July 2016

Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Recommended Citation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6096

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CQ Press/Sage has published a second edition of Encyclopedia of the United States Census (2012, 978-1608710256, $175). The intent appears to be updating and clarifying our understanding of the background, purpose, and workings of this decennial event. After examining the book one comes to the conclusion that editors Margo J. Anderson, Constance F. Citro, and Joseph J. Salvo have succeeded admirably.

Given the recent changes to the way the information is being compiled, this second edition of the Encyclopedia has particular relevance. No longer relying on the long-run sample to accumulate the necessary “social and economic data,” the census now uses the American Community Survey. The ACS is a “continuous measurement methodology” that samples the population on a monthly basis adding efficiency, increased response rates, and more reliable results. A thorough explanation of the ACS is provided in the very first essay in the Encyclopedia and offers a firm jumping-off point. Of course, other articles discuss the principle techniques, procedures, and mechanics required in census taking, there are also many that focus on issues and concepts, demographic results, census controversies, public policy context, and constitutional foundations. In addition, there are short articles providing “snapshots of the nation at each of the decennial censuses from 1790 to the present.” Each article has a bibliography and relevant “see also” references. As you might expect, a number of value-added features are included. Tables, charts, diagrams, and maps are used to good effect throughout the Encyclopedia. Appendices provide data on past census leadership, U.S. population and area figures from the 1790-2010 censuses, Congressional apportionment reflecting changes in the census from 1789-2010, the growth and cost of the census, sample census questionnaires, and the Standards for the Classification of Federal data on Race and Ethnicity. A glossary of terms follows these appendices with a useful index to specific terms and subjects ending the volume.

The Encyclopedia of the United States Census is a typical CQ Press production offering scholarly expertise in an accessible and well-designed reference. The entries here are full-blown essays that cover 140 topics, all written by scholars and experts familiar with the purpose, history, and function of the census. It is a top-notch effort that the editors and contributors can be proud of and that researchers in need of information about the census will welcome. Again, this is another title that could find a home in either circulation or reference. It will be of primary interest to academic libraries supporting courses in demographics and population studies, as well as public administration, political science, and policy studies. The Encyclopedia is also available electronically. For more information, search http://www.cqpress.com/product/Encyclopedia-of-the-US-Census-2nd.html. CQ Press is also providing an online guide to the American Community Survey at http://acsguide.cqpress.com/

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: Debbie Vaughn (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor’s Note: Those connected to libraries of all types have very likely at least heard of Michael Gorman — among many other distinctions, he was the 2005-2006 ALA President and has been honored with a number of awards for his service to libraries and his support for access to information. For better or for worse, he is also known for his stance on the Google Books Library Project. In this month’s Monographic Musings, ATG reviewer Patricia Dragon examines Gorman’s recent autobiography, published by ALA Editions. Happy reading, everyone! — DV


Reviewed by Patricia Dragon (Head of Special Collections Cataloging, Mtdata, and Authorities, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <dragom@ecu.edu>

Michael Gorman’s Broken Pieces: A Library Life, 1941-1978 is the autobiography of a central figure in libraries of the past 40 years, from his boyhood in working-class England to his faculty position at the University of Illinois. It is stuffed full of vivid anecdotes from school days with teachers both repressive and enlightening, reflections upon his parents and childhood through adult eyes, and stories about a child’s discovery of libraries as places to escape existence, and later, as the locus of a fulfilling career. These broken pieces add up to a compelling portrayal of what makes the author who he is. Laboriously indexed and with meaty citations, it is also the work of a scholar detailing pivotal developments in library history in the 20th century, with particular reference to cataloging. Throughout, the earnestness of Gorman’s passion for libraries is the central, unifying theme.

What stands out in Gorman’s recounting of his early working days are the fascinating descriptions of his colleagues, reminding the continued on page 41
Gorman offers cogent criticism of library education today, derived from his own sharply different experience. The curriculum prescribed by the [British] Library Association, Gorman explains, was not simply vocational education, but was inherently closely allied to the needs of the profession. There was an ordered curriculum and general agreement on what the degree recipients should know when they graduate, unlike the programs of multiple tracks and fewer universal requirements that prevail now. Cataloging was central to librarianship, a status Gorman sought to preserve in his first years on the faculty: “I was determined to teach cataloging as one of the fundamental bases of librarianship, not as a specialized skill of use only to a few. I wanted the students to understand that cataloguing was . . . ‘the way librarians think’” (162). Needless to say, Gorman laments the loss of cataloging from the central library curriculum.

For readers looking for juicy conflict, Gorman refers in advance to chapter 12 several times, calling it “the battle of AACR2.” He explains that he segregated the material on cataloging into a separate chapter so that those not interested, presuming there are any who have read thus far, can skip it. The cataloging-phobic have no need to fear, however, since although he alludes to the radical changes, Gorman actually goes into little detail about them. He does give a succinct history of cataloging developments in the 20th century, describing how AACR2 arose out of movements for greater international cooperation such as the ISBD, the rise of machine handling of records requiring certain kinds of standardization, the need for cataloging principles rather than haphazard examples, and the proliferation of formats other than printed books. The battle he describes centers on the conflict between the cost of implementation versus improved service to patrons.

Of course, Gorman is famous for his scathing criticism of certain library trends, and he does not disappoint in this realm, calling FRBR “a name more suited to a Beanie Baby than an ambitious cataloging standard” (197). He leaves no one guessing how he feels about RDA: “Based on trendy chatter, gaseous assertions, and untested assumptions” (203), or metadata: “an inferior, unstandardized species of cataloguing done by amateurs” (191). Although he often portrays himself as a man increasingly unable to recognize the world around him, a literary man in a digital world, Gorman is careful to stress that he is not against the prudent use of useful technology, but rather only technology for its own sake. He remains cautiously optimistic that libraries will continue to inspire and educate those who seek such things. His book is an inspiring read for all librarians and anyone concerned with the preservation of the intellectual record.