
James B. Martin, Associate Dean U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, editor of African American War Heroes, presents a biographical dictionary in which 80 African American men (79) and women (1—Harriet Tubman) have been “…chosen to recognize specific combat actions that resulted in recognition for heroism.” (Preface, xii). Each of the war heroes profiled in this reference work have been awarded one or more military medals for valor save for three whose actions predate our nation’s medal system. Still, inclusion in African American War Heroes is highly selective. Of the eighty-seven African Americans awarded the nation’s highest honor fifty-four combat veterans are profiled.

African American War Heroes is arranged in alphabetical order according to personal name. A fact box preceding each biography provides at-a-glance information that includes vital statistics, branch of service, arena of conflict, age at time of award, but not the title of the award or awards conveying war hero status. This is a regrettable omission the more so given the biographical dictionary’s alphabetical-by-name arrangement. True, the names of those who received specific military honors are listed in the volume’s index under the title of each military award but this presupposes a familiarity with these honors (Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with Valor Device, Legion of Honor) which students, for whom this reference work is most suitable, may not possess.

Each biographical sketch is signed by one of the five other contributors, three of whom share with the editor posting at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Each essay focuses in detail on the heroic actions for which the subject received recognition, in a number of cases retroactively and/or posthumously. Black and white photographs illustrate some biographies. All entries provide a list of further readings which may include published books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and web sites with date of access noted. A concluding six-page general bibliography brings these further readings together.

An introductory essay presents an overview of African Americans in the nation’s military with an emphasis on combat history in line with the volume’s war hero focus. The volume also contains ten sidebars throughout the text (for example “Tuskegee Airmen” on pages 76–77) each of which contributes information about African American participation in the armed forces. Although a color picture of the Medal of Honor appears on the cover of African American War Heroes an additional sidebar devoted to explaining U.S. military decorations in their order of precedence with a brief history of each accompanied by an illustration would not have been unwelcome.

Unlike African American War Heroes, Charles W. Hanna’s African American Recipients of the Medal of Honor; a
The first edition of the work, published as the Encyclopedia of American Immigration (Sharpe, 2001), garnered widespread praise. It was described by reviewers as “well-researched, well-written...” and “impressive” (Choice, Oct. 2011); “essential in academic libraries and extremely useful in large and medium-sized public libraries.” (Booklist, Nov. 1, 2001); and “An asset to any library supporting research in American history or immigration.” (School Library Journal, Feb. 2002). The advisory board consisted of “well-recognized experts in the field” (Library Journal, Sept. 15, 2001). Given this critical reception, it is little wonder that Sharpe choose to revisit such a well-regarded reference work.

As the authors note in the Introduction, “most of the contentious issues surrounding American immigration today would be very familiar to past generations.” (xxix). The hot button issues of a century ago remain topics of concern today, from cultural assimilation and the economic benefits of immigration to the desirable rate of immigration. Given these continuities it is understandable that most essays remain substantively intact from the first edition. Volumes 1-3 contain topical essays organized under themes, time periods, or regions. Almost all of the original contributors have returned for the new edition. They seem satisfied with their previous work, with good reason. The essays hold up well after a decade. While the authors bring events up to date and add newly released data, in most cases the core content remains the same. Commendably, all the bibliographies I reviewed were updated to include references to recent scholarship, and in some cases websites.

Volume 4 contains excerpts from primary source documents ranging from George Washington’s Revolutionary War letters to recent immigration reform efforts. Almost all of the historical documents from the first edition appear in the second. The main additions are ten documents created after the publication of the 1st edition.

While historical continuities abound, technology, terrorism concerns, and changes in immigration patterns have raised new issues. These are not addressed in completely new essays in the 2nd edition, but updated information has been incorporated into relevant entries. For example, discussion of the Dream Act was added to the essay on Children and Adolescents, while a paragraph on the newly created Office of Homeland Security concludes the history of Immigration Agencies. There is also a new 21 page section in Volume 1 covering the post 9/11 years with overviews of recent immigration legislation and the impact of 9/11 on policies and attitudes toward immigration. A detailed subject index facilitates the discovery of specific topics across essays.

Libraries not owning the first edition will find this a welcome addition to their reference collection. It upholds the standards of its predecessor, delivering solid well-written overviews of key topics. Those owning the first edition will want to replace it with this set which reflects recent events and points to the latest scholarship for those conducting further research.—Eric Novotny, Humanities Librarian, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA


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