From the Reference Desk--Reviews of Reference Titles

Tom Gilson
Against the Grain, gilsont@cofc.edu

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Bucking current trends, a new start-up reference publisher is debuting in the marketplace. Based in Santa Barbara, CA, Mission Bell Media intends to publish both print and digital media with a focus on the themes of leadership and innovation. In fact, they have just released a series of single-volume reference works, the first of which is entitled African-American Leadership: A Concise Reference Guide (2015, 978-0990730033, $135).

A look at the Reader’s Guide of this title shows not only the broad categories that are covered but it also points to the framework within which editor Tyson D. Kling-Meadows has chosen to present his study of African-American leadership. In this reference, leadership is presented and defined by how it is exemplified in specific areas of endeavor. As such, articles focus on African-American leadership as demonstrated in fields ranging from academics to business to art, as well as in politics, science, and within faith communities. Given this arrangement, individual entries are free to focus on a range of specific topics including affirmative action: the Freedom Rides; the Harlem Renaissance; the Nation of Islam, gender and leadership; the Black Business Network; historically black colleges and universities; and inventions and patents. There are also essays that cover leadership as seen in specific organizations like the NAACP, the Black Theatre Network, and the National Black Chamber of Commerce. Each article is fact laden providing historical context both past and present while containing specific examples of leadership with numerous references to specific individuals. Value-added features include the above mentioned Reader’s Guide, a general index, a chronology, “see also” references, and brief bibliographies after each entry. How impressive this value-added feature is the 200-page Leadership Glossary edited by Dr. Jeni McRay. It contains over 750 terms relevant to leadership including definitions of concepts and theories as well as brief discussions of specific organizations, influential publications, and actual leaders. This volume has also been published separately by Mission Bell Media under the title Leadership Glossary: Essential Terms for the 21st Century (2015, 978-0-9907300-0-2, $29.95).

Grey House Publishing has just released a two-volume set entitled the Encyclopedia of the Continental Congresses (2015, 978-1619251755, $245). Authored by Mark Grossman, this specialized reference attempts to provide comprehensive coverage of “the Continental Congresses and the persons, places, and events that had an impact on these formative bodies.” In an effort to fulfill this goal, the set contains some 509 entries in a straightforward A-Z arrangement with references to numerous primary sources.

As you might expect, the vast majority of the entries are biographies of members of the First and Second Continental Congresses as well as other relevant players who had an impact on the formation and work of those bodies. Additional entries focus on relevant issues, events, places, battles, laws, and treaties. As such there are discussions of topics ranging from the Coercive Acts to the Declaration of Independence; from Loyalists to the Committees of Correspondence and from Espionage Tactics to the Diplomacy employed by the Continental Congresses. Each article is factual and thoroughly researched with liberal use of quotes from primary sources and including cited analysis from a variety of historians. At first this can be a tad disconcerting given the length of a number of the quotes but the overall effect is to offer a scholarly and comprehensive discussion of each topic covered, not to mention a sense of what contemporaries were thinking and feeling at the time. Each entry reinforces this impression with an impressive work cited list that serious researchers will appreciate. Value-added features include an historic timeline, numerous primary documents, an exhaustive bibliography and a general index. There is also a very useful index of the delegates by state contained in the appendix as well as lists of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, occupation, the Presidents of the Continental Congresses, and the location and dates of the various sessions.

The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congresses is an obvious labor of love. The time and effort needed to gather and distill the information contained in these two volumes required a deep scholarly commitment. Not only does Mr. Grossman cover those who served in these formative Congresses, he also includes those who were selected but did not serve. By quoting numerous primary sources, he offers not only firsthand accounts but is able to provide the perspectives of both Colonial and British observers and participants. And by including the comments of numerous historians, Mr. Grossman intersperses immediate scholarly analysis. The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congresses is a unique resource that serves both as central repository of detailed biographies and as a rich source of references for the avid researcher. As such, it is a natural addition to academic library collections that support the serious study of this formative time in U.S. history. (Buyers of the print-on-demand free online access at http://gold.greyhouse.com.)
With the current Masterplots. While the use of these references is no substitute for reading the originals, they can offer an expanded appreciation of the works and characters being discussed. As such, the Cyclopedia of Literary Characters should be on the short list for possible purchase by quite a few academic, public, and high school libraries.

Extra Servings

Princeton University Press recently announced the publication of a new reference work:

- Edited by Mark R. Dennis, et al., The Princeton Companion to Applied Mathematics (2015, ISBN: 9780691115039; eISBN: 9781400874477, $99.50) is an “authoritative and accessible single-volume reference book on applied mathematics. Featuring numerous entries by leading experts and organized thematically, it introduces readers to applied mathematics and its uses; explains key concepts; describes important equations, laws, and functions; looks at exciting areas of research; covers modeling and simulation; explores areas of application; and more…”

Salem Press is releasing a couple of new literary reference titles:

- Critical Survey of Shakespeare’s Plays (Nov. 2015, ISBN: 978-1-61925-864-8; eISBN: 978-1-61925-865-5, $125) is “written by leading experts in the field of Shakespearean studies. Critical Survey of Shakespeare’s Plays closely examines all 39 of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as Shakespeare’s life, style, technique, and influences. This title begins with a biography of Shakespeare and an introduction to his plays as a whole, followed by close readings of individual plays. Each essay is devoted to a single work and provides an in-depth critical analysis of the play’s historical significance, literary/dramatic techniques, and meaning to a contemporary audience. An abstract, explanation of context, and lists of keywords, works cited, and recommended books for further study also enhance each essay.”

- Cyclopedia of Literary Places (June 2016, ISBN: 978-1-61925-884-6; eISBN: 978-1-61925-885-3, $395) is in three volumes and contains “articles on over 1,300 literary works and selected titles covered in Masterplots. The selected titles are those that best lend themselves to meaningful discussion of place as a literary device. The articles contain more than 6,000 separate place entries… A brief introductory paragraph explains where the work is set and comments on themes and patterns in the work’s use of place. Discussions within the entries focus on how places are used as literary devices within the novels, plays, or poems in which they appear…”

SAGE Reference has a few new titles worth considering:

- The SAGE Encyclopedia of Quality and the Service Economy (Aug. 2015, ISBN: 9781452256726 $395) is a two-volume set edited by Su Mi Dahlgaard-Park that focuses on the emerging service economy and “explores such relevant questions as: What are the characteristics, nature, and definitions of quality and services? How do we define quality of products, quality of services, or quality of life? How are services distinguished? How do we measure various aspects of quality and services? How can products and service quality be managed most effectively and efficiently? What is the role of customers in creation of values? These questions and more are explored within the pages of this two-volume, A-to-Z reference work…”

- The SAGE Deaf Studies Encyclopedia (Oct. 2015, ISBN: 9781452259567, $495) is a three-volume set that defines “the current state of Deaf Studies at an international level using critical and intersectional lenses encompassing the field. The emergence of Deaf Studies programs at colleges and universities and the broadened knowledge of social sciences (including but not limited to Deaf History, Deaf Culture, Signed Languages, Deaf Bilingual Education, Deaf Art, and more) have served to expand the activities of research, teaching, analysis, and curriculum development…”

(These reference works are available online from the SAGE Knowledge platform https://knowledge.sagepub.com/)

ABC-CLIO recently released two items of interest:

- Ideas and Movements That Shaped America From the Bill of Rights to “Occupy Wall Street” (July 2015, ISBN: 978-1-61069-251-9; 294; eISBN: 978-1-61069-252-6, call for pricing) is a three-volume set edited by Michael S. Green and Scott L. Stahler that “examines the evolution of American society and thought from the nation’s beginnings to the 21st century. It covers the seminal ideas and social movements that define who we are as Americans — from the ideas that underpin the Bill of Rights to slavery, the Civil Rights movement, and the idea of gay rights — even if U.S. citizens often strongly disagree on these topics…”

- Iconic Mexico: An Encyclopedia from Acapulco to Zócalo (Aug. 2015, ISBN: 978-1-61069-043-0, $189; eISBN: 978-1-61069-044-7, call for pricing) is a two-volume set edited by Eric Zolov that offers “in-depth treatments by renowned as well as up-and-coming scholars on the most iconic people, places, social movements, and cultural manifestations — including food, dress, film, and music — that have given shape and meaning to modern Mexico and its people. Presenting authoritative information written by scholars in a format that is easily accessible to general audiences, this book serves as a useful and thorough reference tool for all readers…”

Oxford University Press has published some newly revised subject dictionaries:

- A Dictionary of Psychology: Fourth Edition by Andrew M. Colman (2015, ISBN: 9780199675681; eISBN: 9780191744358, $19.95) includes “more than 11,000 definitions, this authoritative and up-to-date dictionary covers all branches of psychology. Clear, concise descriptions for each entry offer extensive coverage of key areas including cognition, sensation and perception, emotion and motivation, learning and skills, language, mental disorder, and research methods. The range of entries extends to related disciplines including psychoanalysis, psychiatry, the neurosciences, and statistics. Entries are extensively cross-referenced for ease of use, and cover word origins and derivations as well as definitions. More than 100 illustrations complement the text…”

- A Dictionary of Education, Second Edition, by Susan Wallace (2015, ISBN: 978-0199679393; eISBN: 9780191758454, $25.95) is written from a UK perspective and “provides clear and concise definitions for the terms that anyone studying education or working in the field is likely to encounter — from A* to zero tolerance. Coverage includes all sectors of education: pre-school, primary, secondary, further and higher education, special needs, adult and continuing education, and work-based learning…”

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