Against the Grain

Volume 17 | Issue 3

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 (2005) "From the Reference Desk," Against the Grain: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 22.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4891

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.
Students of African American history and culture will welcome Routledge’s Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance (2005, 157958389X, $325). Containing nearly 640 articles from 260 contributors, this two volume set does more than map the development of the Harlem Renaissance. Edited by respected scholars Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, it places the artistic and intellectual accomplishments of the movement in social and political context.

While a number of articles focus on Harlem as a center of African American culture, the Encyclopedia also points out that there were many outside influences and discusses the movement in other parts of the country. For instance, there are separate articles under the heading Harlem Renaissance that discuss the impact on and relationship of the Harlem Renaissance to different sections and cities of the country like the South, Kansas and the Plains States, Philadelphia, etc. In addition, there are entries under the broad heading Europe and the Harlem Renaissance that focus on the individual cities of London, Paris, Berlin, as well as the Soviet Union. Additional social and political context is provide with articles on Garveyism, Jim Crow, Black Zionism, the Great Migration, Civil Rights and the Law, Higher Education, Racial Violence, and White Patronage.

And, of course, there are numerous biographies of artists, musicians, writers, and publishers, as well as essays on individual plays, films, books and influential periodicals.

The Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance offers the reader comprehensive coverage of this seminal era in African American life. The scholarship is impressive with each entry being fact filled and informative. A thematic list of entries, helpful bibliographies, “see also” references, and a map of Harlem, offer added value as does a thorough index. A definite choice for all types of libraries where there is interest in African American culture.

Although there are multivolume encyclopedias on crime, Sage’s Encyclopedia of Law Enforcement (2005, 0761926496, $250) is unique with its emphasis on the “practicability of theory” of helping. While this three volume set has over 550 entries written by more than 380 scholars and practitioners, in many ways this is a production of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York. Editor in Chief Larry E. Sullivan and his co-editors, along with numerous contributors, are affiliated with the College. In terms of article selection and content, they are to be commended for their efforts.

Rather than providing a straight alphabetical arrangement throughout the three volumes, each volume treats a major theme creating a set comprised of individual volumes. The first volume covers state and local issues, while the second deals with federal concerns and the third covers the international dimensions of law enforcement. All three volumes list selected entries on relevant topics and also contains as an international survey, offering numerous articles on individual countries. The Encyclopedia subject scope ranges from articles discussing police procedure to those on civil and private involvement, as well as entries discussing various investigative techniques, policing strategies, safety and security concerns, crime statistics, minority issues and police conduct.

The appendices in the first two volumes are worthy of note. These appendices provide annual reviews of state and local, as well as federal law enforcement developments culled from the publication Law Enforcement News covering 1989-2003. In addition, besides each entry having a bibliography, there are impressive master bibliographies cumulated in each volume. Providing access to the individual articles are both a topical Reader’s Guide and a master index. These indexes are very helpful, but they have minor problems. The topical Readers Guide organizes the individual articles by broad subject category but neglects to indicate which volume they can be found in. Normally this would not cause difficulty but given there is no straight alphabetical arrangement throughout the set, it does. Admittedly, that information can be ascertained by checking the list of entries in each volume; however, this is an added, inconvenient step. Another inconvenience is the lack of a page key in the general index telling the reader the pagination of the individual volumes.

These comments aside, Encyclopedia of Law Enforcement is a valuable and serious work that will appeal to the layman, as well as students and faculty. Impressive overall, a particular strength is the international coverage. One expects state, local and federal coverage to be a major portion of such a work but the editors wisely give international law enforcement the attention it deserves. In the process, they have produced a well rounded and thorough treatment of an important and growing area of study. Community college libraries supporting law enforcement programs will find this set a natural for their collections as will other academic and larger public libraries with interest in law enforcement issues.

While there are a number of more broadly focused references in religious studies, Brill’s Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism (2005, 9004141871, $289) is more narrow in scope, but it is nonetheless important. This two volume work sheds light on the “complexity of the relations between science, natural philosophy, cosmology, and religion in the period from Antiquity through the 17th and even the 18th centuries.” And, in doing so, it helps trace the acclamation of pagan traditions like the hermetic, Aristotelian, neoplatonic, and the occult into the Christian culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. But more than that, the Dictionary also follows these complex relationships through the Enlightenment and up to the present day of scientology and the New Age movement. One caveat, Judaism and Islam are discussed as influences upon, rather than fully integrated into the concept of Gnosis and Western Esotericism. Editor Wouter J. Hanegraaff explains that this was a decision based on the fact that “the disciplines studying Jewish and Islamic ‘mysticism’ have so far developed relatively independently, and have already succeeded in achieving a certain degree of academic recognition.”

continued on page 75

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
It has taken 13 years for Oxford to update the Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States (2005, 0195176618, $65). It was worth the wait. Edited by the highly regarded scholar Kermit L. Hall, contributors include legal scholars, historians and practicing jurists and attorneys. These brief, but well written articles discuss legal and judicial concepts, landmark cases, leading personalities, constitutional issues and the role of the federal judiciary, among other topics. Recent dramatic cases and developments are also covered in 86 new articles and range from Bush v. Gore and the University of Michigan's affirmative action cases to the appointments of Stephen G. Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the social issues raised by the Internet and the Web. There are also a number of valuable addenda. Appendices include a copy of the Constitution and a list of nominations and succession of the Justices, including a chart of appointments by Presidential term, and a chronology of succession. Another appendix includes selected trivia and traditions of the Court. There are two helpful indexes: one by case and one by topic. However, although the topical index is thorough and well conceived the use of "see also" references with in the index would have been useful. For example, looking in the index under Internet there are page references to where it is mentioned in the text but no "see also" reference to the main entry which is Web and Computer Access.

However, the pluses associated with this book far outweigh any negatives. The role of the Supreme Court and its impact on American society is evident throughout these pages. Informed by recent scholarship but highly readable, the Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States will appeal to all types of reference collections, and with its reasonable price, will find its way into a number of circulation collections, as well as personal bookshelves.

Fitzoy-Dearchborn has also published a worthy successor to one of its well received reference titles. Once again produced by the Museum of Broadcast Communications, the 2nd edition of the Encyclopedia of Television (2004, 1579583946, $59.50) adds significantly to the initial set. The 1997 edition was a three volume work containing 1948 pages while the new edition is in four volumes and has 749 more pages of content. According to Editor Horace Newcomb, there are nearly 200 new articles along with 486 new photos, as well as revisions of 500 previous articles.

The tone is serious and scholarly without being dull. It portrays television as the important and influential medium that it is, and does so in a straightforward, but engaging way. There are articles that discuss television's impact on, and coverage of, topics ranging from the civil rights movement to natural disasters, continued on page 77.
America Life in the 19th Century: Unabridged Travel Accounts by Audubon, Olmsted, and Twain

by Gene Waddell (College Archivist, College of Charleston) <waddell@cofc.edu>

John James Audubon is best known as an artist, but he was also a major writer, and his accounts of American life in the Middle West from c. 1810-1835 are astonishingly vivid.

Frederick Law Olmsted is best known as a landscape architect, but no one travelled more widely and wrote more incisively about the American South in the 1850s. Mark Twain is best known as a humorist, but his records of life along the Mississippi River and in the West are classic accounts of two eras of American history and two major areas of the United States.

Audubon, Olmsted, and Twain provided comparable accounts that all three were similarly brilliant, well informed, and excellent writers. Audubon and Olmsted wrote like novelists, and Twain was as good at non-fiction as fiction. Taken together, their travel accounts provide what is probably the best possible panorama of American Life in the 19th Century. At least four volumes of their best works deserve to be read in chronological order by everyone interested in how Americans became a distinctive people.

Audubon's accounts are all the more extraordinary considering that English was not his native language. He came to the United States from France to avoid conscription during the Napoleonic Wars, to make his way in life, and to learn English. While living on the Ohio, he became an American frontiersman and taught himself how to depict birds better than anyone ever had, and he learned to write extremely well. He kept detailed journals of his extensive travels, and they served as the basis for his accounts of birds and other types of animals and of his experiences travelling in the area of the Louisiana Purchase.

Audubon's Delineations were published together for the first time in 1897 along with selections from his surviving journals. A two-volume set edited by his granddaughter Maria Rebecca Audubon contains valuable notes by the naturalist Elliot Coues. In 1926 the episodes were first published by themselves in a volume entitled Delineations of American Scenery that was edited by his biographer Francis Hobart Herrick.

Recently published collections of Audubon's writings have enhanced his reputation as a writer, but he also deserves to be considered a historian for his important record of a way of life that disappeared during his lifetime. Altogether, Audubon published 59 essays (including "My Style of Drawing Birds," which was only in his granddaughter's reprint, and "Merchant of Savannah," which was only in Herrick's reprint, but excluding the "Moose Hunt," which as Audubon noted later was contributed by another writer). His essays were published in random order, but most are dated, and the ones which are not, in many cases, be assigned approximate dates. In chronological order, they provide an excellent overview of how the Midwest developed and changed.

Olmsted Before becoming America's first landscape architect, Olmsted was a writer, and before being...