April 2008

Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, vaughnd@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vaughn, Debbie (2008) "Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 2, Article 25.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2752>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

From the Reference Desk
from page 50

Aside from these concerns, *Encyclopedia of Hurricanes, Typhoons and Cyclones* is a fact-filled work with articles that are informative and accessible to both student and lay reader. And at this price, it is a reasonable and worthwhile investment for both academic and public libraries where there is interest. In fact, larger libraries may want this title for their circulating collections as well.

International Security and the United States: An Encyclopedia (2008, 978-0275992538, \$200) offers national surveys with a twist. Published by **Praeger Security International**, this two-volume set gives the reader historic background and discussions of society and politics of the countries that it covers. But it offers this information from a singular perspective. The emphasis here is on the "human security" within each country and how that country relates to the United States. And human security is defined broadly. The authors not only focus on internal violence in their discussions, issues like health care, necessary infrastructure, legal rights and the environment are all touched on.

A total of 48 countries are included and consist of nations that are most active on the world's stage in their relationships with the US. From Afghanistan to Venezuela there are essays on individual countries that, in addition to sections on history, society and politics, also discuss law and order, foreign affairs, security, and justice and human rights. The length of each essay varies but they generally range from 15-25 pages and each has a substantial bibliography. Given the survey nature of the essays, these bibliographies are particularly helpful for those wanting to do more in-depth research.

Although dealing with controversial issues, the essays are factual and attempt to be objective in their analysis. Indicative of the scholarly seriousness of the essays, the affiliations and credentials of each contributor are provided.

With its emphasis on security and foreign relations, *International Security and the United States: an Encyclopedia* provides a unique approach to the countries it discusses. Not intended for lay readers, the primary audience for this work is students, academics and professionals in the fields of international security and foreign relations. For interested libraries, this is another title that could be equally at home in reference or circulation.

Public librarians and their patrons will be more excited about **Greenwood Press' Crimes & Trials of the Century** (2007, 9780313341090). This two-volume set highlights many of the crimes and trials that are part of the "cultural memory" of the 20th century. From the **Black Sox** scandal of the 1919 World Series to the Unabomber, and from the kidnapping and murder of the **Lindbergh** baby to **Martha Stewart**, a total of 35 cases are discussed.

As you would expect of a reference work, the facts of each case are presented clearly and thoroughly. But each essay also discusses elements like the media's role, public perceptions, contemporary impacts and the case's aftermath and legacy. Visually enhanced by black and white photos and sidebars containing timelines, brief biographies and definitions, these two volumes are as enjoyable to browse as they are informative to read. Besides being compelling as individual articles, each one has suggestions for further reading, as well as a list of references useful for continued research.

Crimes & Trials of the Century is factual, fun and thought-provoking. It indulges our fascination with such events while raising

often uncomfortable issues about American popular culture that are part of our history and that remain with us today. While suitable for some reference collections, many libraries will want this set available for circulation. Given the length of the articles and the popularity of the topic, a number of readers will want to check this title out to explore at leisure.

Libraries looking for a broader approach covering more crimes and criminals might consider **Scarecrow Press' Great Pictorial History of World Crime** by the prolific **Jay Robert Nash** (2004, 1-928831-20-6, \$249) or **Fact on File's Encyclopedia of Crime** by **Carl Sifakis** (2001, 0-8160-4040-0, \$150). 🍁

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)
<vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *Libraries are in the business of information. But — to paraphrase T. S. Eliot — what good is information without learning? When we examine the act of learning and dig down into the critical thinking behind it, the countless interdisciplinary connections emerge. History itself is an interdisciplinary discipline, for while learning about history one automatically learns about philosophy, art, economics, sociology, religion and literature. This month's column highlights two titles that demonstrate the interconnectedness of information, learning, and history. Gross and Worth's third edition of **This Day in American History** and Williams' second edition of **The Historian's Toolbox** provide a solid springboard for research and scholarship.*

*In his epic **The Wasteland**, Eliot called April the "cruelest month... stirring / Dull roots with spring rain." I, however, find the provocation of the senses brought on by spring to be the perfect time to revive my love of learning by pouring over books and the interconnected knowledge — the history — within them. Happy reading, everyone! — DV*

Gross, Ernie and Roland H. Worth, Jr. *This Day in American History*. 3rd ed. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. 9780786431922. 516 pages. \$75.00.
and **Williams, Robert C. *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*. 2nd ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007. 9780765620279. 216 pages. \$22.95.**

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

My Bachelor of Arts is in history, and any historical title that passes my desk is of immediate interest to me. Two such titles are **Ernie Gross and Roland H. Worth's** third edition of ***This Day in American History*** and **Robert C. Williams's** second edition of ***The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History***. It goes without saying that books with subsequent editions must be meritorious enough to deserve a second or third publication; these two titles are of no exception.

This Day in American History is like the historical version of ALA's Anniversaries and Holidays — it is laid out by month and day, and events are then listed chronologically. This latest edition adds coverage from 2000-2006. Births and deaths of notable American figures, well- and little-known events, beginnings of

major social movements, court and legislative decisions, discoveries, disasters, "famous firsts," and other facts fill the 200+ pages. As **Worth** points out in the preface, these events

register as significant in American history. Praise them; condemn them. Either way these events *are*, and the knowledge of them provides not only the bare facts of our ever-changing society but also the flavor of sentiments and attitudes at any given moment in our history (1).

Gross and Worth are not strangers to publishing about the historical landscape. Between them, they have 13 other books from **McFarland** and numbers of titles from other publishers. Before his death, **Gross** had careers in newspaper journalism and govern-

continued on page 52

Book Reviews from page 51

ment public relations. **Worth**, who took over research for this new edition of *This Day in American History*, is a historian living in Richmond, Virginia. One of their strengths is the ability to present information in an unbiased fashion that allows readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the reason for an event's significance. For example, on April 30, 2000, "At least 200,000 pro-gay rights demonstrators held a rally on National Mall, Washington, DC; some estimates went far higher; their first massive Washington rally since 1993." There is no judgment of this controversial event, only that it reflects sentiments and attitudes deemed important by our "ever-changing society" (to use **Worth's** own words). Also, in a mere 25 words, this entry touches on the many connections highlighted in this event: demonstrations as a display of opinion, minority groups, sociology, sexuality, and a snippet of the history of pro-gay rights.

While *This Day in American History* presents historical facts, *The Historian's Toolbox* discusses the ways in which historians look at facts. Don't let the term "toolbox" fool you; as a librarian, I immediately assumed that **Williams'** book was a bibliography of sorts, pointing readers in the direction of volumes of primary sources, comprehensive

studies on major spans of history, and notable historiographies. Though there is a selected bibliography at the end of the book as well as endnotes for each chapter, **Williams'** work is not merely a go-to list of sources. Rather, *The Historian's Toolbox* guides budding historians in the processes, best practices, and techniques of the discipline, always relating the subject of the oft-distant past to one's personal perspective. His introduction offers instant evidence of his desire to show history's easy access. Entitled "History is Fun," **Williams** explains in the opening pages that history is neither art nor science but craft, and there is "no better way to understand a craft than to pursue it yourself" (xiv).

The Historian's Toolbox is divided into three sections. In the first, "The Craft of History," **Williams** looks at historiography and the evolution of history, different structures of history (such as metahistory and antihistory), and history's relationship with the future. In the second section, "The Tools of History," he opens the proverbial toolbox and covers many necessary elements for "doing history": effective reading and writing, primary and secondary sources, artifacts, images, and the like. This section also encompasses topics of plagiarism, conspiracies, fiction and film as history (note the interdisciplinarity), and more. Finally, in the third section (new to this edition), **Williams** explores "The Relevance of History" through everyday people, material culture, public his-

tory, current event analysis, and the Internet. Each chapter is brief and **Williams'** writing style is engaging.

When I was a student at the **College of Charleston**, **Richard Marius'** *A Short Guide to Writing About History* was the manual used by students in upper-level history courses. **Marius'** popular book is an excellent tool, but I would have certainly benefited from **Williams'** uncomplicated overview of the discipline.

The straightforward presentation of *This Day in American History* and *The Historian's Toolbox* makes them excellent resources for any historian — whether in high school, college, or graduate school; whether professional or amateur; and whether serious or just curious. The fact is, we're all historians whether we realize it or not; or so claims **Williams**. History is "not some arcane academic enterprise, but a deep structure that underlies our own lives" (*Toolbox*, 151). We each have our own historical memory, we keep records and evidence, we research, we argue, we tell stories, and we experience events. What these books have in common in the accessibility they both lend to history; history doesn't have to be wordy or long-winded, and the events and consequences that shape history have different meanings to different people. Both of these updated editions should be in your high school, academic, and public libraries.

My Love of Books: Source of Life Support

by **Nedelina Tchangelova** (Librarian, Engineering & Physical Sciences Library, University of MD Libraries, College Park, MD 20742; Phone: 301-405-9151; Fax: 301-405-9164) <nedelina@umd.edu> Yahoo, AIM, MSN, Google Talk: NTlibrarian
http://www.lib.umd.edu/ENGIN/profile_Tchangelova.html

*Wisdom is wealth, and every good book is equivalent to a wise head —
the head may die, but the book may live forever.*

— **Joseph Wheeler**

My love of books sprang out of a lack of hearing. I was born with normal hearing but lost it partially due to a doctor's mistake. I grew up in Bulgaria facing many challenges and switching back and forth between the world of silence and the world of sound. This event has marked my entire life and shaped my love of books.

"What can not be heard, can be read," I started devouring books. For me, the library wasn't a storage building filled with books — it was a bright stream of thought and spiritual nourishment. After completing my M.S. degree in Chemical Engineering in 1995, I took a position at the **National Polytechnic Museum** in Sofia. Rather than building machines as I was trained, I succumbed to my constant thirst for knowledge, followed my heart, and worked as a curator. One day, my boss asked me to come up with fresh ideas for new exhibits. The first place I instinctively sought for inspiration was ... the library. You got it right! The mu-

seum had a small collection of books stuck in boxes, covered with dust. It was winter and due to poor funding, the storage room had broken windows and no heat. There was only one dilapidated mechanical typewriter in the entire museum. In the midst of these unappealing conditions I started opening the boxes and melted at the sight of the dusty books from unknown authors. **G. Keillor's** words captured this moment in my life when he said, "Unread authors are kept in the underground crypts of libraries waiting to be rediscovered." Sitting on the floor, immersed in solitude, I began my exploration to find the hidden treasures of the books. It was as though they brought me back in a time machine through the history of science as I rediscovered the history of technology and its inventions. I traveled in awe of the human mind: its excellence and its undertakings that have improved our quality of life from generation to generation. I began organizing the books thoroughly and forgot

about deadlines. My boss reminded me of the responsibilities I had: to set up exhibits, not to read and organize books.

That day, my husband received a green card in the mail. Six months later, we flew to the United States where I continued to follow my dream to read books. With no English fluency and limited hearing capabilities, I called my friends, the books, to help me to get into the library school. Considering my newness to this country and its language, in retrospect I demonstrated great foresight and courage by entering the program at the **University of Maryland Library School**. I wanted to accomplish my dreams and upon the completion of the program, I proudly became a librarian. So, here I am ... daily managing electronic information, and although homesick for print books, I look for ways to save them from the Internet monster. Why? When I began writing this essay, I searched the Internet for some ideas. Nothing happened ... my mind remained blank, no inspiration, and no motivation to look further. Instinctively I returned to my friends, the print books, and suddenly through quotes I felt the inspiration penetrate my mind and

continued on page 53