
302 PAGES  
SIMON & SCHUSTER

this crop too successfully for their own good, attracting the extreme interest of a Mexican cartel in Baja, a group not friendly to competition.

Now Ben wants out of the drug business. He's become interested in philanthropy in third world nations. He certainly doesn't want to grow crops for the Mexican cartel.

"He appreciates the irony, though, that the Mexicans basically want to turn them into field workers," Winslow writes. And: "He digs the reverse colonialism of it, but it just isn't his thing."

So *Savages* is a battle of wills. And that battle, for all the book's throwaway humor, turns as vicious as the title implies. As the story begins, Chon is with Ophelia. Ophelia is called O for short, and nicknamed Multiple O. She enjoys her life in Laguna Beach as a part-time dysfunctional daughter (her mother is known as PAQU, for "Passive Aggressive Queen of the Universe") and full-time slacker.

When Ophelia sees Chon staring intensely at his computer screen, she thinks he's looking at pornogra-

phy. He is. But it's not the type she imagines. It's a monstrous snuff scene sent by the Baja cartel as a warning, showing what can happen to rogue dealers. And it strikes not just fear but also curiosity into Chon. He's just enough of an etymologist to notice that "beheading" is both a noun and a verb.

"You want my advice, boys? And girl?" asks the DEA agent whom Ben, Chon and O regularly bribe. "I'll miss you, I'll miss your money, but run." Chon is old-school enough to think that if you start running you can never stop. (Ben insists irrelevantly that running is fun and good for the cardiovascular system.) The point is they're ready to fight the cartel in a war of nerves.

Since the video wasn't enough to scare Ben and Chon, the cartel has a second idea: Kidnap O. So she becomes a hostage, a role that allows her to fulfill a dream. ("I'm actually forced at gunpoint to lie around my room and do nothing but watch bad TV.") While in captivity she starts demanding her

rights, like the rights to Internet access and salad. Soon she is half-trying to fool PAQU about her whereabouts with bogus messages. As in: "It's very nice here, with the Eiffel Tower and all that." And: "Okay, it's off to Trafalgar Square and later to the West End to see a play. I might even give Shakespeare a try! Who'd a thunk, huh?"

As the peril in *Savages* escalates, Chon finds himself forced back into military mode. Ben finds himself prodded toward behavior that he can justify but not condone. And what began in the tone of Elmore Leonard moves into the darker realm of Oliver Stone, who plans to film *Savages* but will have to walk a tightrope when he takes it on.

The Winslow effect is to fuse the grave and the playful, the body blow and the joke, the nightmare and the pipe dream. It's flippant and dead serious simultaneously. "Whatever happened to morality?" somebody asks in *Savages*. Winslow answers: "Replaced by a newer, faster, easier technology."