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ATG Fiction Contest

Editor

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The Library of Congress is a national treasure. Editors, John Y. Cole and Jane Alken, along with their contributors, have produced a book that mirrors the central role the Library has played, and still plays, in the cultural life of the country. While the Library is discussed in other works like Miriam Drake's four volume Encyclopedia of library and information science (Marcel Dekker, 2003, 082474259, $1295), this is the first encyclopedia devoted to the Library itself.

As a resource, it is suitable for both public and academic libraries. Whether it is placed in reference or circulation will depend on the need. Regardless, it would be a worthwhile addition.

Grey House Publishing has released the 3rd edition of a book that has been well received in the past. Written by Scott Derks, the Value of the Dollar 1860-2004 (2004, 1592370748, $135) is both a browser's delight and a serious reference work. As the title implies, it traces the value of the dollar through times of war, depression, prosperity and inflation. Arranged chronologically, the first section of the book is divided into six parts, the first of which is devoted to the years 1860-1899 and subtitled the Age of Endeavor. This is followed by five more parts that cover the 20th century and beyond. They include: 1900-1919: The Progressive Era and World War I; 1920-1939: Return to Normalcy, the Great Depression, and Recovery; 1940-1959: World War II: Recovery and the Cold War; 1960-1979: The Vietnam War and the Global Economy; and 1980-2004: From Recession to the Era of Possibilities. Each of these parts is further divided into five year increments. An historical snapshot, selected income, consumer expenditures, investments, standard jobs and their salaries, selected prices of typical food basket, as well as a large listing of miscellaneous prices are provided for the first part and all of the following five year sub-divisions.

The second section of the book is a new and welcome addition. Devoted to noticeable trends from 1900-2000, it uses a series of bar charts to trace price trends for household goods ranging from magazines to toasters and fashion items like women's dress suits and men's sweaters. It also includes compensation trends from the minimum wage to the NY Yankee payroll, food prices for basic commodities and prices for entertainment ranging from tickets to Disneyland and the price of a roll of film. The sources for these statistics are diverse and run the gamut from the Federal Reserve Bulletin to Sears & Roebuck Catalogs. Author Scott Derks provides a full list of sources, along with a two page bibliography, in the back of the book. There is also a subject index with references to specific page numbers.

The Value of the Dollar is by no means comprehensive, but it is nonetheless highly useful. Taken together, these statistics paint a fascinating portrait of American life during the periods covered. Of course, one wishes that there were even more of price listings, especially when the figures you are looking for are not available. However, the Value of the Dollar is intended for those interested in social history, not economics majors. These price lists help the reader get a feel for what it was like to live during a selected time period. In addition, they often provide specific numbers to support and enhance research. This latest edition of the Value of a Dollar should join past editions on shelves in both academic and public libraries.