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From the Reference Desk

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S
ome reference works appear to be too specialized for broad application. The Encyclopedia of the First Amendment (2009, 978-0-87289-311-5, $285) with its narrow sounding title, seems like it might fall into that category. However, first amendment rights are so essential to the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy, nothing could be further from the truth. The freedom of religion, the press, and fair trial, are so essential to the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy, nothing could be further from the truth. The freedom of religion, the press, and fair trial, are so essential to the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy, nothing could be further from the truth. The freedom of religion, the press, and fair trial, are so essential to the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy, nothing could be further from the truth. The freedom of religion, the press, and fair trial, are so essential to the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy, nothing could be further from the truth. 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The Encyclopedia of Gender and Society (2009, 978-1-4129-0169-7, $350) is another entry in Sage Publications’ growing list of social studies encyclopedias. Edited by Jodi O’Brien of Seattle University these two volumes contain more than 500 entries authored by scholars from academic institutions throughout the United States and the United Kingdom. This is a serious academic work and it is apparent that a major goal of this encyclopedia is to present gender as a “primary lens” through which society views itself. After spending some time with this set and examining its content, one is hard pressed to argue with that contention.

The Encyclopedia is divided into categories containing articles that reflect and highlight gender's centrality in human social life. These categories are wide ranging and include art, popular culture, and sports, body image and health, crime, economics, environment and ecology, politics, policy and social movements, race and ethnicity, marriage and the family, relationships, religion and spirituality, education, science and technology, sexuality and reproduction and gender identity. The set also has a number of what are called “framing” articles that set the tone. Entries like Gender Identities and Socialization, Media and Gender Socialization and Sexuality and Reproduction provide overviews that point to the defining role of gender. Individual articles also address subjects ranging from chivalry to cybersex and from transgender studies to teen pregnancy. The set does not shy away from controversy providing coverage of issues like female circumcision and genital mutilation, sexual slavery, honor killings and sterilization. The articles are written in a straightforward and factual style while being grounded in recent scholarship, as the individual article bibliographies show. Each entry has “see also” references and there is a Reader’s Guide that groups related articles as well as an alphabetical list of all entries and a helpful general index.

Academic libraries supporting courses on gender and related studies will find the Encyclopedia of Gender and Society a highly valued addition to their collections. Not only does it stand on its own merits, with its focus on gender’s role in society, this set is an obvious complement to other resources like Macmillan Reference’s four-volume work Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender (2007, 978-0-02-866115-5, $425).

Charleston Conference, November 4-7, 2009, in Charleston, SC, USA. “We are very pleased that our survey topic was selected entirely by the library community, and we would like to thank those who participated for their input and support,” says Professor David Nicholas, Director of the Department of Information Studies, UCL Centre for Publishing and CIBER research group. “We realize that librarians are frequently asked to participate in surveys, and there have been a number of studies conducted this year. By having librarians take part in this survey, we were able to gather a wealth of data that we can now share with the library community.”

Published by Facts on File, the Atlas of the North American Indian (2009, 978-0816068586, $85), last revised in 2000, is now in its 3rd edition. Although called an atlas and containing 120 color maps as well as an additional 140 photos and illustrations, this book is more than a mere collection of maps and illustrations. Author Carl Waldman’s descriptive text is equally valuable and together they combine to produce a highly informative reference.

Waldman organizes his book in seven chapters beginning with “Ancient Native Peoples” covering Paleo-Indians and Archaic Indians and then moves to a chapter on “Ancient Civilizations” where the focus is on civilizations in Mesoamerica, the Southwest, and the Mound Builders of the Midwest, South and Northeast. He then discusses “Native Lifeways” from a number of Native cultural areas followed by specific discussions of art and technology, clothing, forms of shelter, religion, languages, trade, transportation, and sociopolitical organizations. The fourth chapter deals with the relationship between native peoples and early European explorers while the fifth chapter revolves around the numerous Indian wars and their history. The sixth chapter covers the impact of all of these changes on the Native way of life finally leading to a discussion of contemporary Native North Americans with a stress on US and Canadian government policies, the Native activist response and the resulting Native Renaissance.

The maps and illustrations are strategically placed throughout the volume to integrate with the text. Maps range from plotting migration routes over the Bering Strait Land Bridge to profiling native population densities in 1500 to showing contemporary Native lands and communities in the U.S. In addition, there are drawings and photos depicting Native life from boats and canoes to masks and clothing. Taken together these maps and illustrations are visually compelling and they combine with the text to form an impressive whole. There are also numerous added features including a chronology running through 2008, a listing of Native Nations of the U.S. and Canada with languages and locations, major Native place-names in the U.S. and Canada, a list of museums, and historical and archaeological sites pertaining to Native North Americans, a glossary and a selective bibliography of overview studies.

The Atlas of the North American Indian is one of those single-volume references that cover a scholarly topic with enough appeal to be of interest to both public and academic libraries. Its reasonable price coupled with its subject coverage, makes the Atlas appropriate for either reference or circulating collections. (This is especially true given that there is a paperback edition available from Checkmark Books (978-0816068593, $24.95).)