

retrieval, there are reasons to have some statistical information in hard copy. Static time-delimited information in a portable, easy-to-browse format has its uses. One can use a search engine to find “black women voting 2004” and get more than 900,000 hits; or use the index in a volume like this and know that tables 4.04–4.15 have voter characteristics. There are many fewer pages to search and the search results are often more precise.

As one would expect, the sources for the tables are U.S. governmental agencies and their divisions: Bureau of the Census, Health and Human Services, Department of Justice, Department of Labor, and Department of Education. The 239 tables are divided into eight chapters: demographics and social characteristics; vital statistics and health; education; government and elections; law enforcement and corrections; labor, employment, and unemployment; earnings, income, poverty, and wealth; and special topics. The special topics include such things as social security benefits, and farm and industry information. Most of the information can be found in the densely packed *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (U.S. G.P.O., 1879–present). But library users often prefer to have information about demographic or ethnic groups available in easily accessible and understandable formats.

Each table deals with one issue, comparing black, white, and usually all races nationally on that characteristic. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred and the median family income by state are examples. Some are “black only,” such as the number of elected public officials by type for selected years. The glossary explains the specific meanings of the terms in titles and by agencies, and the index directs users to all tables related to a word or concept.

First published in 1990, this reference work offers a less expensive, analogous continuation to the *Statistical Record of Black America*, last published by Gale Research in 1999. Though not widely held, libraries fielding U.S. demographic, race-based questions should consider this and its companion volumes on Asian and Hispanic citizens from this publisher. Academic libraries serving social work, nursing, criminal justice, sociology, and related majors should find uses for this book.—Linda L. Scarth, *Reference Librarian, Mount Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

British and Irish Poets: A Biographical Dictionary, 449–2006. Comp. by William Stewart. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007. 503p. alkaline \$125 (ISBN 978-0-7864-2891-5).

The author of this ambitious biographical dictionary spanning 1,557 years believes that the “cultural, national, social, economic, religious and military history” (xi) of Britain and Ireland can be fully realized by understanding the countries' poets and their work. There are no poems or verses of poetry in this book; this is not an anthology. The point is to give a literary, historical perspective on the countries' poets through brief, pertinent information about them and to provide lists of significant works to stimulate further interest and study.

The alphabetically arranged main part of the book outlines each poet-author with a separate, one-paragraph biographical entry and a partial list of published works. The poet's name, along with her or his birth and death years (if death has occurred) makes up each heading. The “Sources” section is a bibliography in paragraph form directly following each biographical entry.

The author used a range of resources in researching this book, including high-quality, subscription electronic databases and print resources such as *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (6th ed., Oxford Univ. Pr.). Conversely, I was surprised at the author's use of the British version of Wikipedia as a source because of possible inaccuracies.

The back-of-the-book material in biographical reference books should make it easy to search beyond just the person's name, and *British and Irish Poets* does a strong job in this regard. The index is very thorough, referencing places, periodicals, and terms associated with the poets. “Timeline of British and Irish Poets” and “Poets by Nation” are also helpful. But the bibliography is weak. It is an overall alphabetical compilation of titles from each “Sources” entry in the book. The individual “Sources” sections after each entry are sufficient.

This book does fill a gap in the existing literature. A review of similar works shows no other book with this wide scope of time and focus on the poets. Other books focus on the countries' poetry and more specific periods of time. Two examples are *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse, 1625–1660* by Peter Davidson (Oxford Univ. Pr., 2001) and *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* by Tim Kendall (Oxford Univ. Pr., 2007).

A major challenge with this type of work is avoiding duplication of information already in electronic format. A search on poet Robert Burns in Thomson Gale's Literature Resource Center found a very comparable, slightly longer biography. The lists of published works in this book are not comprehensive for more prolific authors. For example, Gale's Literary Index provided a fuller list of works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning than is provided in this book.

Purchase of this book would have to be justified by curriculum demands in a high school or college. Much of the information in this book is already in literary subscription databases, often more comprehensively stated but in a scattered way; students need to know what they are looking for when searching databases. The book effectively brings together information about one broad topic, encouraging serendipitous browsing and discoveries during the research process and an understanding of the overall history of Britain and Ireland.—Theresa Kelly Darr, *Library Director, Loyola Blakefield, Towson, Maryland*

Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia. Ed. by Michael R. T. Dumper and Bruce E. Stanley. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2007. 439p. alkaline \$95 (ISBN 1-57607-919-8).

Cities with names such as Doha, Gaza, Najaf, Karbala,