

November 2013

From the Reference Desk

Thomas Gilson
College of Charleston, gilsont@cofc.edu

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



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

Recommended Citation

Gilson, Thomas (2007) "From the Reference Desk," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 19: Iss. 3, Article 23.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5380>

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

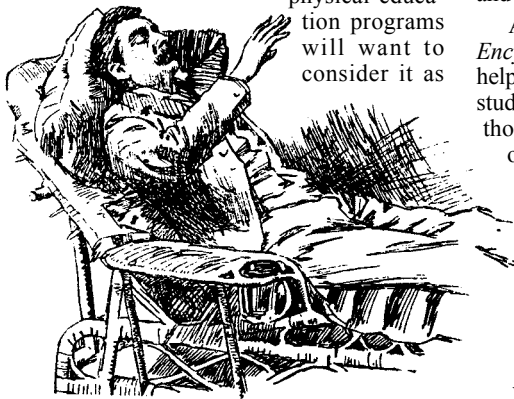
by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Anyone who watches ESPN and its various spin-off channels is aware that extreme sports are emerging from the margins to gain mainstream attention. A new reference, the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports* (2007, 0-9770159-5-5, \$125) takes a serious look at this growing component of the international sports scene and attempts an "in-depth dissection of this new and emerging phenomenon."

Many of these sports like rock climbing, hang gliding, ski jumping, motorcross, snowboarding, windsurfing, and the Iditarod are familiar. But others like canyoning, extreme ironing, parkour and bouldering are little known and have small followings. Naturally, the *Encyclopedia* has articles that discuss all of these sports. There is also coverage of major personalities and pioneers of extreme sports like **Tony Hawk, Ryan Nyquist, Ricky Carmichael, Evel Knievel, and Shirley Muldowney.**

Unlike many of the more traditional sports, extreme sports are not team based. They stress the individual and are high risk, thrill seeking activities. Bearing this in mind, the *Encyclopedia* wisely devotes a substantial amount of coverage to the physical and psychological aspects, as well as the social context, of extreme sports. These articles range from those on gender, injury, and the psychology of risk, to those on violence, commercialization, and the spiritual aspects of extreme sports. The articles are informative and well researched. They are generally written by academics and all have bibliographies of relevant sources, some quite extensive, especially those dealing with the social and psychological issues. (The entry on the Meaning of the Extreme has a bibliography of more than 100 citations from a diversity of sources ranging from Websites to academic journal articles.)

Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports is a scholarly treatment of an increasingly popular phenomenon. While extreme sports are mentioned in other sources like **Routledge's** *Encyclopedia of International Sports Studies* (2006, 0415277132, \$595) and the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sports* (2005, 0974309117, \$395), this current work is unique in its comprehensive and focused view. Academic libraries supporting sports science and physical education programs will want to consider it as



part of a well rounded reference collection. Given the popular interest in the topic, they may also want to add it to their circulating collections. Larger public libraries may also be interested for similar reasons.

The *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice* (2007, 141291812X, \$495) is a new three-volume set published by **Sage** that focuses on the history, inherent diversity and evolving nature of activism worldwide. As the title implies, coverage is limited to activism with the "espoused goal of social justice." At the same time, as editors **Gary L. Anderson** and **Kathryn G. Herr** note, it is an activism "that goes beyond conventional politics." An examination of the topics discussed, and the treatment they receive, confirms this.

The articles in this encyclopedia are devoted to a broad variety of activism. Environmental, feminist, legal and judicial, as well as activism related to labor and social class, health and welfare, and gay and transgender issues are all covered. In addition, there are essays on activism as expressed in literature, art, music and popular culture, as well as entries on people and personalities that have been, and are currently, social activists. Although the predominant coverage is of movements of the political left, individual entries run the gamut from the anti-nuclear movement to anti-pornography activism; civil disobedience to the **Christian Right**, and the **National Organization for Women** the **NRA**. Interestingly, there are also articles on groups like the **Irish Republican Army**, the **Khmer Rouge** and **Hezbollah** because their espoused goals include social justice regardless of the violent methods they employ.

Although the articles are written for an academic audience they are factual and jargon free and will appeal to the informed lay reader. The length of article relates to the extensiveness of the topic and run from one to five pages. There are bibliographies for each entry but many of them are brief. This is one area where any future edition might expand its efforts. Organizing and providing access to all this information are a full list of entries, a topical index or Reader's Guide, and a thorough and comprehensive index.

As any fine subject encyclopedia does, the *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice* helps add scope and definition to its field of study. It also offers a strong factual base for those researching the concepts and themes of social justice and activism, as well as for those studying specific movements and organizations. Both academic and larger public libraries where there is an interested audience will do well to consider it.

Routledge has published the 13th volume of its Medieval Series of encyclo-

pedias and this is a timely addition. *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (2006, 0415966914, \$350) is a two-volume set that aims to "bridge the gap between what we perceive Islam and Islamic civilization to be about and what it really is." While the religious aspects of Medieval Islam are treated, the emphasis is on the broader culture and civilization of the Muslim world. The *Encyclopedia* also tries to inform the reader about "what Muslims did to contribute to European understanding of the sciences, mathematics, arts, literature, philosophy, and government."

For the purpose of this work, the Islamic world extends from the Iberian Peninsula across North Africa and the Mideast to Southeast Asia. The timeframe runs from the first year of the Islamic calendar, 622 CE through the 17th Century. As hinted at above, the array of topics discussed is equally wide ranging. Besides entries dealing with sciences, mathematics, arts, literature, philosophy, and government, there are those that discuss travel and pilgrimage; women, gender, and families; law and jurisprudence; daily life; and of course, religion and theology.

Edited by **Josef W. Meri** and consisting of contributions from an international group of scholars, there are more than 700 entries comprising the set. These articles are informed by the latest scholarship but written in a style accessible to both undergraduates and the informed lay reader. A bibliography is included for each article as are "see also" references linking related articles. Also grouping related articles is a well developed thematic list of entries. A solid general index provides access to information by specific page number. However, given that Arabic words and phrases are referenced throughout, one suggestion for future editions is to provide a pronunciation key.

Medieval Islamic Civilization: an Encyclopedia offers an accessible, balanced and well rounded approach to a complicated topic. With its diverse coverage of Islamic civilization, as well as its discussions of other religions and interfaith relations, it provides a welcomed perspective. The stress in this reference work is on the inter-relatedness of, rather than, the clash of civilizations. It would be a valuable and worthwhile addition to most academic collections.

When discussing the World Wars of the 20th century, a great deal of attention is usually given to military strategy, battlefield events, and international politics. The newly published *Home Front Encyclopedia: United States, Britain and Canada in World War I and II* (2007, 1576078493, \$285) offers another perspective.

Edited by **James Ciment** and published by **ABC-CLIO**, this three-volume set gives the reader a sense of the dramatic societal

continued on page 61

Introducing Springer eBooks

Spend less time searching and more time researching.

- ▶ More than 3,000 New eBooks and eReference Works Every Year
- ▶ Ownership Business Model
- ▶ Unlimited Simultaneous Use
- ▶ Grouped in 12 subject specific Online Libraries
- ▶ Collection comprises Textbooks, Monographs, Handbooks, Major Reference Works, and more



012383x

From the Reference Desk from page 60

changes that engulfed the home front, as well as their long term effects. There are almost 700 articles in this set written by more than 100 international contributors. The first volume is devoted to coverage of **World War I** while the second volume deals with **World War II**. Each of these volumes consists of distinct sections that first provide biographical sketches of prominent figures and then offer essays on relevant subjects. The biographies range from movie stars to war heroes and from writers to government officials. Topical coverage extends from sports and politics to race riots and labor unrest; and from music and film to religion and the changing role of women. The third volume contains 70 primary source documents ranging from **George M. Cohen's** World War I anthem *Over There* to **Wilson's** Fourteen Points and from **Winston Churchill's** Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat speech to **Roosevelt's** State of the Union Address in 1945. The third volume also contains a chronology, glossary, and bibliography for each of the World Wars. Black and white photos and illustrations compliment the text throughout. The articles themselves are straightforward and factual and should appeal to upper level high school students and lay readers, as well as lower division undergraduates.

The Home Front Encyclopedia: United States, Britain and Canada in World War I and II will prove a useful compliment to the other

reference works on the World Wars. It offers a unique and important viewpoint not given full exposure in other sources. In addition, the articles depict not only what was happening on the home front, they often note resulting changes and how they helped shape future developments. All in all, this is a good choice for libraries wanting a broader perspective on the World Wars reflected in their reference collections.

Grey House Publishing has just released a new edition of one of their most popular and useful titles. *America's Top Rated Cities: A Statistical Handbook* (2007, 9781592371846, \$195) now in its 14th edition, ranks what its editors consider the top 100 cities in the US with populations of 100,000 or more. The set is divided into four-volumes covering the following regions: southern, western, central and eastern. Ratings from a variety of sources, as well as a numerous statistical tables are provided for each city.

Each entry starts with a background essay describing the city and noting its various characteristics. This is followed by rankings in number of categories including business and finance; women and minorities; seniors and retirement; children and family life; health and environment; dating and romance; sports and recreation; and culture and performing arts. There are also rankings for general and miscellaneous topics from the most pet friendly, to the most drivable, to the most literate. According to the editors the rankings are derived using

“data from more than 200 books, articles, and reports.” The source is noted for each ranking given. However, these entries only list the title and date. Specific pages are not provided and this is an oversight. **Grey House** might also consider including a complete listing of all these sources in one general bibliography. It would help the reader get a better sense of the diversity and quality of the sources being used. Nonetheless, these category rankings are interesting, revealing, fact-filled and fun to browse.

But perhaps the most useful information from a research standpoint comes in the statistical tables covering the business and living environments of each city. On the business side, these tables provide figures on demographics, finance, employment, real estate, taxes, transportation, businesses, and hotels and event sites. Statistics reflecting the living environment include climate, housing, education, health care, cost of living, major employers, public safety, recreation, the media, hazardous waste and air and water quality.

America's Top Rated Cities: a Statistical Handbook offers highly useful profiles of each city covered, as well as comparative information related to rankings. Whether it is for a marketing report or a prospective relocation, this reference provides a fascinating and informative starting point for anyone studying the cities covered. Both public and academic libraries will find *America's Top Rated Cities* a valuable addition to their collections. Libraries that own the 2006 edition will need to

continued on page 62

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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

Column Editor's Note: *The onslaught of crime dramas on the small and large screens are but one piece of evidence of people's fascination with mysteries and detectives. Shows such as **House**, **Bones**, and **Numb3rs** consistently top ratings for their time slots, and the very fact that both **CSI: Crime Scene Investigation** and **Law and Order** have evolved from singular programs to multi-program franchises indicates that Americans can't seem to get enough suspense, inspection, and "ah-ha!" moments. No matter what the context is — be it a police precinct, a forensic laboratory, or even a hospital — folks are crazy about detectives.*

*This month, **Monographic Musings** celebrates the popularity of the detective genre with some investigations of its own—investigations into recent publications, that is. From the detective story's origin to a comprehensive look at female sleuths, this column has it covered. Happy reading, everyone! — DV*

Panek, LeRoy. *The Origins of the American Detective Story.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. 0786427760 (10); 9780786427765 (13). 235 pages. \$35.00.

Dresner, Lisa M. *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007. 0786426543 (10). 9780786426546 (13). 240 pages. \$35.00.

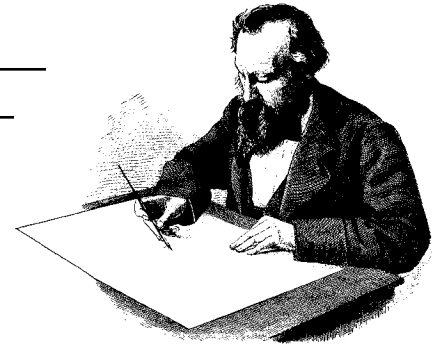
Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

One of my favorite places to eat in the Charleston area is a restaurant called **Poe's Tavern**. The eatery's namesake, **Edgar Allen Poe**, was stationed at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island in 1827, just down the street from the tavern. It was during **Poe's** stint in the South Carolina lowcountry that he was inspired to write such tales as "The Gold Bug" and "The Balloon Hoax." Though **LeRoy Lad Panek** speculates that **Poe**, the inventor of the detective story, was influenced by crimes that took place in Philadelphia and New York City, I can't help but wonder if he might have also been influenced by the superstition and legends that permeated Charleston society in the 19th century. By nature, legends are shrouded in mystery, and it is only fitting that **Poe** should eventually create a hero to solve such obscurities.

In his book *The Origins of the American Detective Story*, **Panek** explores the detective in fiction during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. The first chapter is a wash of the first 50 years of sleuth stories, highlighting **Poe**; the crime sensation novels of **Metta Fuller Victor** and **Anna Katharine Green**; the "ex-detective" work of **Emma Murdoch Van Deventer**; and the work of **Julian Hawthorne** (son of **Nathaniel**). **Panek** offers thorough

inspection of the progress of the genre in the first half-century, noting how the authors built upon their predecessors' work as well as the similarities and differences of their stories. The second chapter focuses on **Arthur Conan Doyle's** great detective, **Sherlock Holmes**. **Panek** analyzes **Doyle's** success through the development of the mass media, dramatic adaptations and parodies of his work, and other writers' use of **Doyle's** literary style. In chapter three, **Panek** investigates why the police were not central characters in early detective fiction; he attributes some of this to the then-infancy of the police detective profession. Chapter four tackles the role of science and the scientist in crime stories — some of the excerpts provided by **Panek** read like an early 20th century version of **CBS's** popular tale of forensic pathology, *CSI*. The most interesting chapter might be the fifth, which examines "breakthroughs" in 19th and 20th century pseudoscience; phrenology, racism, and sexism certainly had their turns in the spotlight when it came to "understanding" the minds of criminals. Chapters six through ten each focus on different heroes of detective fiction: journalists, private investigators, women, lawyers, and "everybody else." **Panek** rounds out his book with "last thoughts" in chapter 11.

While **Panek's** work offers a broad overview of the birth and childhood of detective fiction, **Lisa M. Dresner** wears a more focused lens in her book *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*. In her introduction, **Dresner** states that no one has created a "comprehensive theory that adequately theorizes the place of the female detective"(1). She provides an overview of the literature about female detective fiction and concludes that such fiction presents female investigators as "fundamentally flawed"(2). With hopes to bridge the gaps in female detec-



tive theory, her book focuses on four themes: the female investigator in gothic novels, lesbian detective novels, television, and film.

Dresner's coverage of each topic is all-encompassing — it is obvious that she has taken great pains to complete thorough research into a variety of female sleuths. In the first chapter, which focuses on the female investigator in gothic novels, **Dresner** highlights five best-sellers: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (**Ann Radcliffe**), *Northanger Abbey* (**Jane Austen**), *Jane Eyre* (**Charlotte Brontë**), and *The Woman in White* and *The Law and the Lady* (**Wilkie Collins**). Each of these novels is scrutinized and all references to the heroines' "almost-detective" status — that is, the heroines' reliance on a man to ultimately solve the crime — is spelled out. The second chapter, which focuses on the female investigator in lesbian detective novels, highlights a variety of protagonists: **Nell Fury**, **Nancy Clue** and friends, **Virginia Kelly**, **Harriet Hubble**, and **Kate Delafield**. These investigators' stories receive the same meticulous analysis as those in chapter one, and the common thread of car trouble appears throughout. The third and fourth chapters, covering female investigators in television and film, delve into characters from **Angela Fletcher** to each of *Charlie's Angels* (both the small and silver screen versions). **Dresner** concludes with a chapter about *Rebecca* — a novel that embodies each of her themes by originating as a gothic novel, inspiring a lesbian detective novel, and hitting both the small and large screens. It must be said that **Dresner's** narrative voice is not necessarily one of female power. I expected to find tribute to the dominant, intelligent female detective; however, **Dresner** points out that even the books, television shows, and movies that entertained me — such as *Jane Eyre*, *Moonlighting*, and *Silence of the Lambs* — type the female leads as incompetent and/or slightly insane.

Both *The Origins of the American Detective Story* and *The Female Investigator* are academic in scope — **Panek** and **Dresner** include extensive bibliographies and indexes, and **Dresner's** notes comprise 30 pages of text. If you seek a quick guide to specific characters or milestones in detective fiction, then these are not the books for you. If, however, you wish to access in-depth information about each authors' subjects, then you will find a wealth of knowledge in these works. 🐾

From the Reference Desk from page 61

decide if the extra year's information is worth the added cost. However, given that the individual volumes can be purchased separately, another option might be to purchase the most recent edition for the region that you are most interested in. 🐾