The most unique section of this work is the last one: “Primary Sources.” Here are poems, essays, and interviews from some of the subjects of the biographies. Again, these are valuable, but they are limited to a handful of players. There is also a glossary, a chronology, a list of further reading, and a fairly detailed index.

Although The Harlem Renaissance provides useful information, the overall coverage is rather narrow. Many major artists are not included, or are mentioned only in passing. It has the look and feel of a reference work, and lacks excitement. Libraries and media centers might be better served by Laban Carrick Hill’s Harlem Stomp! A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance (Little, Brown, 2003). Hill’s work is more vibrant, with coverage of a wider range of subjects and the inclusion of more graphics, which more closely captures the energy and excitement of the period. Hill’s work, however, is much shorter. For more information on artists of the era, Denise Jordan’s Harlem Renaissance Artists (Heinemann Library, 2003) would be hard to beat. Online databases, such as Compton’s Online, provide much of the same information found in the Hillstrom book, albeit in less detail.

Public libraries and media centers looking to beef up their coverage of this period may consider this a supplemental purchase. —Carla Wilson Buss, Curriculum Materials & Education Librarian, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens


The subtitle of this delightful collection of American idioms makes it clear that this is not just a simple dictionary, but more of a charming etymological examination of popular expressions. For example, the entry “Talk Turkey,” alluded to in the title, goes well beyond simply giving the meaning of the term. Author Rosemarie Ostler also covers the origins of the term, other related and outdated expressions, how the meaning of the term has shifted over time, and the context for how it is used today. What makes this work special is the author’s wide-ranging, learned discussion of these points. With “Talk Turkey,” the origins are actually quite murky and allow for alternate theories to be presented and scrutinized, which is done in a highly readable manner.

Entries are arranged into thirteen thematic chapters to which the terms are assigned according to their usage, not their literal meaning. For example, “Sing Like a Canary” is listed in the “Cops and Robbers” section and not in “Behaving Like An Animal” because it is used as a crime-related phrase, not an animal one. The chapters fall under the sections of The Natural World; Business, Politics, and Society At Large; Culture and Amusements; and The Home Front. Ostler makes a point of citing her sources in her discussions and describes how the advent of the Internet has been a boon for word historians in trying to trace the origins of familiar but distant American expressions. She also emphasizes how our language continues to grow, change, and evolve.

This book covers only around 150 expressions, and that is the only drawback to the work. No matter how fascinating it is and how well written, it is not nearly comprehensive enough to make it an essential purchase for reference collec-