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From the Reference Desk

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In his preface to *Oxford University Press’* new reference work *African American National Biography* (2008, 978-0195160192, $795), Editor Henry Louis Gates observes a truth that reference librarians will recognize and applaud. In his discussion of the early struggle of African American Studies to become an established discipline, Gates notes that scholars “had to find a way to map the field with reference works, sophisticated reference works such as biographical dictionaries, encyclopedias of history and culture … in short all of the foundational reference works that, taken together, bring a field of study into the realm of scholarship.” Due in no small part to the work of Dr. Gates and his colleagues, this corpus of foundational works is available to the work of *Oxford’s* online *African American Study Center*. As things stand some 2,000 new biographies will be added initially. Hopefully, this will also allow for updating and enhancing the bibliographies. (Those interested in more information on this elaborate online reference resource should point their browsers to http://www.oup.com/online/africanamerican/)

The *African American National Biography* is another major reference work that will add luster to *Oxford University Press’* reputation for serious scholarship. Given the set’s obvious quality, the inclusiveness of its coverage and the importance of *African American Biography* as a reflection of African American history, libraries of all types would be wise to consider it.

Women in the American Civil War (2008, 978-1851096008, $195) published by ABC-CLIO is a two-volume set that fills a gap in the reference literature. While coverage of women and their part in American history has grown over the years, the role of women in the Civil War has not received the appropriate attention. Editor Lisa Tendrich Frank remedies this oversight by offering an in-depth treatment of the complex nature of women and their contributions during this seminal struggle. The articles in this set show that, far from being the “self sacrificing feminine patriots” that the popular accounts of the day portrayed, many women stepped outside traditional roles.

The first volume is introduced by 14 contextual essays that “provide an overview of how various groups of women experienced the era and how women in general shared similar experiences.” They also point to the complex and diverse nature of this experience by dealing with topics ranging from Abolition and Northern Reformers to Female spies, and from African American Women to the Confederate Northern Reformers to Female spies, and from African American Women to the Confederate Homefront. There are also similar essays that cover Southern Women, the Union Homefront, Religion, Politics, Wartime Employment, Northern Women, Nurses, Wartime Literature and Female Combatants. In addition, there are numerous “see also” references from these essays to specific related articles contained in the main part of the set. As you would expect, each of these essays has a useful bibliography.

With recent headlines focused on the subprime mortgage crisis and post concerns about the criminality related to the ENRON and WorldCom scandals, the relationship of business ethics to broader society is a topic of growing significance. However, it is also a subject that is complex and multidimensional. The *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society* (2008, 978-1412916523, $795), edited by Prof. Robert W. Kolb, is a five-volume set that vividly attests to this fact. It contains more than 900 entries covering topics that draw from a diversity of related fields to “embrace commerce in all its ethical and social dimensions.”

There are articles representing a number of broad categories including political theory, applied ethics, rights, corporate power, organization, and governance, problematic practices and events, employee issues, gender, age, ethnicity, diversity, and sexual orientation, customers and consumers, justice, environmental theory, and regulation and legislation. Specific issues as divergent as informed consent, executive compensation, intellec-
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As alluded to above the main part of this set consists of more than 300 articles that cover the lives of numerous individual women, domestic concerns like courtship, marriage, and family life, women’s perspective on military practices like conscription and enlistment, discussions of topics like girlhood and adolescence, as well as the actual involvement of women in specific battles. There is also discussion of issues that reflect the darker side of women’s experience like prostitution, rape, and the impacts of guerilla war, as well as disease, bread riots, and both Confederate and Union widows.

The articles are relevant, readable and full of essential facts. Value added features include a chronology, a collection of 24 primary sources, a collected bibliography, a helpful general index and black and white photos that enhance the visual attractiveness of the set.

Women in the American Civil War provides thorough coverage of an era of American Women’s history that is deserving of serious scholarly attention. Editor Lisa Tendrich Frank and her contributors have skillfully produced an accessible and easy to use reference work that should find a welcome home in both academic and larger public libraries.


Companies flogging products often know no shame so my early warning antennae are on high alert when I read what could be misleading claims. The blurb that came with this new dictionary reads, in part, “This invaluable reference features:

- thousands of new words spanning everything from technology and medicine to colloquial slang
- headwords in color and changes to layout to further improve accessibility
- increased coverage of acronyms and EU terminology
- more material for students on their year abroad or anyone living in the French speaking world such as sample utility bills, bank statements, and leases
- new and updated cultural notes to help students grasp the essence of the language
- a numbers page at the start of the dictionary covers the increasing frequency of numeric abbreviations, such as ‘0800 number’ and ‘24/7’

This time, the hype is justified because, as touted, it is up-to-date and it “gets right to the heart of both languages.”

I really like this dictionary. If I were French (zut alors, ne serait-ce que pour un instant), I would be able to learn that a “goodfella” is a gangster and that a “goody two shoes” is a modele de vertu and that its meaning is ironic.

As an American whose French is rusty and never was that good, I re-learn to count in French and also learn when to use en, how to express approximate numbers, familiarize myself with phrases using numbers, and how to express calculations and decimals. All of these things are contained in one, easy-to-read box. There are similar boxes dealing with colours, the clock, nationalities, and age, as in “Quel age avez-vous?” Months of the year, time units, surface area measurements, speed, currency & money, sizes, military ranks & titles, shops, trades, & professions, and games & sports are other quick reference areas that supplement phrase books and give usage tips besides.

Usage and contemporary vocabulary are major strengths of this dictionary. One can find usage guides for words such as have, go, should, since, and do for the French speaker and, for example, ce, quelqu’un, qui que, quel, quelque, and encore for the English speaker.

There is a ninety-four page section titled “Communication mode d’emploi/Guide to Effective Communication” that covers Internet, SMS, telephone, business & general correspondence, living in France, and seeking employment with English and French language pages facing one another.

I will not dispose of my ragged Cassel’s yet, however, because I suspect that it is better for literary needs and besides, you can never have too many language dictionaries but some are better than others and if I had to choose one, it would be The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary. Any library supporting French language studies needs to provide this reference work to its public.