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Review

What Can U.S. Government Information Do for Me? Librarians Explain the Discovery and Use of Public Data, Documents, Maps and Images. Edited by Tom Diamond and Dominique Hallett. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2023. 299 pgs. \$75.00 (978-1-4766-8949-4).

The importance of government resources to information professionals cannot be overstated. *What Can U.S. Government Information Do for Me?* demonstrates the depth and breadth those resources can bring to researchers and how librarians can benefit from learning more about them. The editors are Tom Diamond, collections and materials selector librarian at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, and Dominique Hallett, government information and STEM librarian at Arkansas State University. They introduce us to the volume with a long-familiar rhetoric evangelized by information professionals across the country and within multiple professional domains: “U.S. government publications are an incredible resource waiting to be used and discovered by the public” (p. 2). The book aims to provide information about US government resources, how to use them, and provide examples for use in our respective libraries. This up-to-date tome provides information about agencies and departments, what their websites contain, and what each provides. The editors describe the work as “hands-on” and practical, serving the needs of library workers in the government information environment at academic, public, school, federal, and special libraries. Some of the highlights of this book include curricular development examples and practical resources for educators to use in the classroom.

The book is conveniently split into seven parts, making it easily accessible as reference material for different subject areas covered by multiple, varied, and often surprising government agencies, and therefore useful to myriad librarians across disciplines. It is not meant to be read in one, linear sitting. Rather, use it as needed by subject area to help guide your teaching, public displays, reference interactions, collection development, etc., and refer back to it as often as is necessary.

Part I. General

Part I. General begins with Claudene Sproles and Amy Laub’s “The United States Congressional Serial Set: A Rich Primary Resource of American History.” In it, the authors detail the rich history of the Serial Set and expertly inform readers of what it is, why it is, and what it isn’t, that is, what it doesn’t contain. It includes detailed access points for both online and print resources, listing specific Serial Set numbers as well as finding aids, freely available online resources, and commercial subscription options. We continue with Elisabeth Pearson Garner’s “Department of State and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The article goes in-depth detailing policy issues covered by the Department of State, such as “Climate and Environment,” “Countering Terrorism,” “Global Health” and “Human Trafficking,” giving good examples of the materials one might find there. Part I. proceeds with Ariana Baker and Allison Faix’s “Discovering Crime and Justice Data on Government Websites,” where they “offer some strategies for finding, navigating, and getting the most out of that data” (p. 30). Notably, this chapter focuses on multiple agencies and departments, and even

includes some useful non-governmental resources. The General section continues with Amanda McLeod’s chapter titled “What’s in a Policy? Government Information Resources to Help Inform Policy Analysis and Research.” McLeod articulates goals of policy research and analysis, while sharing tools and resources from multiple agencies along with practical examples of those tools in action and when readers might find them useful. Jennifer Castle rounds out Part I. with “Finding and Contextualizing Government Images.” This chapter can be considered, if not a comprehensive, at the very least, an intensive and incredibly well-researched list of agencies offering freely available images and their (mostly public domain) copyright statuses. In addition, Castle offers a section on Citing and Contextualizing, detailing the information needed to correctly cite images for academic integrity (p. 63).

Part II. Education

Part II. Education begins with Nicole Wood’s “A Guide to the U.S. Census for History Teachers.” Wood helps guide teachers through the census using questions focused from a historical lens, such as, “How are questions on race, ethnicity, and immigration informed by an ever-evolving understanding of what it means to be an American?” (p. 69). It includes a historical overview of the census and where different surveys exist, as well as tutorial guides for using and interpreting census data. This chapter is a thorough and detailed document that will help any educator (or student) trying to answer historical, social, and cultural questions about the United States using the census. In “Back to School: Education and Teaching Resources from the

U.S. Government,” Emily Rogers and Laurie Aycock cover government information from various agencies that librarians can recommend to educators, largely K-12 but may also include higher education, including quizzes, games, and even complex online learning modules. This chapter is divided by topic: civic engagement and literacy, science technology and math, health and medical, data and financial literacy, and history, arts and the humanities. Educators will find the resources listed in this section helpful for building lesson plans and continuing their own education for professional development. The Education section continues with “Financial Literacy 101: Combating Misinformation and Debt with Freely Available Government Resources” by Caterina M. Reed. It focuses on college students and recent graduates. The “essay will help librarians examine and consider government resources available relating to budget, money management, credit scores and history, student loans, filing taxes, and consumer protection” (p. 99). The essay is conveniently broken down by financial topic: budgeting and money management, credit scores and history, student loans, filing taxes, and consumer protection.

Part III. Genealogy

The Genealogy section begins with “Using Federal Government Documents for Genealogy Research” by Jennifer Crowder Daugherty and Andrew Grace. In it, the authors detail how to go beyond birth dates and places to find a family member’s movements or dealings with the government. The essay includes creative pathways to finding information, such as through the Freedman’s Bureau, immigration and naturalization records, war records, or BLM records, to name a few. Even the Serial Set contains hidden gems for genealogical research. In “Geography and Genealogy: Using Maps and

Aerial Imagery from Government Agencies for Genealogical Research,” Kelly Bilz writes, “Historic maps can bring neighborhoods to new light, spark the imagination about the day-to-day lives of our predecessors, and illustrate new connections” (p. 126). Bilz demonstrates this through various agency tools, such as Census Bureau maps or USGS tools, providing detailed information on exactly how to search for and access the data.

Part IV. Health and Social Programs

Part IV. begins with “Learning the Basics of Social Programs and Services Through Federal Government Sources,” by Angela L. Bonnell. Bonnell details key government sources librarians can share with individuals as well as professionals in social work, health care, and education.

Bonnell demonstrates the importance of the role libraries can play on the well-being of individuals and families in their communities (p. 144). Emily Alford continues Part IV. with “Public Resources for Public Health.” As the title suggests, this essay focuses on individual health needs and resources to help them make decisions for their well-being. Topics covered include health coverage, nutrition, substance abuse and mental health services, medicare and medicaid, benefits, and others. This chapter will be helpful for librarians assisting patrons with questions related to their healthcare needs. It also lists helpful professional development tools to keep abreast of developments in the public health sector of government. Closing out Part IV is Isabella Folmar and Blake Robinson’s “Finding and Using Federal Information Relevant to People with Disabilities.” The essay covers key resources from healthcare, employment, and education that may help librarians serving patrons with disabilities. Significant legislation is also discussed. This article helpfully

navigates various agency sites for concepts related to disabilities.

Part V. Military

“From Service Records to Special Collections: General and Specialized Military Resources” by Heather Seminelli and Lauren B. Dodd discusses military-related history and the excellent government resources available for the subject. The authors write, “Military data sources are useful for a variety of topics of interest for users such as genealogical information, military history, awards, historical sites, military leadership, veteran’s history projects, oral histories, and many other subjects” (p. 17–80). A detailed record of resources available, this article covers a vast array of resources available by type of research support, such as military education, service records, or obituaries. Michelle Shea continues Part V. with “Using Government Sources to Support Military Queries in Academic Libraries.” Shea’s essay addresses academic research needs for military sources, but also includes services for veteran and active-duty students, such as locating service-based scholarships or help finding information for filing VA paperwork for health needs. It focuses on publicly available resources for information needs in an academic context. Shea writes, “While librarians are not expected to have the same expertise as an education training center or recruiter, we can direct patrons to government and military sources that get people started on the right path,” which just feels like an apt quote for librarianship in general (p. 194).

Part VI. Native Americans and the Federal Government

Brandon R. Burnette starts off Part VI. with “Native American History from Government Documents and Maps.” It includes a link to Southeastern Oklahoma’s State University subject guides that

include many of the links listed in this resource. This essay provides extensive resources relating to the laws, land cession, population, culture, and history of Native peoples in the United States, and includes detailed descriptions on how to access them. Resources from both government and non-governmental sites are listed, as well as the content and resource types available. Burnette notes there are more websites with Native American materials that can be found on the Oklahoma State University's Native American Historical Resources subject guide. (p. 214) Connie Strittmatter continues Part VI. with "Researching Indian Treaties and Other Related Documents: An Annotated Bibliography." Strittmatter's article goes into further detail about the process of researching Indian treaties and provides a detailed history of treaties between the United States and various tribes, including dates and different parts of government involved. The article gives a fantastic historical overview of Indian treaties in the US, and also includes an annotated bibliography of primary resources for treaty research.

Part VII. Science

"Finding Current and Historical Weather Data" by Claudene Sproles and Angel Clemons begins the seventh, and final, section. This chapter discusses navigating the National Weather Service for data, including forecast data covering local, graphical, aviation, marine, sun/moon, climate, and space weather, among others (p. 234). It includes extensive information about natural disasters

and weather-related hazards, including a storm events database that can be used to research significant weather events. There is a breakdown of where to find information for different types of natural disasters. In "National Park Service: The Importance of Place," Connie Hamner Williams discusses the importance of the NPS as a source for scientific, cultural, and historical research. Some of the gems included are the ways National Parks have influenced our history as a nation, like how the West influenced voting rights for women. There is significant historical data available about the Parks via the NPS website, data related to social science and science, and lesson plans for teachers. Mark Love continues with "Government Information Resources from the U.S. Department of Energy." Love explores the DOE's policies related to clean and fossil energies. There are good ideas about who might benefit from different policies and sections of the website, like those wanting to build businesses for clean energy, for instance. There is a data section and educational resources for STEM research, which include lesson plans. Nathan A. Smith finishes out the Science section with "Science Images and Where to Find Them." This chapter is an invaluable resource providing a detailed resource list capturing public domain science images and how to find them. Using example research questions, Smith guides us through different agency websites to find corresponding images that help support or outright answer the queries.

Each chapter contains a reference list and some include additional resources.

There is an index on pages 285–99. It is worth noting that the language used in each section mirrors the federal language around that agency or area of government. For instance, the section "Native Americans and the Federal Government" often interchangeably uses Native American and Indian, as does the federal government.

There are areas that could be developed further. For instance, a future edition might include chapters explicitly devoted to race, class, gender, or sustainability and researching them within government documents. While some chapters addressed those topics within a larger context, each one might prove useful to explore further as a stand-alone concept or chapter.

There are many surprising and creative ways a single agency can be used to cover various reference questions peppered throughout the book. Of course, with a reference book as varied as this, it is important that you verify the websites exist in the same way as when this book was published. This will be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of any students and information professionals working with government information and should be required reference material for those pursuing librarianship as a career. This reviewer's only wish for this book is that an accompanying webpage or LibGuide were created for each chapter that includes links to the invaluable resources described here.—*Brianne N. Hagen* (brianne.hagen@humboldt.edu), Librarian, Cal Poly Humboldt University