Outstanding Reference Sources: The 1997 Selection of New Titles

By John R. M. Lawrence

ANNUAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF DISTINGUISHED REFERENCE WORKS SELECTED BY EXPERIENCED LIBRARIANS

 Forty years ago, as Pan American launched its first jet service to Europe and American Express began a commercial revolution by introducing credit cards, a small group in ALA’s Reference Services Division, as it was then called, began an effort to aid America’s cash-strapped libraries. A committee under the leadership of Helen M. Focke, professor of librarianship at Western Reserve University, was charged with recommending a list of new and outstanding reference sources that would meet the needs of small and medium-sized libraries. This year marks the 40th appearance of the renamed Reference and User Services Association’s annual recommendations of distinguished reference works and the 15th appearance of the list in American Libraries.

In that time span, the world has witnessed innovations far greater than hula hoops or Ford Thunderbirds. Not the least important has been the phenomenal expansion of American libraries in size, numbers, and in the services they offer. Computers and automation may have caused as much trauma as the Dodgers’ move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, but they have tremendously improved the cataloging and management of collections. Those collections changed radically with the introduction of a variety of new media, adding everything from rock and roll to Pee-wee’s Big Adventure. Most recently, the telecommunications revolution and the Internet have brought fundamental shifts in our approaches to providing access to information.

In contrast, the approach the Reference Sources Committee has taken to meeting its charge has changed little. The individual members of the committee are assigned subject areas to review. Throughout the year the members scan catalogs, collect reviews, and examine and evaluate hundreds of new reference publications. They log scores of hours visiting libraries, bookstores, Web sites, and publishers’ exhibits in order to see new resources. A month or so before ALA’s Mid-winter Meeting, the members begin to nominate titles for the entire committee to examine, and a more intensive review process begins. The process culminates in grueling meetings at Midwinter, where the committee considers each nominated title individually and selects the final list.

Two constants have attended the work of the Reference Sources Committee. The budgetary constraints that inspired the creation of the annual list in 1958 continue to affect all libraries and give us much of our reason for being. More importantly, many publishers continue to commit tremendous resources to producing reference sources of the highest quality. In 40 years, the committee has honored more than 2,000 titles as outstanding reference sources. The list that follows demonstrates that the committee on the part of publishers is as strong today as it was 40 years ago. Many of the titles represented here are the products of years of planning and investment long before the first page was printed. All demonstrate a commitment to quality and innovation and an attentiveness of the publishing world to the needs of the library public.

LITERATURE


A welcome addition to the growing number of titles focusing on the African-American literary experience, this volume follows the format of other Oxford companions. It is broad in scope, including entries on education, humor, history, folklore, stereotypes, and funeral and mourning customs. The largest number of entries are devoted to authors and conclude with brief bibliographies. Plot summaries and character sketches as well as commentary on important speeches are included. Useful cross-references abound. Most entries are written by faculty members; other specialists and affiliations are listed at the beginning of the book. This is an important reference source for large and small libraries alike.


The primary focus of this two-volume work is to present an introduction to the works and influences of African authors. Following the same format as the earlier Latin American Writers, this source includes 65 authors from the late 19th and 20th centuries throughout the African continent whose works vary in length, critical acclaim, and audience. A critical and secondary source for the major authors, this volume is as useful for students as it is for professional librarians. The first volume explores the African literature of the continent, and the second volume is devoted to indigenous authors from Africa’s former colonies. The first volume presents an introduction to the literature of 110 countries and territories, one to 10 authors in each. The second volume is divided into two parts: the major works, followed by an alphabetical list of authors. Each entry includes a biography, analysis, and bibliographical information. A non-exhaustive list of selected titles by major authors is also provided. This is an important reference source for the entire collection of African literature.
**THE 1998 DARTMOUTH MEDAL WINNER**

The Dartmouth Medal is awarded by the New Hampshire Board of Trustees to recognize achievement in creating reference works outstanding in quality and significance. The 1998 winner is:


Containing 800 lively biographies and 110 topical essays on subjects ranging from cookbooks to vaudeville, the two volumes of Jewish Women in America provide gratifyingly thorough encyclopedic coverage of the many varied roles that Jewish women have occupied in America, from the earliest days until the present.

All articles are signed and written with attention to detail by noted scholars; 500 period photographs are well-chosen and supplement the text; and researchers will find the lengthy "Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Archival Resources on the History of Jewish Women in America" especially useful. This source will have significant and lasting value in all libraries.

whose works are in English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, or indigenous African languages. Entries, averaging 13 pages in length, include biographical information, description, critical analysis, and a selective bibliography of primary and secondary sources. The lengthy introduction delineates the criteria used for the selection of authors and presents the major issues in the study of African literature. Other useful features include a list of writers by country; a chronology of literary, social, and political events; and a detailed index. This source will assist high school and college students alike in their study and research of African authors and literature.


Authors, their works, and survey articles relating to the literature of South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean are superbly presented in this encyclopedia. The articles, ranging from one to 10 pages in length, cover historically important authors, including women writers, as well as indigenous literature. Typical author entries include lists of selected works, translations, compilations and anthologies, further reading, and interviews. The volume concludes with both a title index and a general index. Large libraries will find this a useful starting point for research; smaller libraries can rely on this as their major source for Latin American literature.


With more than 4,000 signed entries written by an international team of 75 experts, this massive volume—a companion to Clute's award-winning Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993)—documents and surveys the writers, artists, literatures, and media that have used fantasy themes or have fantasy content, from the form's earliest days until the present. Numerous terms and concepts relevant to fantasy are also defined. Entries are clear and well-written and contain bibliographies when appropriate; cross-references are numerous and well-chosen; and the organization facilitates access to the contents. Academic and public libraries will find this timely and comprehensive volume satisfies not only the readers of fantasy but those interested in its theoretical aspects.

**THE ARTS**


This thoroughly researched work is the result of extensive scholarly interest in the subject of women artists and a reevaluation and reinterpretation of women as artistic producers. The chronological coverage extends from 975 A.D. to artists born in 1945. Each of the alphabetically arranged...
entries includes a brief biography, information about the genre of art produced, and an example of the artist's work. These volumes also present 20 introductory surveys on such topics as "Court Artists" and "Training and Professionalism," and include an overview of women's art in the 19th and 20th centuries by country. Together with their chronological list of artists, the volumes include a range of information not ordinarily found in a resource of this type, such as a directory of women's art periodicals and indexes, resource centers, and miscellaneous items including Web sites.


Biographies of persons important to the decorative arts, topical essays on national and period styles, and technical data fill two volumes on secular interior design. The articles—which focus on America and Europe in the last two centuries and range from George IV's taste and influence to the origins of the three-piece living room suite of the 20th century middle class—are scholarly, yet nonexperts will find them readable. Each entry identifies museums that hold examples of the works under discussion and provides bibliographies for further reading. Inquirers can now find in this one place information they previously could only assemble from several sources.


Yes, another dinosaur book! This time it is a thoroughly useful reference title rather than a summertime horror novel. This handy reference tool offers information to the amateur paleontologist, casual dinosaur enthusiast, or interested general reader. Opening with an overview and historical background on dinosaurs, the encyclopedia is devoted to an alphabetical list of dinosaur genera. Each article provides genus name; derivation of that name; the genus's extended classification of order, suborder, and family; a list of the locations specimens have been found; and drawings or black-and-white photographs of bones or the whole creature's skeleton. Each entry describes the physical characteristics of the animal and how its genus was established as well as how research and analysis have extended our understanding of it. This

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Mother Nature—who or what is she? This comprehensive encyclopedia seeks to answer that question by providing personal and professional background on over 445 American and Canadian naturalists, explorers, conservationists, park planners, ecologists, environmentalists, zoologists, writers, and artists from the late 15th century to the present. Many entrants are well-known individuals such as Henry David Thoreau and Frederick Law Olmsted, while others are more obscure. Alphabetically arranged biographies provide information on education, positions held, and career background, and details about major contributions in each person's field or avocation, plus selective bibliographies of major works and locations of unpublished source materials. An appendix lists the subjects by national origin, occupation, and field to which they made their principal contributions. The men and women described in this source have both advanced our knowledge of nature and enhanced our appreciation of its value, beauty, and vulnerability.

The NASA Atlas of the Solar System, by Ronald Greeley and Raymond Batson. 369p. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 (0-521-56127-2), $150. NASA has taken us to the moon and back, and with this new atlas we can now tour the rest of the “neighborhood,” our solar system. This outstanding tool is both an atlas and a history of space exploration. It is a compilation of systematic maps, photographs, and overviews of planets and major satellites based on data collected from over 20 years of NASA space missions. A first for any atlas of the solar system, this title provides a set of maps that are uniform in format with consistent scales of measurement. The text provides an overview of the solar system and each planet or planetary system. The bulk of the atlas consists of spectacular maps and drawings of each celestial body. Maps, charts, and spacecraft images convey both the similarities among and the unique aspects of the objects in the solar system. The appendixes include a summary of interplanetary spacecraft missions and data for the planets and satellites. Also included are a glossary of terms, a bibliography, and a gazetteer of named features on all the planets and satellites. Without a doubt, this outstanding reference source won’t soon be eclipsed.


Armchair and serious gardeners will find this volume describing 15,000 garden plants fascinating. The former will be entranced by the attractive format and appealing color photographs, while the latter will find the information on propagation, environment, pests, and diseases enlightening. Entries are arranged alphabetically by scientific name, but an extensive common-name index helps users locate plants usually known only by their popular names. Since the practice of gardening stands as one of the most popular American hobbies, this book will be a great addition to every library.


Fascinated by cats? This author is, too. Veterinarian Bruce Fogle describes all aspects of cat life, wild and domestic, and how cats are perceived by humans in art, literature, and religion. The various breeds and their life cycles, health, habits, and habitats are examined straightforwardly. Especially engaging are the plentiful pictures—cats look-

This brown classic tabby and white is one of several random breeds that wiggled its feline self into The Encyclopedia of the Cat. The classic tabby’s dark coat provides the best camouflage for an urban dweller.


Strikes, boycotts, and rallies are popular forms of protest often used to redress grievances of an economic, social, or political nature. This excellent new resource explores the many issues surrounding nonviolent protests, such as the nature of power, violence, and conflict resolution. Each article highlights the historical and cultural context of the events discussed. The wide-ranging, global coverage of this source, from the Russian workers’ uprising of 1905 to Greenpeace, will make it indispensable for many student reports.

Censorship, edited by Lawrence Amey and others. 3 vols., 905p. Pasadena: Salem, 1997 (0-89356-444-3), $290. With 353 contributing scholars, this title does an extra-
ordinary job of providing essays on a wide spectrum of topics concerning censorship. Censorship is as old as society can remember, and this reference source details the subject in 977 alphabetically arranged articles on individuals; general issues; books, films, and other works of art; organizations and government bodies; laws; events; places; and court cases. Bibliographies and cross-references are provided at the conclusion of each article. Photographs, illustrations, and maps can be found throughout. A comprehensive subject index and a list of topics add value to this exceptional source, which should be a part of all reference collections.


Women's Issues presents a panoramic look at the changing and dynamic nature of women's lives in America. Contemporary issues are the focus and range from women in sports to date rape. The wealth of historical and biographical material, coupled with definitions of terms and descriptions, makes this a tool relevant for a broad spectrum of users. Each entry is followed by "see also" references; longer ones also include a bibliography. Particularly helpful is the brief introduction to each article, providing a topical or social context.


Since the landing of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492, Native Americans have been fighting for their rights. Only since the 1960s has there been a strong outcry by activists, reformers, jurists, legislators, and others for the rights of Native Americans. Over 500 themes, significant events, legislation, political debates, cases and laws, battles, and key players as well as organizations and commissions are covered in this one-volume A-to-Z reference source. Each entry ends with cross-references and citations. A subject index and a chronology ranging from 1492 to 1996 can be found at the back of the book. Black-and-white photographs and illustrations can be found throughout, making this a useful, well-put together work for all collections.

As blue as the "blue bird" hibiscus (above) or as brilliant as a yellow Chinese poppy (left) would not be overstatement in describing vivid colors found in the world of plant life. The cup-shaped poppy can be found on stalks 18 inches high and the hibiscus has small red centers. Nearly 6,000 color photos illustrate the comprehensive A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants (DK Publishing).


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**THE ENVIRONMENT**


Are you looking for information about Superfund sites in your community, or who is responsible for the physical cleanup and associated cost? Here's the encyclopedia that can answer these questions and more. Although the EPA has records of over 35,000 contaminated sites in America, this book contains 1,310 of the worst sites arranged by state. These toxic waste sites, derived from landfills or waste dumps, industries and businesses, government and mining activities, often date back to the mid-1880s. Geographically arranged entries provide a brief description of each site's location and history, the type of contamination that affects the soil and groundwater, the number of people who are threatened, the cleanup work conducted or planned, the parties responsible for the contamination, legal actions taken, and source(s) to contact for more-detailed information. An appendix provides a list of common contaminants found in Superfund sites and a glossary. An excellent source that will be used by concerned citizens, students, and practitioners.


These volumes provide a snapshot of the current state of the environment and human efforts to exploit or protect it. Types of pollution, environmental law and regulation, and the interaction of human populations with the environment are just some of the topics covered in this excellent set. Useful appendixes list major environmental legislation, organizations, and U.S. governmental agencies with environmental responsibilities, while outstanding indexing facilitates access. Lavishly illustrated, the encyclopedia will appeal to students and laypersons interested in environmental topics, legislation, ecology, and evolution.

**CIVILIZATION AND HISTORY**


Those studying the U.S. foreign relations will find this encyclopedia's 1,024 articles surveying political, economic, military, cultural, ideological, and environmental issues to be authoritative and cogent. The coverage provides broad historical contexts as well as specific detail on individuals and their influence. Written by a panel of distinguished experts, the signed articles do not treat their subjects in isolation but are thoroughly cross-referenced and conclude with bibliographies for further reading. There are numerous charts, maps, tables, and figures. The fourth volume contains elaborate appendixes, including a chronology and a table of national data; there is a comprehensive index. Students and librarians will appreciate this resource.


Focusing on the peoples, civilizations, and histories of Africa south of the Sahara, the nearly 900 signed articles in this volume discard earlier notions of sub-Saharan Africans as "primitive" and "culturally inferior." More than a fourth of the articles are written by African scholars, and their authoritative writing redresses imbalances in previous treatments of African life and culture. Articles conclude with selected bibliographies and cross-references, and are supported by numerous charts, maps, tables, and figures.

EDI ted by Rob ert J. Allison. 423p. Detroit: Gale, 1997


As a follow-up to Gale's popular American Decades series, the American Eras series will cover the nation's history from the late 18th century to the end of the 19th century. Each volume contains essays dealing with lifestyles, politics, technology, people, and events. Perhaps most useful are the over 300 illustrations in each volume of popular topics that are often difficult to research in most reference collections: the era's fashions, hairstyles, sporting equipment, furniture, advertisements, and famous people. The comprehensive nature of the series, covering everything from recreation to criminal justice, will help libraries fill in the gaps in their reference collections.

Books vs. Bytes: Reference Sources Chair John Lawrence Speaks Out

AL: Outstanding Reference Sources continues to highlight primarily books. Are outstanding reference sources simply not being produced in other media?

Lawrence: Of course they are being produced in other media and some titles have made our list in the past. However, publishers have been rather conservative in experimenting with CD-ROM, online, and Web formats especially, and, not surprisingly, a high percentage of those products in these new formats have been based on what has been their bestsellers. So those products have a hard time meeting our committee's criteria because we exclude new editions of previously published titles.

When you talk about Web products, stability of the site becomes an issue. Last year, for instance, we had a site that was nominated and was withdrawn the very day it was being considered by the committee because the address for the site changed.

AL: Is the Internet now really the world's best reference source?

Lawrence: My idea of a good reference tool is one that should lead you quickly to verifiable information that's relevant to your question. Despite search engines and a great improvement in some of those things, the Internet is not proving to be that great research tool that we hoped it would be—not just yet.

AL: How is it transforming what we're doing in reference already?

Lawrence: In terms of currency, it cannot be beat. You can get up-to-date, up-to-the-minute news information and anyone who has access to a server of some sort can become a publisher. You have access to a wide range of information that simply was not available before. Now, whether it's all quality, well-informed, and verifiable information, that's another matter.

AL: Many libraries are beginning to offer electronic reference services to remote users. Do you know much about this?

Lawrence: Yes, many libraries, and their reference departments especially, have been offering electronic mailboxes for years with organizations and bringing up their own Web pages and offering those services to people. They often have a place where people can send e-mails or electronic questions—to a department or to possibly any staff member at the organization. Certainly with libraries building their own Web pages to assemble collections of information that should be available to their patrons, they're providing electronic references sources to their remote users.

AL: Have you any reason to believe that print reference materials are being edged out of library budgets in favor of technology?

Lawrence: I don't think it's any different than what libraries have faced in the past. There has been a displacement of print resources by computerized resources or electronic access to information in reference especially, particularly when you talk about indexes and bibliographies and similar sources. That's not necessarily a bad thing, however. In fact, I would say that's a very good thing in terms of the access to information. I think CD-ROM indexes and online indexes have proven that you can increase the access to information very effectively with these tools. They quite reasonably replace the print products in this fashion since those print products themselves were always the most expensive source of materials that reference departments acquired. Small and medium-sized libraries that this list is aimed at just cannot afford massive investments in technological equipment.

AL: Can you say anything about where we are now in terms of change?

Lawrence: We're in a period of transition, and I think publishers are having the hardest transition, not the actual users. They are trying to find a way of providing access to this information, and certain types of reference products are losing quite clearly to a computerized environment and they may permanently be that way, but I still think there will be a large number of reference tools that have a long way to go before computer or electronic access will match the quality of the print product. That is, as you consider products that require high-quality printing, like an atlas, or things that involve reproduction of exact photos and titles of that nature. Computer terminals just can't match that quality of detail in the near future or not without a great amount of investment.