Sources: Movies in American History: An Encyclopedia (Review)

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/rimhof/11/

The blurb accompanying the review copy describes this resource as “focused on the relationship between American society and filmmaking in the United States from the late 19th century through the present.” This is important to keep in mind since users may be puzzled by the inclusion of Godard’s Breathless, Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin, and Truffaut’s The 400 Blows. That noted, the breadth and scope of this collection does primarily consist of representative American motion pictures, from the early silent films to the Harry Potter series.

The three-volume set includes 450 A–Z entries written primarily by university-affiliated scholars from diverse disciplines. There are entries for film titles, people (actors, directors, and notable screenwriters) and subjects. In particular, the subject entries are a useful distillation of topics such as “Drive-in Theatres” (remember those?) and “Representations of Disability in Film,” for instance. Each entry provides a brief summary of the film along with an explanation of the film’s cultural significance and influence, especially in relation to race, class, and gender issues. References at the end of each entry provide authoritative books and durable articles for further research. Each volume includes a complete index to the set and, happily, the index uses a bold font to indicate main entries in the encyclopedia. Editor Philip C. DiMare (lecturer in Humanities, Religious Studies and History at California State University, Sacramento) provides a substantive, 40-page introduction that serves as a good whirlwind tour of the history of cinema in the United States.

Surprisingly, there isn’t currently a film reference source that duplicates the aim and scope of this set. The forthcoming Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film may possibly prove to be a competitor (albeit at a higher price point), but since this four-volume set wasn’t available at the time of this writing, this reviewer is unable to provide a comparison. For collections with an emphasis on Film/Media Studies.—Robin Imhof, Humanities Librarian, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.