

# The Best of the Best Reference Sources

**The 2003 Reference and User Services Association recommendations of distinguished reference works selected by public and academic librarians**

**by Vicki D. Bloom**

**D**uring a frigid winter weekend in Philadelphia, 10 librarians met during the 2003 ALA Midwinter Meeting to identify newly released reference works of distinction that would comprise this year's Outstanding Reference Sources. These dedicated and knowledgeable public and academic librarians from around the country are the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) Reference Sources Committee.

Each committee member is assigned one or more subject areas to review based on the Dewey decimal classification. Throughout the year they comb catalogs, peruse publisher Web sites, collect reviews, and inspect hundreds of new reference titles. Close contact is established with publisher representatives to obtain news of forthcoming publications and acquire review copies. In October, the chair solicits committee nominations and distributes a preliminary list of some 100 titles. The list is refined several times over the next few months as committee members review titles. Before they meet face-to-face during the five working sessions at Midwinter, they visit the exhibit area to examine sources they may have missed. This year, after over 15 hours of deliberation, 70 titles were held up to the committee's scrutiny.

In previous years, an average of 25 titles made the final list. This year, only 13 titles were deemed outstanding. There are two major reasons for this modest number. The

VICKI D. BLOOM is the head of reference services at Rivera Library, University of California at Riverside. As chair of RUSA's Reference Sources Committee, she is responsible for the introduction of this article and for editing the annotations written by committee members.

committee decided not to consider works with 2003 imprints that were published at the end of 2002; sufficient consideration could not be given to the increasing number of publications that were produced in this manner. Second, and most important, it was not a strong year for reference publishing. Usually, there are several titles that reflect the highest quality—rich scholarship, unique subject matter, pleasing layouts, sturdy bindings, beautiful illustrations, engaging text, helpful indexing, and good bibliographies. This year, we noted flaws in what could otherwise have been considered excellent works.

In light of that fact, this year the committee included recommendations (see sidebar) of desired features or criteria for excellence in reference publications. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but is provided to serve as a prologue to further discussion. A listing of problems the committee found is also included. Since publisher representatives are welcome to observe and take notes during our open meetings, we hope that our comments reflect public and academic reference librarians' concerns for first-rate, affordable publishing.

This year's selections vary widely in scope and subject, from the beautiful *World Atlas of Coral Reefs* to the comprehensive *Chronology of American Musical Theater*. The list of 2003 Outstanding Reference Sources is spotlighted on the RUSA Web site, along with criteria and details about the selection process. To learn more

about the Reference Sources Committee or to see past and present lists with fuller annotations, visit [www.ala.org/rusa/](http://www.ala.org/rusa/).



**THE**  
Horror  
662 p.  
Inde  
John K  
vacuum  
period  
scholar  
arrang  
cal and  
as givi  
numbe  
films o  
more  
eral in  
synop  
cast ar  
tions  
ture a  
the fil  
and st  
esting  
ograp  
includ

*A Chr  
cal Th  
Norto  
Press.*

The  
chron  
opera  
York  
entice  
than  
crew,  
man  
as the  
know  
and r  
mem  
other  
in-de  
stage  
for s

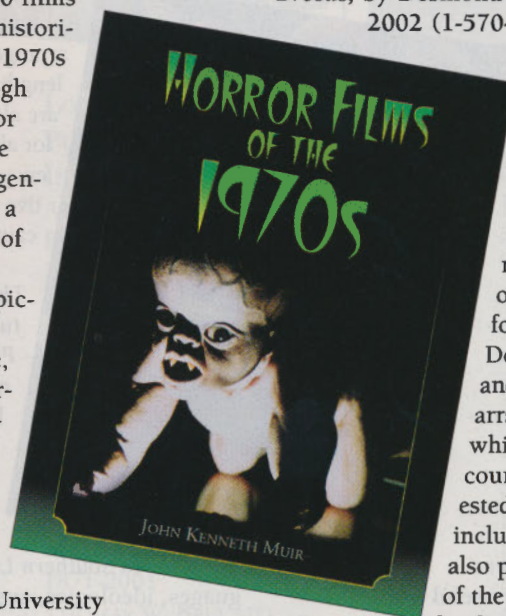
**SCI**  
Ency  
vols.  
5122

Al  
ers,  
are c  
ence  
but  
and  
thou

## THE ARTS

*Horror Films of the 1970s*, by John Kenneth Muir. 662 p. McFarland, 2002 (0-7864-1249-6), \$59.95.

Independent filmmaker and horror-film scholar John Kenneth Muir says, "Art does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it is inexorably bound to the time period from which it sprang." In his entertaining and scholarly filmography of over 200 films arranged by year, Muir sees the historical and social happenings of the 1970s as giving rise to the unusually high number of groundbreaking horror films of the decade, as well as the more routine ones. Following a general introduction, Muir provides a synopsis and commentary, a list of cast and crew, significant quotations by critics for each motion picture as well as by participants in the film's making when available, and stills for selected films. Interesting appendixes, notes, a bibliography, and an index are included.



*A Chronology of American Musical Theater*, by Richard C. Norton. 3 vols. 3,078 p. Oxford University Press, 2002 (0-19-508888-3), \$395.

The gorgeous illustrations in this season-by-season chronology of every musical comedy, operetta, comic opera, burlesque, and revue performed on a major New York City stage from 1851 through May 2001 might be enticement enough to acquire this set. Entries for more than 3,000 plays include details such as the full cast, crew, production staff, venues, number of performances, creative personnel, and songs, which are listed as they occur within acts when this information is known. Three indexes cover song titles, show names, and names of principal players and famous chorus members. Leaving appraisal and plot summaries to other classic references, these volumes are the most in-depth documentary source on the New York musical stage available, with a chapter that carries the timeline for selected plays back to 1750.

## SCIENCE AND NATURE

*Encyclopedia of Evolution*, edited by Mark Pagel. 2 vols. 1,205 p. Oxford University Press, 2002 (0-19-512200-3), \$325.

All aspects of evolution, including theories, researchers, history, philosophy, processes, plants, and animals are covered in this reference work. Other science reference publications include information about evolution, but this source is unique because of its comprehensive and thorough examination of the subject. It includes thought-provoking essays on such topics as culture in

chimpanzees, motherhood, and Darwinian medicine, all written by recognized scholars in the fields. Extensive indexing makes any topic easy to locate. This is a crucial research tool for anyone in search of information on any aspect of evolution.

*Dogs: The Ultimate Dictionary of over 1,000 Dog Breeds*, by Desmond Morris. 752 p. Trafalgar Square, 2002 (1-570-76219-8), \$24.95.

Renowned animal behaviorist Desmond Morris has created an impressive guide to the history and variety of man's best friend. The entries are accompanied by over 500 line drawings, which express the character of the dogs represented in a way that photographs often fail to capture. Divided into four major categories—Sporting Dogs, Livestock Dogs, Service Dogs, and Other Dogs—each division is arranged by the specific purpose for which they were bred, and again by country of origin. For the reader interested in further research, many entries include extensive references. Morris also provides an annotated bibliography of the most important dog reference books from 1576 to the present, and two additional lists of reference books, arranged by region and by breed group. A must for dog lovers.

*World Atlas of Coral Reefs*, by Mark D. Spalding, Corinna Ravilious, and Edmund P. Green. 424 p. University of California Press, 2001 (0-520-23255-0), \$55.

This reasonably priced atlas explores one of nature's most diverse and beautiful ecosystems—coral reefs. Its coverage is vast, providing an area-by-area summary of coral-reef systems in all geographic locations and countries. Each section includes an overview of the area, the locations of the reefs, data on size, and the specific pressures and hazards to those reefs. Background information on coral-reef evolution, environmental issues, and reef-mapping techniques is also provided. Scientists, researchers, and teachers will appreciate the currency and comprehensiveness; lay readers and students will find the plethora of superior maps and lavish color photographs of the many reef species inviting.

## HISTORY AND CULTURE

*Dictionary of American History*, 3rd ed., edited by Stanley I. Kutler. 10 vols. 5,539 p. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002 (0-684-80533-2), \$995.

The third edition of this classic and indispensable work, first published in 1940 and last revised in 1976, has been updated completely for a new generation of students and scholars. Recognizing that the ways in

which history is understood and interpreted have changed drastically over the past six decades, the editors have revised 448 articles, replaced 1,360 articles, and added 841 new entries. Gender, race, and social-history perspectives have been added to many entries for the first time. In another departure from the earlier editions, the editors have added maps and illustrations throughout the text, providing helpful visual cues to readers. No library should be without these new volumes.

*Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, edited by David Levinson and Karen Christensen. 6 vols. 3,264 p. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002 (0-684-80617-7), \$695.

Intended for students and non-specialists, this six-volume set does an outstanding job of covering all aspects of modern Asia (economics, religion, technology, politics, education, the arts, environmental issues, international relations, and scientific advances). Recognizing that there is not one Asian culture but many, the editors have been careful to stress both the interrelatedness and the tremendous variance of traditions. The set is equally useful for those researching common themes across Asian culture and those examining a particular country. Well illustrated and carefully indexed, the set is highly recommended for all public and academic libraries.

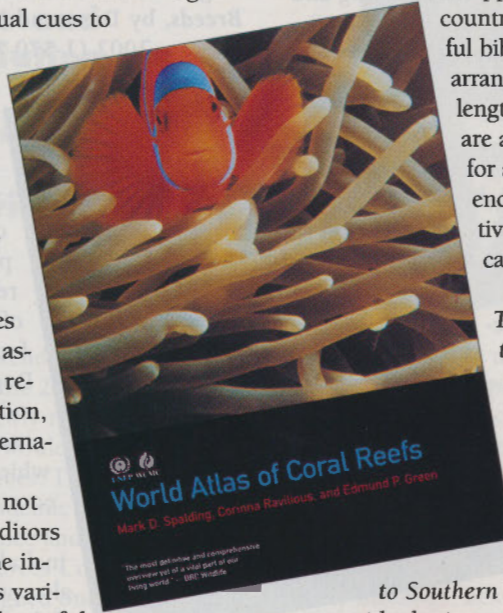
## LITERATURE

*Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature*, edited by David Patterson, Alan L. Berger, and Sarita Cargas. 251 p. Oryx Press, 2002 (1-57356-257-2), \$54.95.

This encyclopedia presents the lives and works of 128

writers whose contributions lend significant first-generation understanding to the Holocaust. Arranged by author, entries provide a biographical, bibliographical, and critical profile with emphasis on each author's experience with or response to the Holocaust and contributions to the literature. All entries offer a short list of selected works. Included

are appendixes listing authors by date, country of birth, and birth name. Two useful bibliographies—one of primary works arranged by genre and another of book-length studies of Holocaust literature—are also included. Highly recommended for all academic and public libraries, this encyclopedia brings together representative primary and critical works of Holocaust literature.



*The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, edited by Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda H. MacKethan. 1,054 p. Louisiana State University Press, 2002 (0-8071-2692-6), \$69.95.

Solidly authoritative and comprehensive, *The Companion to Southern Literature* spans the genres, languages, ideologies, events, culture, literary history, works, and writers that comprise the literature of the South. From incest to grits, topics are wide-ranging and eclectic. It features alphabetical and topical tables of contents and a thorough index that allows users to find important names that may lack an entry. With more than 500 entries by 200 contributors, the book contains signed essays that are critical and complete with cross-references and a brief bibliography. This companion's affordability and comprehensiveness make it a value and a prized reference work.

### Good reference works should include:

1. Clear, readable maps and photographs
2. Beautiful photographs and illustrations that enrich the text
3. Wide gutters, making photocopying easy
4. Sturdy bindings, strong construction
5. Readable, engaging text
6. Rich scholarship
7. Pleasing layout
8. Excellent indexing, with indented subheadings
9. Clearly stated selection criteria and purpose
10. Authoritative, well-documented information
11. Good cross-references
11. Broad audience appeal
12. Currency
13. Affiliation and background of contributors

### Good reference works should exclude:

1. Fuzzy and poorly reproduced photographs
2. Indexing with run-on page numbers next to entries
3. Narrow gutters, making photocopying nearly impossible
4. Redundancy
5. Too many or too few volumes for the number of pages
6. Incomplete or nonstandard citations
7. Tiny typeface
8. Too much or too little white space
9. Weak construction or binding
10. Inconsistent length of entries
11. Unreferenced illustrations or photographs
12. Dated statistics



## MUSIC M

A History of  
United States  
EDITH BOYD  
2003, 416 p.  
0-8108-4674-  
1-880157-17-  
1-880157-18-

Provides a c  
and nonspe  
ues in Ame  
rary times.

## THE BEST 1996-200

A Guide to  
about Latin  
ISABEL SCH  
2003, 280 p.  
0-8108-4666-

Designed a  
who are int  
grades K-1  
Latino peo

## HISTORIC KOREA

ILPYONG  
Asian/Ocean  
2003, 280 p.  
0-8108-433-

The autho  
ship and it  
and explor  
in recognit  
of the Kor

## SOCIAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

*Encyclopedia of Aging*, edited by David J. Ekerdt. 4 vols. 1,591 p. Macmillan Reference USA, 2002 (0-02-865472-2), \$495.

As our population ages, interest and scholarship in issues surrounding our later years have intensified. From the general to specific, the 400-plus well-referenced entries cover an impressive range of medical, psychological, sociological, public-policy, and biological subjects. There are good cross-references, along with bibliographies at the end of each article and a handy list of articles grouped by topic areas. Whether you are looking for information on genetics, social theories of aging, mental health, or pensions and Social Security, this four-volume encyclopedia presents information to the general reader while serving as a good starting point for either the high-school or college researcher.

*Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*, edited by David Levinson. 4 vols. 1,949 p. Sage Publications, 2002 (0-7619-2258-X), \$600.

Authoritative and comprehensive, this multivolume set includes hundreds of articles in the field of criminal justice. Impressive arrays of authors have contributed to this resource, addressing such diverse topics as racial profiling, money laundering, torture, prisoner literature, the KGB, and Sing Sing. Written in an accessible manner and attractively presented, the background discussions, definitions, and explanations of important issues and future trends are absorbing. Interesting sidebars and facts, reference lists, relevant court cases, tables, and black-and-white photographs supplement the entries. Appendixes cover careers in criminal justice, Web resources, and professional organizations. A lengthy bibliography lists relevant works.

*Social Workers' Desk Reference*, edited by Albert R. Roberts and Gilbert J. Greene. 910 p. Oxford University Press, 2002 (0-19-514211-X), \$65.

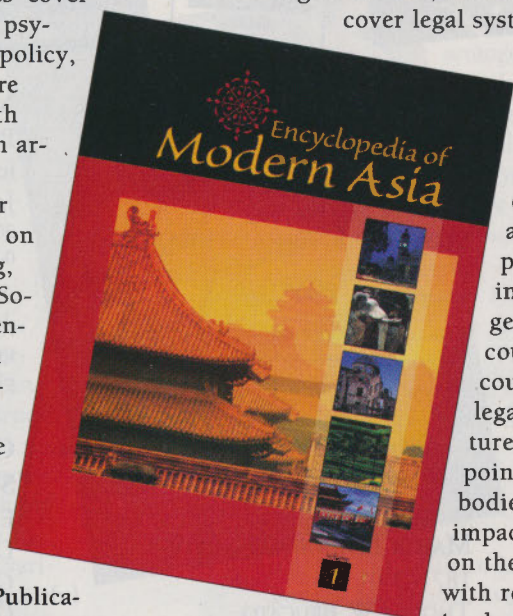
Equally useful for students, teachers, and practitioners, the *Social Workers' Desk Reference* provides comprehensive information on all of the various aspects of social work. Topics covered within the 146 chapters include crisis management, family therapy, treatment planning, disorders, case management, community services, and risk assessment. Each chapter concludes with a list of references or recommended readings. An excellent glossary and thorough indexes round out

this practical volume. Authoritative and readable, this resource provides one-stop shopping for social work.

*Legal Systems of the World: A Political, Social, and Cultural Encyclopedia*, edited by Herbert M. Kritzer. 4 vols. 2,370 p. ABC-CLIO, 2002 (1-57607-231-2), \$385.

Written by an international team of more than 350 legal scholars, the more than 400 signed entries cover legal systems of countries from around the world, Australia, and the provinces of Canada; transnational systems (International Court of Justice); general systems (Islamic law, indigenous, and folk legal systems); and key concepts. Each country profile includes a map with an inset of its location on the globe, general information about the country, its history, diagrams of its court structure, the evolution of its legal framework, its current structure, staffing or how judges are appointed, any specialized judicial bodies (i.e., military court), and the impact that the legal system has had on the country. Articles conclude with references and a bibliography. Academic and public libraries will find

this source invaluable for comparative studies in legal and judicial systems. ♦



The members of the Reference Sources Committee, shown hard at work (inset) during ALA's 2003 Midwinter Meeting, are: (standing from left): Michael Levine-Clark, Deborah Costa, Emily Horning, Matt Wayman, Nevin Mayer; (seated) Edward Kownslar, Jeff Kempe, Vicki Bloom, James McShane, and Katharine Dean.

