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From the Reference Desk

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From the Reference Desk

Reference Reviews

Column Editor: **Tom Gilson** (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History. Macmillan Library Reference, 1996. 5 vols. 0-02-897345-3. \$375.

Reviewed by **Tom Gilson**
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In the June, 1995 issue of *Against the Grain* (v.7 # 3, p.44), I interviewed **Ken Kister**, the dean of encyclopedia reviewers, to get his observations regarding the current state of encyclopedia publishing. Responding to my questions, Mr. Kister confirmed my suspicion of the growing importance of subject encyclopedias in reference work by pointing to their "mind-boggling proliferation." Mr. Kister also noted that not only are subject encyclopedias growing in number, but prominent publishers are now "strongly committed to producing authoritative subject encyclopedias."

Happily, a number of recent publications support Mr. Kister's observations. The most welcomed is the *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* published by Macmillan Library Reference (1996, 0-02-897345-3, \$375). Finally, there is a significant scholarly encyclopedia specifically devoted to black history and culture.

Resulting from a proposal by the Center for American Culture Studies at Columbia University, this five-volume set accurately portrays the depth and breadth of African-American achievement in this country. The *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* contains 2200 articles with two-thirds of them being biographies of African-Americans. In fact, one of the editorial decisions for the set was that only African-Americans would warrant individual biographies.

Thus, while other Americans who have had a major influence on African-American history, like **Abraham Lincoln**, are referenced in the encyclopedia, they do not have their own biographies, nor do influential Africans like **Nelson Mandela**. The focus in this set is on African-Americans.

The concept of culture is given broad interpretation. The editors see "culture" as "all expressions by which people define themselves, and not just Art with a capital a." The result is an encyclopedia with references to body-building and break dancing, as well as, the Harlem Renaissance and ballet. Naturally, the historical contents of the encyclopedia contain essays on major topics like slavery, the civil rights movement and affirmative action, but the set also highlights specific events, legal cases and organizations. The articles are well written and thorough, being suitable for student, scholar and educated lay person. The encyclopedia is cross-referenced with "see" references within the text of the articles. Volume five contains a solid index with references to specific page numbers, with the page numbers contained in each of the volumes listed at the bottom of the index page. Bold page numbers indicate whole entries while regular typed page numbers represent references within the text of other articles. Numerous photographs, many from the **Schomburg Center**, along with other illustrations, enhance both the value and visual appearance of the encyclopedia.

Each article in the encyclopedia has its own bibliography. Unfortunately, the bibliographies are uneven, particularly as they relate to the importance of the article. The bibliography in the article on the "Emancipation" lists three references and the bibliography on the "Civil War" lists four. At the same time the article on dancer and television producer, **Debbie Allen**, also has four references in the bibliography, while the article on "Afrocentricity," lists seventeen references. My sense of things is that the student and scholar interest in the emancipation and the Civil War are more in line with that of interest in Afrocentricity than that of Debbie Allen. The bibliographies should reflect this level of interest more evenly.

Supplementing the articles, the *Encyclopedia* offers a number of useful features. In the first volume of the set, there is a full alphabetical list of the articles contained in the encyclopedia, as well as a directory of

contributors along with the articles they wrote. Contributors who are affiliated with colleges or universities list their institutions, but contributors with no affiliation list only their names. It would have been helpful to have more information on their credentials.

In addition to the index mentioned above, volume five contains an 144-page appendix full of lists and statistics related to subjects like awards and honors, business, crime, economics, education, entertainment, health, politics, population, religion and sports. Following the appendix, is a very helpful listing of "Biographical entries by Profession" listing all of the biographies in the set by area of achievement. As anyone who has ever worked a reference desk knows, such a breakdown is invaluable. The *Encyclopedia of African-American History and Culture* is a major reference work covering an area that has needed a scholarly subject encyclopedia for a long time. My hat's off to the folks at Macmillan.

As I alluded to earlier, a number of other subject encyclopedias have crossed my desk which reinforce **Ken Kister's** impressions about subject encyclopedia publishing. In the next issue of *ATG* I will have more to say about them.

Nurcombe, Valerie, J. *Information Sources in Architecture and Construction*. Second Edition. New Jersey: Bowker-Saur, 1996. 489 p. ISBN 1-85739-094-6. \$90.00

Reviewed by **Sheila Seaman**
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This is an update to Valerie J. Barfield's *Information Sources in Architecture* (1983). It is a one-volume guide covering Europe, the United States of America, Canada as well as other English-speaking countries. It aims at international coverage while recognizing that other countries outside the scope of this one will have their own similar information guides/bibliographies. It considers itself to be a map or starting place for the vast information territory of architecture and construction covering periodicals, databases, trade literature, standards, maps, and drawings and subject areas directly related to architecture and construction including interior design, landscape, geographic information systems, computer-aided design, communications, urban and land use planning, site survey, contracts and liability, and conservation. It is presented in the form of twenty-four chapters which are in narrative,

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TestDriving CD-ROMS

Reviews of CD-ROM products

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Reviews by Norman Desmarais
(Providence College)

Select Street Atlas

Producer: Pro CD, Inc. 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923-4520. Phone: 800-99-CD-ROM, <http://www.procd.com>. Cost: \$99.00.

Select Street Atlas is a digital street map of the United States that supports nine levels of magnification, going from a national map (3200 miles) to street level maps (1.5 miles) or detail maps (0.5 mile). The amount of geography displayed depends on the resolution of the monitor. A 1024 x 768 monitor will show four times as much area as a 640 x 468 monitor. Also, removing the scroll bars will display a slightly larger map area.

The screen consists of the active map which takes up the largest portion of the screen, an overview window that shows the area in active map in a rectangle surrounded by the larger geographic area, a menu bar that includes a series of pull-down menus that provide access to most of the atlas's functions (file, edit, view, map, help), a 12-button tool bar that activates the atlas's most commonly used functions (open, import, save, zoom in and out, find, highlight, etc.), and a symbols window that contains 100 icons that can be used to annotate a map. **Select Street Atlas** has a larger collection of icons than its competitors but the icons are smaller and a bit harder to distinguish. The smaller icons are also better suited to the scale of the most detailed maps where they are most apt to be

used. Finally, a legend identifies the geographic and man-made features of the map. Its features change as one moves around maps and between the different map levels because they correspond to the displayed map. A status bar at the bottom of the screen automatically provides Quick Help prompts that show how the tool bar buttons and other functions of the software work. It also displays labels for features such as street names and a scale of miles which changes as one zooms in or out.

Select Street Atlas locates any place in the country quickly and easily. The Find option, accessible from either the Edit menu or the Tool Bar, is the easiest way to find a particular place. One can specify a particular state, city/place (town, village, major park, airport, university, or point of interest), county, area code/exchange, ZIP code, or street.

Select Street Atlas also includes the locations of more than 1 million business, travel, and other useful destinations. The database of Places is organized in 20 categories that include: banks; business services and supplies; post offices; travel services; lodging; traditional restaurants; ethnic restaurants; coffee, donuts, & delis; fast food, pizza, & ice cream; personal services; gas stations & mini-marts; dry cleaners & laundromats; pharmacies; specialty shops; major department stores; recreation, leisure & sports; hospitals & clinics; government services; churches & cemeteries; schools & universities. Users can add these places to maps either in groups or individually. They can also retrieve the addresses or telephone numbers.

One of **Select Street Atlas**'s most powerful and impressive features is that it lets users

customize and produce an unlimited variety of maps for planning business trips or vacations, for identifying houses and businesses, or locating customers. Users can add directions, place text and symbols, and highlight routes. They can import lists of names and addresses for plotting on the maps, either from **Pro CD's SelectPhone** (which requires a bit of disc swapping) or from their own ASCII database that includes 9-digit ZIP codes. (Licensees can obtain a program (**ZIPFix**) that will convert 5-digit ZIP codes to ZIP+4.) They can save these customized maps or print them out in color or black and white.

Although the maps are copyrighted, **Pro CD** authorizes users to use or print them for non-commercial purposes. The license agreement includes a lengthy section specifying authorized and unauthorized uses. **Select Street Atlas** is a powerful, flexible, and easy-to-use atlas. It contains several features available only in higher-priced competitor products. Best of all, it draws and displays the maps faster than its competitors. Highly recommended.

System Requirements:

386SX/25MHz computer or faster; minimum of 4MB RAM (8MB recommended); MPC-compatible CD-ROM drive; SVGA Display (256 colors at 640x480 resolution); Microsoft Windows-compatible mouse; 5 MB available hard disk space; MS-DOS 3.1 or later; Microsoft Windows 3.1 or later. Using **Select Street Atlas** on a computer that has only 4MB RAM requires configuring Windows 3.1 with virtual memory and using a 2 MB hard disk as RAM.

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textbook form. Some chapters have bibliographies and some list sources within the text. The arrangement of chapters follows the order of use during the design and construction process which is an indication that its intended primary audience is professional architects. Each chapter is written by an expert who regularly uses the sources and services described. Also included are two appendices; one lists organizations and associations including telephone, fax number and email addresses whenever possible. The second appendix gives a comprehensive list of abbreviations. The appendices are followed by a thorough index.

Speaking as a librarian, there is not enough "white space" for my taste or aging eyes, and it is not a conventional (linear) annotated bibliography. However, having spoken as a tradi-

tional librarian, it seems apparent that the information we handle is no longer linear or ordered but an ever-changing multidimensional soup of databases, CD-ROMs, World Wide Web, professional organizations, and contacts. Also, it must be recognized that architecture is multi-disciplinary and depends upon a steady supply of accurate information. What is impressive about this work is that it tackles all of the information formats including the Web. In some cases URL (uniform resource locators) addresses are given and in some cases they are not. One address not given was <<http://www.ahip.getty.edu/ahip>> which is the address for the **Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals** which is part of the **Getty Art History Information Program** which is available on the Web and mentioned in this work on page 220. This may be a detail that was not available at the time of publication. Certainly enough information was given

so that a resourceful person could easily locate it. All in all, this work is a classic or standard for the profession. It does not stand in place of comprehensive bibliographies such as the G. K. Hall, **Bibliographic Guide to Art and Architecture**, but provides a working "map" or guide to needed information resources while providing guidance for those who want to go beyond the sources given. Although it is not written for librarians ("...the language of the librarian is avoided as far as possible," p. xvi-xvii) many of the contributors are librarians which adds to the strength of this source. Any college of university which supports a program in architecture, landscape design, or construction will surely need this source as well as public libraries which cater to professionals in these fields. *Upper division undergraduate, graduate, and professional.*