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Best Reference 2015

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In 2015, as Americans worried about terrorist attacks at home and abroad, a disturbing new study showed that while 71 Americans were killed in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil over the past decade, more than 300,000 were killed by gun violence. A report in the *Guardian* showed that African Americans were more than twice as likely to be unarmed when killed during encounters with the police as white citizens. Glen Starks’s *African Americans at Risk: Issues in Education, Health, Community and Justice* examines why African Americans are disadvantaged in comparison with the majority population.

We were shocked when the media showed a picture of a toddler, a Syrian refugee, washed up on the surf of the Turkish coast and saddened when terrorist attacks in Paris killed more than 120 people and injured some 200. These events prompted discussions of what to do about an escalating exodus of refugees from war-torn countries. *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia* from SAGE reminds us that although the United States is a nation of refugees, assimilation is not always easy. On the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, ABC-CLIO published *Modern Genocide*, which describes each atrocity in text and documents.

Taking flight

The subject of the birds, bees, and butterflies brought us some wonderful new sources. *Parrots of the Wild* from the University of California Press was the culmination of a life spent researching some 350 species of parrots. Complete with 900 beautiful color illustrations, Joseph Wilson and Olivia Carril’s *The Bees in Your Backyard* addressed some 4,000 different species, while *Monarchs in a Changing World* from Cornell University Press enhanced our knowledge of the mysterious monarch butterfly.
To honor the centennial of Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity, Princeton University Press produced its exceptional *An Einstein Encyclopedia*, which looks at Einstein as a personality, scientist, political figure, humanitarian, and even poet.

Food was also a hot topic for reference publishers. The launch of Oxford University Press’s *Savoring Gotham: A Food Lover’s Companion to New York City*, edited by Andrew Smith, was complete with local food, wine, and beer. Critics also heaped praise on *The Oxford Companion to Sugar and Sweets*, edited by Darra Goldstein, and the fourth edition of the *Oxford Companion to Wine* by Jancis Robinson. Finally, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Food Issues*, edited by Ken Albala, helps readers understand food processing and safety.

Finally, as the world is keeping its eye on Russian president Vladimir Putin, it was good to have Ian Barnes’s final gift to us, *Restless Empire: A Historical Atlas of Russia*, from Harvard University Press, with an entire chapter devoted to “The Putin Era.” Barnes, the author of so many great atlases, died in 2014.

**ARTS**


Written by the longtime dance critic of Britain’s the *Independent*, this widely praised reference focuses on a core international repertoire of 140 ballets ranging from romantic ballads such as *Coppélia* and imperial classics like *Sleeping Beauty*, down to indie-pop cult favorite *Everywhere We Go*, choreographed by Justin Peck. For each entry, the author describes the circumstances of the ballet’s creation and its effect on the theater and recounts anecdotes about performance history and reception. For instance, we learn that the attribution to Tchaikovsky of the libretto for *Swan Lake* is disputed and that the first attempt to stage it in 1877 was a failure. Fittingly, Anderson even offers tips on what to look for during a performance. (*LJ* 6/1/15)


Berg (media studies, Univ. of Texas), who has spent more than two decades researching Mexican cinema, focuses on the Cine de Oro, or Golden Age, of Mexican cinema, which lasted from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s. He sees its precursors in the illustrations of printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and the silent film *El Automóvil Grís* (1919). Mexican cinema reached its peak with the films of Emilio Fernández in the 1940s and Spanish-Mexican filmmaker Luis Buñuel in the same era, before market factors in part brought on by the onslaught of Hollywood films after World War II contributed to its demise. With a detailed index and extensive notes, this works both as a history and a reference source shedding new light on an understudied subject. (*LJ* 7/15)


This is the third in a trilogy of reference works about the American stage. Fisher’s (theater, Univ. of North Carolina at Greensboro) earlier volume, *Modernism*, was published in 2008, followed by *Contemporary* in 2011. The focus of the more than 1,000 entries here is the formative era both prior to and post-independence, extending to the end of the 19th century. The first plays performed were comedies most likely acted by Spanish soldiers at a mission near Tequesta, FL, in 1567. Prior to the revolution, “theatrical activity...was sporadic at best.” The first permanent theater
structure, the Southwark Theatre, opened in Philadelphia in 1766. Complete with a detailed chronology and bibliography, this is a well-researched treasure trove of information. (LJ 7/15)


There may be other biographical dictionaries of the French cinema, but none with such engagingly written biographies as this one. Editors Abecassis (French, Oxford Univ.) and Block have assembled an international cast to write personal sketches of actors and actresses in the French cinema. American audiences will recognize names such as Gérard Depardieu, Oscar winners Juliette Binoche and Simone Signoret, and singer-actor Maurice Chevalier. Chevalier’s sketch chronicles his many early successes, postwar troubles, and triumphant return to the United States after 1954 with Love in the Afternoon. The highlights of the dictionary are the hand-drawn caricatures by artists Jenny Batlay, who’s based in New York, and Igor Bratusek, at the Sorbonne in Paris, that accompany each sketch. Read collectively, the pieces document trends in French cinema and its close connections with the theater.


In 1993, bibliographer Gray began to document resources relating to the music of the African diaspora. This title, the sixth in the publisher’s “Black Music Reference” series, notes that popular music in the English-speaking Caribbean has two principal hubs. The first was covered in his Jamaican Popular Music. With a Trinidad base, this second hub explores the intertwining of carnival, calypso, and steel pan in some 3,400 entries arranged regionally from Antigua to the Virgin Islands, including West Indian communities in North America. A separate biographical section profiles some 600 individual performers and ensembles. Gray documents how, from their beginnings as colonial harvest celebrations, carnivals became spectacles that are major economic engines for their regions. Criteria for inclusion include research potential and accessibility to researchers.

Business & Economics


Editor Hendrickson (history, Sam Houston State Univ.) notes that in 1750 the vast majority of people worked daily for the basics of life: food, clothing, and shelter. By 1900, electricity supplied power, while cities maintained local infrastructures. How this shift occurred and the costs associated with this global phenomenon are the themes around which a diverse group of international scholars—including historians, social scientists, and engineers—have crafted more than 1,000 entries describing technical innovations such as the water frame that led to the first factory in the English Midlands, social theorists such as Robert Owen who introduced “higher principles” at his New Lanark cotton mill in Scotland, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. One of RUSA’s “Notable Business Reference Sources of 2015.” (LJ 9/15/15)

Clothing & Dress


This sweeping overview of fashion and apparel describes American history through the clothes its citizens wear and wore. Earlier volumes cover the colonial and federal eras and the 20th century through World War II. Here, Blanco
FOOD


The most popular reference book of the year is this “tour de force” on all things sugary and sweet, edited by Goldstein (Slavic literature, Williams Coll.; Fire and Ice), founder of the journal Gastronomica. She engaged 265 diverse international contributors to write some 600 entries alphabetically arranged from “à la mode” to the Italian trifle “zuppa inglese.” This book speaks to such concepts as how chocolate evolved from a drink to a solid bar, why cats don’t discern sweetness, and how sugar has become a part of our discourse and language in terms such as eye candy and sugar daddy. Also explored is the darker side of sugar and its connection to slavery and addiction. (LJ 6/15/15)


The fourth edition of this work, first published in 1994 to worldwide acclaim, is the latest update since 2006. At 4,104 entries from 187 contributors, it is just slightly longer than the previous edition. Nearly 2,500 entries have been significantly revised, and 300 are completely new. All appendixes have been updated along with maps of growing regions. Consider the entry for Chile, some six pages in length, with a full-page map of growing regions. Readers learn that Chile has undergone possibly the most dramatic technological revolution in the wine world and now boasts some of the finest oenologists, with Cabernet Sauvignon being the most important variety. Trends noted are a shift from “making” to “growing wine,” and a wider variety of grapes than ever before. Italy, France, and Spain remain the leading producers, but China is on the rise. (See review p. 120.)


The more than 400 well-written and well-researched A–Z entries here focus on social and policy aspects of food production, safety, regulation, labeling, marketing, distribution, and consumption. Editor Albala (history, food studies, Univ. of the Pacific; At the Table) is a prolific author and editor of more than 20 books on food. The focus is inclusive and global, as are the contributors. Among the more intriguing articles are “airport meals,” which date to the early 1900s in Europe and are designed to provide order to passengers’ concept of time; the “food justice movement,” which asserts that no one should live without enough food; “food TV,” now 24 hours a day; and veganism, a term coined by Donald Watson in 1944.

This wonderful companion to all things related to food in New York is the brainchild of Smith, who teaches courses on culinary topics at the city’s New School and edited the award-winning Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America. In 567 alphabetical entries, the 174 contributors (mostly New Yorkers) describe everything from the cronut (the wildly popular 2013 invention of pastry chef Dominque Ansel), deep-fried Twinkies, famous restaurants such as Delmonico’s, venues such as the Plaza Hotel, street vendors, odd terms like grogeries (grocery stores in tenements where beer and liquor were sold), and people such as Tim and Nina Zagat who created the famous Zagat Survey.

GENERAL REFERENCE


Forbes (religious studies, Morningside Coll.) describes how five culturally important holidays (Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Easter, Halloween, and Thanksgiving) came to be celebrated as they are in the 21st century. All of them combine elements of seasonal and religious festivities heavily influenced by popular culture. It may come as a surprise, writes Forbes, that “early Christians did not celebrate Christmas” and there was “no real consensus” about the date of Christ’s birth. December 25 was selected because it was in the middle of three Roman winter festivals. The beginnings of our other holidays are just as obscure. (LJ 1/16)

history


This valuable reference source on the history of Russia in maps is a parting gift from historian Barnes. Early Russian expansion is compared with westward expansion in the United States. While the United States is only 2,500 miles wide, Russia is more than 6,000 miles wide. Administering such vast tracts helps explain Russian political development. From the “Coming of the Slavs” by the fifth century to “The Rise of the Romanovs” beginning in 1613; from “The Winter War of 1939–40” to the “Russian Oil Exports” in the Putin era, this work enhances readers’ knowledge of complicated geopolitics.


While the Inca Empire was the largest in the pre-Columbian New World, until recent decades it had drawn less scholarly attention than the Maya and Aztecs. Editors Urton (pre-Columbian Studies, Harvard Univ.) and Peruvian archaeologist von Hagen have gathered 35 Inca specialists to describe key elements of an empire that extended from Colombia to Chile and encompassed coastal plains, mountains, and tropical forests. The Incas did not invent a writing system but used quipus (knotted string devices) for record keeping. There are fascinating entries on fortifications, and their extraordinary road and bridge network, which was some 25,000 miles long, linked Cuzco to the rest of the empire and featured roadside lodgings called tambos every ten to 15 miles. Specialists and students alike will reap the benefits of this helpful reference.

Drawing inspiration from an African American teacher in Logan County, KY, who when called upon to teach a Kentucky history class in the 1930s lamented that not one of the textbooks referenced the contributions of African Americans, series editors Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John A. Hardin spent over a decade bringing this rich collection to print. More than 150 academic contributors describe individuals who were born in or who spent their formative years in Kentucky as well as places and historical events that shaped the region’s history, including Bowling Green’s first registered nurse (Ora Porter, once family nurse for the John D. Rockefeller Jr. family), Louisville jazz musician Lionel Hampton, and boxer Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali). This is an important reference source that other states should emulate. (LJ 11/1/15)


Quiroz (history, Texas A&M Univ.–Corpus Christi) argues that a generational approach can be helpful in understanding history and that collective biographies can shed light on these eras. He identifies the period roughly between 1920 and 1960 as the “Mexican American Generation.” This anthology includes 13 essays on the men and women in states from Texas to California who advanced the struggle for equal rights and social justice for Mexican Americans. Described are the careers of educator José de la Luz Sáenz, one of the founders of LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens); Héctor García, who founded the AGIF (American GI Forum); 1930s feminist Alice Dickerson Montemayor, who promoted “Ladies LULAC” chapters; and politician Edward Roybal, the first Mexican American elected to the Los Angeles City Council since 1881 and who later served in the U.S. Congress.


The 956 individuals profiled by Civil War historian Smith (director, Tusculum Coll. Lib.) include volunteers, enlisted sailors, military officers, steamboat captains, civilian contractors, and more. Entries are full of fascinating personal details and document both sides of the conflict plus postwar service. Consider William Withers, a hero of the Chickasaw Bayou campaign who was captured at the Siege of Vicksburg and after the war practiced law in Jackson, MS, before moving back to Lexington, KY, to raise horses. Appendices arrange individuals by organization and campaign. Complete with an exhaustive bibliography, this rich resource will inform scholars and entertain Civil War buffs.

In 2011, Oxford published the first two-volume set in its new “Oxford Encyclopedias of the Bible.” The series has now reached 16 volumes with this newest edition edited by Beal (religion, Case Western Reserve Univ.). Focus here is on the cultural history of biblical texts, themes, characters, images, and the ideas of scripture and the Bible as they circulate in the arts. Coverage is from ancient times to the present. Some 130 international scholars from a variety of disciplines discuss Margaret Atwood’s use of Genesis in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Bob Marley’s references to the Bible while addressing issues of social justice in his music.

Language & Linguistics


Librarian Elswit (*The Jewish Story Finder*) spent three years gathering these 470 tales from 21 countries and 75 indigenous tribes of Latin America. Included are tales collected by early Catholic missionaries; told by Sephardic Jews; from indigenous Quechua, Maya, Inca, and Amazonian cultures; and from indentured servants from India. Summaries of stories are arranged thematically from “beginnings and balance” to “strange and mysterious encounters.” Geographical notations with connections (cross references) and other variations of the same tale plus a glossary and bibliography make this a pleasure for instructional purposes.


Lent has spent the last 50 years studying Asian mass communications and comic art research. Here, he provides detailed information on 16 countries arranged by region—East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia (excluding Japan and former parts of the Soviet Union)—describing their histories, key creators, characters, contemporary status, and trends, complemented by 178 black-and-white illustrations. The author notes that nearly every country from China to Sri Lanka has had a “golden age.” For Cambodia, political cartoons and then comic books that became prominent in the 1960s and favored by King Norodom Sihanouk ceased to exist under the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot (1975–79) and have been rejuvenated since 2001 after three artists from France started teaching comic courses at an orphanage.


Targeted especially to high school students, this appealing reference explains 4,000 Shakespearean words with examples from the 12 most studied and performed plays. Notes offer insights into Shakespeare’s use of language, society, and theatrical performance, clarifying many obscure terms such as *clyster-pipe*, a tube for giving an enema in *Othello*. David Crystal is a well-known writer, lecturer, and broadcaster on language, while his son Ben is an actor, writer, and producer. The combination lends a special authority to this tome. In a recent interview, David Crystal commented that only a tiny selection of the million or so words in the Shakespeare canon are markedly different from language today. Those noted here by brown triangles include “kite,” which in *King Lear* meant “a bird of prey.”

The word *genocide* was coined by Polish American Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, while serving as an adviser to the chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. In the 20th century, according to the editors, genocide assumed unparalleled dimensions in places such as South Africa, Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, East Timor, Guatemala, Kurdistan, and Rwanda—in addition to the Holocaust. An international team of scholars describe each of these genocides in terms of causes, consequences, perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and international reaction. The work also includes a time line, individual entries on key players, a collection of primary documents, and a bibliography. Depressing reading at times, it will be of enormous value to students and scholars studying these issues and to the general public seeking to understand them.


Allaby is an author of nonfiction books for children who has edited four science dictionaries for Oxford University Press. Here, he provides practical scientific descriptions for gardening terms focusing on the 16 branches of science that are of particular interest to gardeners. From abscission, “the rejection by a plant of one of its organs (e.g., leaves)” to soft rot, “a plant disease in which tissues...become slimy and foul smelling,” the author provides definitions and explanations informed by the latest developments in science while discussing climate change, ecology, and native plants. Unique and very helpful is a section for “Further Reading” with links to websites about many of these terms. *(LJ 10/1/15)*


Albert Einstein received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921 and achieved lasting fame after his 1919 publication of “the general theory of relativity.” However, he was more than just a physicist of the first rank. Here, Einstein scholars Calaprice, Daniel Kennefick, and Robert Schulmann describe his life as a moral and humanitarian icon. Born in Ulm, Germany, and educated in Munich and Zurich, Einstein held teaching and research positions in Europe before fleeing Nazi oppression to New Jersey in 1933. The book is organized in three parts—the first collects information about his personal and family life, the second describes his scientific accomplishments, and the last focuses on his nonscientific efforts. Drawing heavily from the Einstein archives and the first 14 volumes of his collected papers, with many original documents and copiously illustrated, this is a marvelous reference source. *(LJ 9/1/15)*


Editor Parker, senior scientific fellow of the Zoological Society of London, along with ten contributors ranging from conservationists to zoologists to science writers, profile key species, both extinct and living, that hold a special place
in the study of evolution. Readers learn that the first steps toward the dominance of plants on Earth began more than two billion years ago and that the first upright humans date back more than a million years. The authors also note that recent genetic studies show that modern humans have a common African ancestry that extends back 200,000 years. This readable volume is gorgeously illustrated. [See also Reference Short Takes, p. 121.—Ed.]


While there have been several earlier compendia of monarch biology and conservation, the explosion of interest by citizens collecting scientific data has added immeasurably to the body of knowledge of one of the most popular insects in the world. Not intended as a basic primer, this latest volume explores new research on monarchs as herbivores, prey, and hosts; monarchs in a changing climate; conserving North American monarch butterflies; and new perspectives on monarch migration, evolution, and population biology. Authors include an international cast of monarch biologists and conservation practitioners. In a fascinating chapter on the “Journey North,” readers learn that monarchs may spend up to ten hours in flight in their migration from Central America to Minnesota.


More than a decade before her death in 2011 and after some three decades of field research, Toft began writing a comprehensive book on the biology of parrots. The book was completed by her longtime collaborator Wright in association with the World Parrot Trust, an international organization devoted to saving rare parrots while ensuring those living with humans receive the best possible care. Organized in five parts, the book describes collective research on the “psittaciformes,” which range from tiny pygmy parrots to giant macaws, spread across six continents. Their actions, how they receive and use information, and their monogamy make them among the most fascinating of birds and deserving of efforts to “keep wild parrots in the wild.” Profits from the book go to support the work of the trust. (LJ 11/1/15)


Biologists and bee experts Wilson and Carril, dismayed by the mischaracterizations of bees by even trusted news sources, set out to create a guide that was accessible to those without years of training in biology. It may come as a surprise that there are more than 4,000 species of bees. Among other misconceptions are that bees are aggressive and frequently sting and that they are social and live in hives. Consider the family Andrenidae, which includes 4,500 species, of which 1,200 live north of Mexico. Some of the Perditini bee tribe that frequent Southwest deserts are so specialized that they only collect pollen from primroses that bloom at dusk. The 900 color plates are stunning.

SOCIAL sciences


This rich reference source, representing the collective efforts of 50 scholars, is designed to serve both scholars and students. Edited by historian Falola (history, Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities, Univ. of Texas), this work is arranged in 54 sections, one for each country or group of associated islands within Africa.
Entries describe each country in terms of such topics as religion, social customs, food, and cuisine but also areas of change and modernization including gender roles, marriage and the family, and the media. Dozens of insets describe various subjects such as the burial practices of Burundi, the poetry of Ghana, and the Lost Boys of Sudan. With country bibliographies and a chronology, it presents the diversity of this continent.


This attractive four-volume source published in collaboration with the Association for Asian American Studies divides equally into two volumes, with some 300-plus entries, and two volumes collecting a vast array of primary documents from 1849 to 2013. Editor Danico (associate dean, Coll. of Environmental Design, California State Polytechnic Univ., Pomona) reminds readers that Asian Americans are not a monolithic group. Contributors are Asian studies specialists, principally from North America, and they describe the history and cultures of 21 Asian American ethnic groups. An article on Cambodians notes that there are 287,000 living in the United States, with large populations in California and Massachusetts. Terms covered include boat people, Bollywood, KPOP, and the 1.5 Generation.


It can be difficult to remember that the magic lantern and slide projector were “high tech” in the early 1900s. This impressive source boasts solid organization, thoroughness, currency, and readability. Editor Spector organized a group of international editors who then chose some 330 contributors to write two- or three-page scholarly entries arranged around 28 topics, from “Adaptive Learning” to “Technology Diffusion & Integration.” Readers might begin with the well-crafted “History of Technology” article by the editor and Youqun Ren before exploring topics such as cloud computing, disruptive technology, holographic imaging, integrating social media into learning instruction, and summative assessment (measurement of student learning). This is easily the best new work on the topic. (LJ 6/1/15)


Starks is a senior manager in the Defense Department and a biographer of Thurgood Marshall who has written extensively on public administration and American politics. He notes that African Americans comprise more than 13 percent of the United States population but lag well behind the majority in terms of the annual median household income and suffer unemployment rates almost twice as high. He explores some of the primary areas in which African Americans are at the greatest risk of falling behind. Topics focus on education, health, family, children, and crime and criminal justice. For each, the author defines the issue, discusses the implications, and advises ways to improve the situation. This is an important primer for teachers and students.


This is one of a series of cutting-edge titles that focus on leadership, a rapidly expanding field of study. Editors Dodds and Reese have both academic and professional sports experience in marketing, law, and management. Contributors are American academics who work in these fields, and they address leadership among athletes, in sports organizations, in coaching and managing, and in sports business as well as leadership ethics. Topics from emergency action plans to ticket operations are covered. Common to all volumes in this series is a helpful leadership glossary created by Jeni McRay (leadership studies, Fort Hays State Univ.). With the value of the sports market in the United States estimated as high as $470 billion and employing 1.6 million people, this is a needed resource.

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