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## From the Reference Desk-Reviews of Reference Titles

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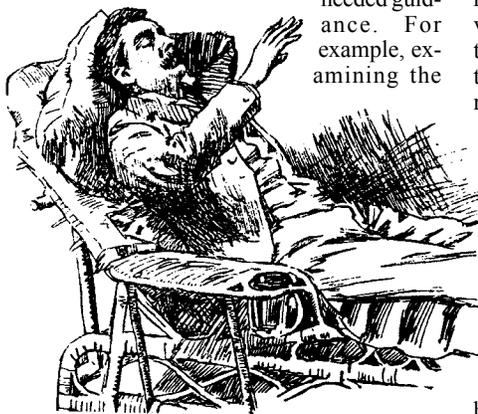
# From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*, and Head of Reference Emeritus, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401) <gilson@cofc.edu>

**O**xford University Press has published two reference works that go a long way in filling major gaps in the reference literature. One is the recently-published *Dictionary of African Biography* (2012, 9780195382075, \$1,200), and the other is the not so recent *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (2010, 9780195377330, \$2,095). In both cases, Oxford has published unique works that are comprehensive and groundbreaking efforts informed by a highest level of scholarship.

The *Dictionary of African Biography* is part of a lineage of reference works that includes essential standards like the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, *American National Biography*, and the *African American National Biography*. Like the latter title, one of the guiding lights of this reference is **Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**, who serves as editor-in-chief with another formidable scholar, **Emmanuel Akyeampong**, Professor of History and of African and African American Studies at **Harvard University**. They and their contributors have produced a six-volume set that supplies 2,126 well-written and thoroughly-researched biographies. And to their credit, these collective efforts exceed all other previous attempts at creating a biographical reference focused on the entire continent of Africa. As you would expect, the vast majority of the biographies cover the lives of native Africans chosen from “every historical period.” However, readers will also find there are others entries that discuss non-Africans who have had significant impact. Few of the entries cover living people, but some 20% are biographies of women, which is higher than either the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* or the *American National Biography*. The entries range in length from 750 to 2,000 words and provide information about family and outside relationships, positions and careers, contributions, and achievements, as well as overall influence and importance. Each entry has a useful bibliography leading to further research.

The finding aids are what you would expect from a top-notch reference. While arranged alphabetically, a number of indexes offer needed guidance. For example, examining the



index grouping “Occupations and Realms of Renown” shows the diverse number of pursuits that are represented among the entries. Presidents and heads of state are side-by-side with novelists and fiction writers, mathematicians are covered along with missionaries, and early Christian figures occupy the stage with Islamic religious scholars. And that just scratches the surface as far as occupations go. An additional perspective of the coverage can be gained by examining the other indexes listing place of birth or major involvement and periods of activity which indicate which countries and historical time periods are represented. And pulling it all together, there is a comprehensive 239-page general index that includes names and topics with references to specific page numbers. A full directory of contributors is also provided with their current affiliation and a list of the entries they wrote.

The *Dictionary of African Biography* will be a key reference work for academic libraries supporting African studies programs, as well as a valuable addition to any biographical reference collection. Larger public libraries with strong reference collections will also want to consider it. The set is available in the *Oxford Digital Reference Shelf* collection. For pricing and discount information, point your browser to [http://www.oxford-digitalreference.com/contact\\_us](http://www.oxford-digitalreference.com/contact_us). Also be aware that, according to the editors, plans call for an “ever-expanding online edition (of the *Dictionary of African Biography*) in the Oxford African American Studies Center” that will offer researchers “the most comprehensive continental coverage... available to date.”

The *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* fills another longstanding need. It is the first major reference work to treat dress and fashion in a worldwide, comprehensive manner steeped in serious scholarship. The *Encyclopedia* represents the efforts of 585 scholars from over 60 countries contributing 854 articles. And, according to the introduction “as much as possible, entries have been written by experts from within the culture being discussed” to lend credibility. While it is a ten-volume set, the *Encyclopedia* has been designed so that each volume can stand on its own as a first-class resource. It has been arranged with the first nine volumes treating distinct continental regions and the tenth covering global perspectives. While the emphasis is on the 19th to early 21st centuries, each volume is informed with introductory sections laying out the historical background and context. The individual volumes then focus on countries within the sub-regions, so, for example, the volume on Africa has sections on countries ranging from Algeria to Ghana to Zambia and from Angola to Kenya to South Africa. In addition, the practices of major ethnic groups are often discussed, and there are sections in each volume devoted to accessories as diverse as face veils, beads and beadwork, footwear, and jewelry. As you would

expect, visual illustration is important in a work focused on dress and fashion. Some 2,000 images are included, and there are numerous sidebars and bulleted lists supplementing the text. One only regrets the absence of color photos.

Because of the multidisciplinary interest in dress and fashion, the *Encyclopedia* takes a broad approach. The concept of dress is expressed as “any supplement or modification to the body,” including clothing, jewelry, and other accessories, as well as the transitory changes related to dress that are spoken of as fashion. Also included is the costume associated with theatrical presentation and dance. However, regardless of how it is defined “contributors to this encyclopedia primarily describe dress and explain how it is worn within specific cultural contexts.”

While intended as a unified reference set, we cannot help but observe that, as noted above, the individual volumes of the *Encyclopedia* stand on their own, focusing on specific geographic areas with serious scholarly content. And, although there is an extensive, comprehensive index in the last volume, each volume has its own index. This gives the set the flexibility of being put in either a reference or circulating collection. In fact, it is an ideal candidate for those libraries that have begun circulating portions of their reference collections to enhance their use.

Regardless of its eventual home, the *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* is a major contribution that will set the standard for the foreseeable future. It has received numerous accolades including winning the **Dartmouth Medal** for 2011. These honors are well-deserved. Anyone serious about the cultural diversity and significance of dress and fashion will be drawn to this set.

As far as an online version goes, the *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* is the cornerstone of the online *Berg Fashion Library*, which also has resources from **Berg Publishers** including “an extensive eBook collection, a vast image bank, extra reference resources, and more.” This online portal is “supported by **Oxford University Press**’ highly experienced team.”

The *Encyclopedia of United States-Latin American Relations* (2012, 978-0872897625, \$500) is another effort from **CQ Press** that warrants strong consideration. Edited by **Prof. Thomas M. Leonard**, this three-volume set provides researchers with more than 800 signed articles authored by over 160 scholars focused on a topic that has drawn increasing interest. As the preface to this set notes, a thorough treatment of U.S. - Latin American interactions has been lacking in the reference literature. This set aspires to remedy that situation.

Utilizing the traditional A-Z alphabetical arrangement of entries, these three volumes

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offer a variety of relevant articles dealing with key issues that span more than 200 years of U.S. - Latin American interaction. As you would expect, there are numerous biographies of major players ranging from businessmen to generals and from diplomats to dictators. But, obviously, there is much more to this relationship than individual people. Other articles cover topics as diverse as wars and interventions, treaties and alliances, government agencies and commissions, and specific programs and policies. There are also entries highlighting how economics and economic exploitation are interwoven with U.S. - Latin American relations. Articles discuss issues like coffee as an export crop, the expansion of the Panama Canal, the expropriation of foreign oil companies, trade agreements like GATT and NAFTA, and the role of the World Bank. And for those wanting to concentrate on specific counties, there are individual entries that detail the relationship between each Latin American country and the United States, as well as articles that discuss Latin American relations with other international heavyweights like China, Russia, and the European Union.

The set's overall format is text-rich, but it has numerous black and white photos and 20 maps providing visual enhancement and support. The writing is reader-friendly and will appeal to the interested lay reader, as well as students and scholars. The entries are factual and objective and maintain the emphasis on themes related to relations between the U.S. and the various Latin American countries. While each entry has helpful "see also" references linking readers to related articles, the set could have benefitted from a topical index, and the bibliographies, although useful, might have been more substantial. A helpful general index is reprinted in each volume.

Needless to say, these volumes will be of value to students of American political science and U.S. foreign policy. However, Latin American Studies curriculums continue to grow in colleges and universities and with the histories of Latin America and the U.S. so interwoven, an awareness of the influences and interactions between the two is essential for a firm understanding of this discipline, as well. Given this, the *Encyclopedia of United States-Latin American Relations* has broader appeal than first realized. Collectively the set provides an historical perspective, as well as a sense of the current status of a relationship that is a key to understanding the development of Latin America. In short, it should prove itself to be a valuable addition to many academic collections.

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Both serious military historians and aficionados of the history of the American West will be impressed by this recent title from McFarland. *Participants in the Battle of the Little Big Horn: A Biographical Dictionary of Sioux, Cheyenne and United States Military Personnel* (2011, 978-0786462896, \$75) adds

a truly personal dimension to one of the most controversial events in Western history.

**Custer's Last Stand**, as it is more popularly known, has drawn critical interest since the battle occurred in 1876. This biographical dictionary authored by **Frederic C. Wagner** adds to our knowledge of the battle by not only listing the members of the 7th Calvary who fought and died at the Little Big Horn. He also provides a second section listing the civilians, quartermaster employees, and scouts who played supporting and active roles in the battle. But uniquely, and perhaps most importantly, a third section of the book is dedicated to the Indians present at the battle along with estimates of their strength. And it is not a mere listing of leaders and heads of bands. It includes "Indians of various tribes, known or believed to have been present in the Indian village along the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876" Some 1,488 names appear with 1,274 being men or male children, while 214 are women or female children.

The vast majority of the book consists of biographical entries that vary in length depending on available information. More is known about the U.S. Calvary participants, so most of those entries list place of birth, birth and death dates, company, rank, eye and hair color, height, family members and whether they were involved in the battle and in what capacity. The Indian biographies are much sketchier but nonetheless useful in trying to document who was there and which tribe they represented. The section introduction also offers helpful descriptions of the tribes and bands that were camped at the Little Big Horn that day. **Mr. Wagner** supplements his biographies with a series of appendices that cover unit rosters and strength summaries; listings of scouts from three different sources; 7th Calvary demographics and lengths of service; regimental duty stations before and after the battle; military horses, uniforms, weapons, and tactics; and Indian dispositions and weapons. A bibliography and an index round out the book.

Examining this book and its findings, one wonders if the full story of the Little Big Horn will ever be known. The author, **Frederic C. Wagner** admits to the confusion that surrounds the battle. Given the controversy that the battle enjoys, the mystery and uncertainty will continue, but by combing through numerous primary sources, **Mr. Wagner** has compiled a resource that offers some clarification, at least as it relates to whom was there. Interested readers and researchers will turn to his efforts repeatedly. *Participants in the Battle of the Little Big Horn* is a title that will appeal to academic, as well as public libraries and will often find a home in circulating collections. And it is a reasonably priced, fact-filled, and handy resource that individual readers will also want in their personal collections. Currently, this title is not available as an eBook.

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### Extra Servings

**Sage Reference** is releasing a number of new single-volume works you might want to be aware of:

- The *Encyclopedia of Transnational Crime and Justice* (ISBN: 978-1-4129-9077-6, \$125; eISBN: 978-1-4522-1858-8, \$156) "describes, defines, and charts transnational crimes and criminal activity, as well as the policing and prosecution of those crimes."
- The *Encyclopedia of New Venture Management* (ISBN: 978-1-4129-9081-3, \$125; eISBN: 978-1-4522-1857-1, \$156) "explores the skills needed to succeed in business, along with the potential risks and rewards and environmental settings and characteristics."
- *Encyclopedia of Community Corrections* (ISBN: 978-1-4129-9083-7, \$125; eISBN: 978-1-4522-1851-9, \$156) "explores all aspects of community corrections, from its philosophical foundation to its current inception."

(All of the above titles have a pre-publication price of \$115.00 for the print only that expires July 31, 2012.)

In May, **Salem Press** kicked off a new, revised *Earth Science* series by publishing a pair of two-volume reference sets:

- *Earth's Surface & History* (ISBN: 978-1-58765-977-5, \$295; e-ISBN: 978-1-58765-980-5, \$295) "explores the land masses and seas of the world" describing "mountain ranges, the oceans, continental movement, and a wide variety of features that have influenced life on earth."
- *Physics & Chemistry of the Earth* (ISBN: 978-1-58765-973-7, \$295; e-ISBN: 978-1-58765-976-8, \$295) looks "at the dynamics of the earth's mass and how its chemistry produces change." The set also covers "many underlying factors surrounding the issue [climate change], including geothermometry and geobarometry, glacial events, and mass extinction theories."

Plans call for completing the series with October releases of two more titles, *Earth's Weather, Water & Atmosphere* and *Earth Materials and Resources*.

(The full content of all **Salem** sets is available online, free for those purchasing print sets, as well as being available for online-only purchase.)

May 2012 also saw **Grey House Publishing** release the Second Edition of *Working Americans 1880-2012 Volume I: The Working Class*. It has been 12 years since the first edition made its appearance, and this new edition attempts to bring "the story into the 21st Century."

**ABC-CLIO** has added to its collection of history titles edited by **Spencer C. Tucker** with *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812: A Political, Social, and Military History* (ISBN: 978-1-85109-956-6, \$310; e-ISBN: 978-1-85109-957-3, call for pricing). In addition, they have published the *Chronology of the U.S. Presidency* (ISBN: 978-1-59884-645-4, \$399; eISBN: 978-1-59884-646-1). 🐾