

This is Who We Were: A Companion to the 1940 Census.

By Scott Derks. Amenia, NY: Grey House, 2012. 458 p. \$150 (ISBN 978-1-61925-007-9). E-book available (978-1-61925-008-6), call for pricing.

Studies of twentieth-century American history invariably include a lengthy examination of the “Greatest Generation,” and rightfully so. Navigating the repercussions of worldwide economic calamity, struggling to survive the suffocating Dust Bowl, and witnessing the advent of another world conflict were just a few of the defining moments of that decade. In an effort to better understand this turbulent time period and the people that experienced it, *This is Who We Were* offers a statistical, cultural, and personal examination through the lens of the 1940 census.

This is Who We Were is organized into a lengthy preface, containing newspaper articles published shortly before and after the 1940 census that provide insight on issues pertaining to the census at the time of its release, and five subject-based sections. Highlights include biographical profiles of American citizens spanning geographic location and socio-economic standing; an economic snapshot of the decade listing prices of such items as an ice box, home egg hatcher, and a portable typewriter; and an impressive array of data tables collected from the 1940 census. While the information in each section is not organized in any particular manner, an index is included, which makes finding specific information within this volume a breeze.

Were this book simply a collection of data tables from the 1940 census, its usefulness would be suspect as such information can be found through numerous other sources. Fortunately, one of the strengths of this book is its ability to blend the rather dry, dense data tables with fascinating biographical pieces and cultural cornerstones. The result is an all-encompassing cultural and societal context in which to learn more about the decade. Combined with the raw data of the 1940 census, users will have access to a comprehensive examination of the time period.

The one glaring omission of this work is the absence of a concrete bibliography or list of sources. According to the introduction, information contained within the book is based on “original material from the 1940 Census, first hand interviews, government data and dozens of images”(xi). While this is all well and good, it would have been beneficial, particularly to historians and students of American history, to know precisely what these sources are and where to go to delve further into sources that constitute this work.

While the addition of a bibliography or list of citations

for the sources that complement the 1940 census would have further enhanced the value of this book, *This is Who We Were* would still make a welcome addition to any academic library in support of modern American history research.—*Matthew Laudicina, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Sojourner Truth Library, State University of New York at New Paltz*

World War II: The Essential Reference Guide. By Priscilla Roberts. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012. 411 p. acid free \$89 (ISBN 978-1-61069-101-7). E-book available (978-1-61069-102-4), call for pricing.

The global scale of World War II and the dramatic ways in which it shaped the world we live in today ensure that it will long be a subject of fascination and research. Its very immensity can make the subject daunting to those who have only a basic understanding of what took place. The compilation of entries within *World War II: The Essential Reference Guide* offers a comforting yet thorough overview of the significant people, places, organizations, and events of the war.

This single volume work begins with an essay outlining the course of the war and another essay examining its causes. Alphabetically organized signed entries follow. Each entry consists of a substantial essay devoted to a large-scale topic. The entries conclude with a “see also” list of other potential entries of interest and references to outside sources. Illustrations and maps supplement the text and add another layer of understanding. The volume concludes with primary source documents, an appendix investigating historical dilemmas of the war, a chronology of events, and an index.

The structure of the volume is one of its key strengths. Topics are explored in-depth, so that more than just a brief snippet of information is passed along to the reader. The inclusion of primary source material is a welcome addition, and the information on historical dilemmas will provide assistance to students researching these issues. Attention is given to both the European and Pacific theaters of the war. The focus is on the war’s major players and battles, which is to be expected in such a condensed work.

Because this is not an encyclopedia, this work will be of little assistance in providing quick answers to simple questions about the war. That being said, the text is not designed as such. It is designed to produce a more comprehensive exploration of the most significant aspects of the war. As such, academic libraries looking to supplement more traditional encyclopedic treatments of the war may wish to add this to their collections.—*Sharon E. Reidt, Technical Services Librarian, Marlboro College Library, Marlboro, Vermont*