Best Reference 2013

Brian E. Coutts, Western Kentucky University
Cheryl LaGuardia, Harvard University
Louis Shores, writing in 1939 in the second edition of his Basic Reference Sources, defined a reference book as “any book which is used to refer to for specific information.” Today’s “Best Reference Sources” can be found in reference and circulating collections, online, accessed on your laptop or iPhone, or even carried in your backpack.

The publication of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism, with 7,000 articles by more than 1,000 scholars, ended a 25-year quest to document one of the world’s oldest living traditions. Covering Indian history, languages, art, music, dance, architecture, medicine, and women’s issues, with spectacular color illustrations, it is one of the year’s top releases.

Also drawing international acclaim was Mammals of Africa, published by Bloomsbury, a ten-year project involving a team of editors and 350 authors who describe the 1,160 species and 16 orders of Africa’s mammals. A highlight is the 660 color illustrations by renowned biologist Jonathan Kingdon. Kingdon grew up in Tanzania, where his mother taught him to draw and then to read and write.

Our knowledge of American music was greatly enhanced by the publication of a second edition of the Grove Dictionary of American Music, with its 9,300 articles in eight volumes from 1,500 authors, almost double the number in the 1986 edition. Its 4.3 million words provide much broader coverage of Latino, Asian American, Native American, and Hawaiian music and musicians, not to mention 300 articles devoted to individual country musicians. Also for music lovers, Steve Sullivan’s Encyclopedia of Great Popular Song Recordings, from Scarecrow, describes in detail the stories behind more than 1,000 key songs, recordings, performers, and songwriters from 1889 to the present.

The executive branch of our government was the focus of two new reference works. The Encyclopedia of the U.S. Presidency, edited by Nancy Beck Young (Univ. of Houston), devotes a chapter to every presidential administration from Washington to Obama and offers biographical essays on first ladies and vice presidents. To quote LJ’s reviewer, entries are characterized by remarkable depth and insightful prose. Shirley Anne Warshaw’s (Gettysburg Coll.) Guide to the White House Staff (CQ Press) covers from the four people who served George Washington to the hundreds working today and discusses the increasing specialization of staff across policy and political units.

For sheer dedication, how about retired history/humanities professor Beverly Chico, who in her Hats and Headwear Around the World (ABC-CLIO) shares knowledge gained from 40 years of collecting, researching, exhibiting, lecturing, and consulting for museums from around the globe. Similarly, octogenarian Irma Collins retired from teaching music in colleges and schools and thought the world needed a good Dictionary of Music Education. She wrote one for Scarecrow.

New Orleans, where the good times roll, was the subject of two wonderful resources, Susan Larson’s The Booklover’s Guide to New Orleans (Louisiana State Univ.) and the Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas by Rebecca Solnit and Snedeker (Univ. of California), which drew the best headline of the year, “Mapping New
Orleans by trees, parades, seafood and sex," in the *New Orleans Advocate*.

The book drawing the most media attention was *Candy*. Author Samira Kawash was featured on the *Weekend Edition* of NPR in a segment titled “A Sweet and Sour History of our Obsession with Candy” and in a review in the *Wall Street Journal* in which the author was quoted as saying, “It isn’t so complicated: eat real food. And then have a few jelly beans.” Our favorite though comes from the Bennington Banner: “Don’t Be Spooked, let your little goblins eat the candy corn.”

**Arts**


The British film industry, one of the world’s oldest, has gone through periods of boom and bust. Two eminently qualified specialists, Chibnall, who owns a private collection of thousands of pieces of British film, and Burton, who’s written extensively on silent film and directors, here describe that tortuous history beginning with a detailed chronology and following with an overview and then a dictionary section on outstanding actors, producers, directors, organizations, and studios. Among recent helpful signs, according to the authors, are lottery funding and a reputation for heritage films and literary adaptations. Lists of awards and an exhaustive bibliography complete this outstanding work.


Collins, now 83, has been teaching at both public schools and universities for 50 years. Interviewed for the *Winchester Star*, she commented, “I’ve always wanted a music education dictionary—because there wasn’t one like this.” To remedy the lack she outlines the precursors to the discipline in a detailed chronology dating back to the Greeks in the sixth century BCE. She follows this with dictionary entries covering from Canadian bandmaster Eric Abbot to Johannes Zumpe, a German-born maker of English square pianos. Her focus extends beyond the United States to include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the UK. Lists of organizations, of publications arranged by country, and of examining institutions and a bibliography complete this groundbreaking source.


As director of the Black Arts Research Center, Gray has produced many outstanding reference works in the “Black Music Reference” series. The focus of this bibliography is on *musica bailable*, or simply “Latin Music.” His 5,300 entries describe general works on the history and evolution of Latin music, materials on Latin musical instruments from the accordion to the violin, key music and dance genres from the bolero to salsa, regional studies covering 34 countries, and biographies and critical studies on 1,100 artists, dancers, and others.


The first edition with the title “New” was published to rave reviews in 1986. This second edition has been completely revised. The 9,300 articles include 4,800 that are new, and at 4.3 million words, the set is twice as long. Additions encompass entries on topics such as boy bands, the Black Eyed Peas, Mexican cumbia singer/songwriter Rigo Tovar, country singer Taylor Swift, and New York composer John Zorn. As well as artists, the material addresses topics such as musical tourism, pilgrimages to places such as New Orleans or the Imagine Mosaic in Strawberry Fields in New York’s Central Park, and even music in video games—this rich source is primed to serve the next generation as an authoritative source on American music.

Some reference works are just plain addictive, and none more so than this fascinating collection of 1,000 key song recordings from 1889 to the present selected by Sullivan, who’s been writing about popular music since the mid-1980s. He organizes the songs into ten playlists from “Crazy Blues” to “Memories of You.” The stories behind the recordings make this source fascinating. Who knew that Tom Dooley, made famous in a 1958 recording by the Kingston Trio, was based on the story song “Tom Dula,” written in 1868 about a returning North Carolina civil war soldier who’s hung for murdering one of his two lovers? Or that Keith Richards woke out of a fitful sleep in a Florida motel to record the riff that became “I Can’t get No Satisfaction” for the Rolling Stones in 1965? Use the title index to check out your favorite tunes.

Clothing & Dress


While living in Madrid in the 1950s, Chico began collecting old head pieces, religious hats, folk bonnets, and even Guardia Civil tricornes. Her collection has now grown to more than 600 unique items from 100 countries, and she is acknowledged as a leading expert on headwear. Defining “headwear” as anything worn or covering the human head, she documents a dazzling array of hats, caps, hoods, caul, wigs, veils, and headscarves such as the Cardinal’s red hats dating to 1245 CE; the chullas, worn by men in the Peruvian highlands; and the headgear worn by today’s professional athletes. There are even sidebars on hat terms like the hat trick, first used in a cricket match in 1858 Sheffield, England. Chico discusses each item with regard to its social and cultural importance or use as a religious or political symbol. A unique source.


This author has developed many award winning reference sources. The focus here is on the nature of apparel and the fashion industry. She uses 313 major entries to document milestones in the history of attire from the cave dwellers to the present. Grooming, hairstyles, sleepwear, prison attire, the couture of Givenchy, the elegant luggage of Vuitton, and the important role played by magazines such as Vogue are all covered here; as the author notes, clothing history “encompasses every aspect of human endeavor.”

Food


Burford’s roots in Virginia orchards go back generations. He’s been called the “prince among antiquarian apple enthusiasts.” He describes almost 200 varieties selected for flavor and historical context, from the Arkansas Black, first produced in 1870 near Bentonville, AR, to the Yates, which dates from 1844 in Fayette County, GA. For each he gives the history, describes the exterior and interior, disease resistance, uses, and storage quality. Part two is an orchard primer that discusses planning, planting, and propagation. Burford knows his stuff: he told a Washington Post reporter recently that the key to a great apple pie is to use several varieties.


The editors and a very diverse cast of contributors including the editor of Barista Magazine, a mechanical engineer, and a medical anthropologist have created this magnum opus that examines everything from the soil to the cup in 63 essays arranged in five parts. The first focuses on the business: coffee is the world’s most widely traded tropical agricultural commodity. The second part profiles producer countries, such as Vietnam, which now ranks second in global production, and consumer country profiles, which show that Americans are drinking better quality coffee but less of it. The history of coffee and its social life are next. The good news in part four, on the qualities of coffee, is
that drinking the beverage in moderation is generally beneficial to health. A final section looks to the future and even offers advice on how to make a great cup of coffee. Reading this is like waking up to the aroma of a fresh pot: immensely satisfying.


In an interview for Canada’s National Post, Kawash noted that “one of the wonderful things about candy is it’s not healthy. It’s honest; It says I am here for your pleasure.” Kawash tells the fascinating story of how candy evolved from a luxury good to a cheap everyday snack. She describes the technological changes such as the vacuum steam pan, starch mogul, and chocolate dipping machines that revolutionized production. Along the way the industry weathered rumors that candy was unsafe, even poisonous; it contained alcohol, caused cavities, and made us fat, leaving us with this thought from the National Confectioners Association in 2012: “It is important to remember that candy and chocolates are treats, snacks or desserts.”

General Reference


Danilov probably knows more about the state of America’s museums than any other person, having written 17 books about them. Here he marshals his vast knowledge to describe 472 museums, historic sites, and memorials for some 409 people from actors and presidents to outlaws and writers. They are arranged by subject from the Rex Allen Arizona Cowboy Museum to the Hillwood Estate of Marjorie Merriweather Post. For each he provides history, program, and contact info. Readers can even check their destination state in the Geographic Guide.

History


While there’s no shortage of reference sources on the American Civil War, this ranks among the best. Start with 2,648 entries that consume 1.5 million words in six volumes. In addition to famous battles and leading military and political figures, discuss political, economic, societal, and artistic trends; provide superbly crafted battle maps; illustrate profusely from collections such as the Library of Congress; and explain the meanings behind medals and confusing military ranks. Add a glossary of terms, a chronology so detailed that it sometimes goes day by day, a bibliography, and an entire volume of primary documents with entries from Mary Chestnut’s Diary and Sherman’s Orders Concerning the March to the Sea, and what you have is an extraordinary reference source on the seminal event in 19th-century America, an event that still casts shadows today.


World War II was a truly global war fought on land, at sea, and in the air over four continents by 25 groups of combatants. In all, some 60 million people died, 2.5 percent of the world’s population. Here Doyle, a well-known scientist and military historian, uses graphs, charts, map overlays, and high-impact infographics to illuminate the social and economic costs of the war. Six chapters describe preparations; land, sea, and air campaigns; weapons and innovations; and costs. Readers will learn that the costliest clash was the Battle of Stalingrad, that German bombers attacked London every night but one between September and mid-November of 1940, and that the D-day landings involved 179,515 troops, 26,391 aircraft, and 6,939 naval vessels. Never has the ultimate cost of the war been so visually displayed.

War came to Gettysburg, PA, on July 1, 1863, when the forces of Gen. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia collided with the Union Army of the Potomac led by Maj. Gen. George Meade. The battle took place in the woodlots, ridges, and hills of the pastoral seat of Adams County. When it ended on July 3, 53,000 soldiers had died, been wounded, or been captured. Reardon (Penn State) and Vossler, a retired army colonel, who have devoted decades to the subject, here combine their talents to produce the best guide to the field of Battle at Gettysburg. With chapters focusing on what happened, who fought, who commanded, who fell, and who lived in Gettysburg and what they said about the battle later, the authors offer a tour of some 35 key vantage points. Old controversies are reviewed and new insights explored.

Humanities


Lopez (Univ. of Michigan), who once spent a year in Tibetan refugee monasteries, began working on this dictionary 12 years ago. He was joined by Buswell (UCLA) who spent seven years as a Buddhist monk in Thailand, Hong Kong, and Korea. With help from their graduate students and building on earlier reference works, the authors have crafted more than 5,000 entries totaling over a million words. One aim was to redress the omission of Buddhist traditions of Tibet and Korea in earlier works. There’s a chronicle of Asian historical periods, a time line back to the sixth century BCE, and a “List of Lists.”


Take 11 beautifully bound volumes containing 7,000 articles from a thousand scholars, many handwritten in their native languages of Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali, and Tamil, translate them into English, and edit and reedit them over the course of 25 years. Add to this spectacular, full-color illustrations portraying everything from the major deities of the Hindu pantheon to the Hindu temple complex of Angkor Vat in Cambodia, add name, text, theme, and concept indexes, and the result is this amazing reference source that will serve students and adherents alike. Whether seeking to understand the role of pilgrimage for the devout or the Hindu concept of marriage, begin your search here.


Among the unique features of Jewish folklore are its multilingual character—given the dispersion of the people to many different lands—and the availability of written sources back to antiquity. Bar-Itzhak (Univ. of Haifa) builds on an idea conceived by Patai, a famed scholar of Hebrew myth and history, to create this rich collection of more than 250 entries authored by a mostly Israeli-American cast who describe folk narrative, audio-oral folklore, the year cycle, the supernatural, and places. Entries cover, for example, Aaron, elder brother of Moses; angels; Kibbutz folklore; Torah ornaments; and the “Wandering Jew.” A detailed list of anthologies, a section of beautiful color plates, and black-and-white illustrations enhance this very readable collection.

Language & Linguistics


A former book review editor for New Orleans’s Times-Picayune, Larson currently hosts The Reading Life on WWNO, the city’s public radio station. This second edition (the first was published in 1999) has been given a total
makeover. The new edition, the cover of which features a tattooed young woman gazing out a rain-spattered streetcar window, describes the literary history of the city from the early 18th-century letters of Ursuline Marie Madeleine Hachard, to the works of Walt Whitman, Samuel Clemens, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams through to post-Katrina writers such as Ruth Salvaggio. A welcome extra is Larson’s literary address book, which allows readers to find the residences of famous writers, locate bookshops, and even discover good places to write. This is a tour de force of the New Orleans literary scene.


This work expands and updates the Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry, edited by the late Ian Hamilton in 1994. New editor Noel-Tod (Univ. of East Anglia) reviews poetry for the Times Literary Supplement. Coverage now begins in 1910 and is guided by anthologies published since 1994. The alphabetically arranged text exclusively covers poets, and there is a separate appendix on movements. Of 300 new entries, almost 50 percent are on women and an equal share cover the British Isles and the United States. All revisions and new entries are the work of the editor, who has succeeded in his stated intent to devise a compact resource that guides outward to wider reading.

Law & Politics


While there have been many reference sources on the U.S. presidency, this engagingly written source with its remarkable depth is one of the best and the most up-to-date. Volume 1 includes 19 thematic essays about the history of the presidency. Volumes 2–6 provide a biography of each president, describe each presidential election and succeeding administration, and highlight major events and issues. Insets discuss first ladies and vice presidents. Even the much maligned Millard Fillmore, who became president on July 10, 1850, following Zachary Taylor’s death, gets a new look for his role in keeping the nation united during a time of increased sectional controversy. Editor Young (history, Univ. of Houston), who wrote the chapters on George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and 41 other contributors put it all into historical context.


As part of the 12-volume, 3,500-entry Oxford Encyclopedia of American History, this two-volume topical set has 450 alphabetically arranged entries that focus on the diplomatic and military episodes, people, and ideas central to American history. From biographies of the key decision-makers to doctrines like Truman and key strategies, they’re described here along with 150 of the most important events and treaties, foreign relations, historiography, organizations, and government departments concerned with war and diplomacy. Comprehensive, authoritative, and current entries from leading scholars give you the real story not always found on the Internet.


Our first presidents often relied on a single assistant, but today’s White House Staff numbers 450 people. Warshaw, a political scientist (Gettysburg College) and the author of seven books on presidential decision-making, describes the foundations of the White House Staff in part one and the operations of the modern White House Staff in part two. Administrative operations expanded in the 20th century as presidents began delivering more speeches and drafting extensive foreign and domestic policies culminating in the Reorganization Act of 1939 that created the Executive
Office of the President. Warshaw looks at White House organization, transition, key policymaking units, and career paths for those leaving office. An appendix lists all White House Staff since 1939.

Sciences


This six-volume set’s five editors hail from the UK, Australia, and Kenya and are joined by 350 expert contributors to describe all 1,160 species of African mammals. A highlight is the 660 color illustrations by Kingdon. The set opens with introductory chapters covering evolution, geography and geology, biotic zones, and morphology. The remaining sections are a comprehensive compendium of current knowledge on the animals in question. We learn that only three species of elephants are extant, two in Africa, and that they now occupy only 20 percent of their historic range, while giraffes currently number fewer than 100,000. A glossary and bibliography complete this rich resource.


The editors note that developments in the last 20 years have ushered in a golden era of evolutionary study. Rapid and inexpensive sequencing of large amounts of DNA and spectacular fossil finds have aided in this pursuit. Leading international scientists cover the topic in eight sections. The first describes the basics—what evolution is, the history of its study, and the evidence for its occurrence. The seven sections that follow cover the major areas of evolutionary biology. For each article there is an outline, glossary, and suggestions for further reading. With its own Facebook page, this is a great resource for students and teachers.

Social Sciences


Zhao (UC–Santa Barbara) and Park (Loyola Marymount Univ.) and over 200 scholars from a variety of disciplines have collaborated on some 600 entries that describe major Asian immigrant groups from the oldest and largest, the Chinese (3.8 million); to the wealthiest, Indians (a median income of $90,711); to the fastest growing, Thai, whose numbers have increased 131 percent since 1990. Topics like the Ah Quin Diary, the first significant writing in English by a Chinese immigrant (1877–1902), Alien Land Laws that began in California in 1913, and the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees are complemented by a collection of 55 primary documents and a detailed bibliography.


Designed to give the reader un sabor (a taste) of the different forms of expressive culture of the fastest-growing ethnic minority in the United States, this set delivers so much more. Tatum (Univ. of New Mexico) and a talented group of contributors use nine broad categories to explore history and origins, regional practices, and contemporary forms on subjects such as art, food, literature, spiritual beliefs, and theater and dance. The coverage of contemporary trends here is exceptional. From celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo and artists such as the Santeros of New Mexico to the practice of rascuache, that unique way of recycling and recomposing—it’s all given a fresh look here in essays and spotlights on culture and biography.

This first-of-its-kind reference source endeavors to explore the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences. Using a multidisciplinary approach, international scholars examine how philosophy looks at the social sciences and mark how the two are interrelated and differentiated. They see lots of new areas of study developing as outgrowths of artificial intelligence and cognitive studies while social scientific research has impacted philosophy. The 402 entries range from “A Priori and A Posteriori,” a distinction codified by Immanuel Kant, to “World-Systems Analysis.” A helpful reader’s guide groups entries under 17 subject categories. This title offers a whole different way of looking at things.


Street crimes, those connected to the urban lifestyle against people and property in both public and private spaces, are often the lead story in our newspapers and local television news programs. Ross, who teaches criminal justice (Univ. of Baltimore) and is a frequent analyst for national media, and an international group of social scientists discuss criminals from street gangs to those involved in organized crime and victims, such as tourists. Street crime trends in major cities are described in detail, and there is a helpful chronology and a detailed glossary.

Travel & Geography


Solnit, who wrote a similar atlas on San Francisco, and Snedeker, an award-winning New Orleans filmmaker, here try to make sense of a city where nine million tourists spend $6 billion annually in pursuit of fun, in a state where one out of every 14 black men is behind bars. An ensemble of contributors use 22 maps to explain a city in which cardinal directions are of little use, where the sugar industry became a heaven and a hell, and where the banana trade flowed out from the Garden District to the “banana republics” of Central America. Most intriguing is the map “Snakes and Ladders” depicting the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the snakes being mostly people in power making all the wrong decisions and the ladders made up of mutual aid from within and volunteers outside.


One of the world’s largest economies, a leader in everything from agriculture to high tech and renewable energy, California’s infrastructure has suffered from strained water supply systems, overburdened highways, and inadequate funding for education, health, and welfare. Walker, a retired geographer (UC-Berkeley), and Lodha, a computer science professor (UC–Santa Cruz), in ten chapters discuss the real California in maps, charts, and text that describe the land and people; politics, governance, and power; urban areas; water and energy; environment, health, and educational inequality; and challenges that lie ahead. We learn that California real estate is the priciest in the country, that its 18 million registered vehicles is double the number in Texas or New York, and that the top ten percent own 73 percent of all assets in California. The authors fear that the wealthy white minority who dominate politics lack the political will to solve pressing social problems in the state. This eye-opener should be in every library.

Brian E. Coutts is Professor and Head, Department of Library Public Services, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green. Cheryl LaGuardia is a Research Librarian for the Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA