

Reference Books

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Editor

American Civil War. Ed. by Steven E. Woodworth. Gale Library of Daily Life. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 2 vols. \$211 (ISBN 978-1-4144-3009-6).

The Gale Library of Daily Life series comprises a variety of reference books detailing the social and cultural aspects of life during major events in history from around the world. These two volumes on the *American Civil War* are an important addition to this growing series.

Essays are written by a variety of contributors, including professors, park rangers, and historians, and give detailed coverage of the topics selected. The volumes are divided into broad sections: a soldier's life; family and community; popular culture; religion; health and medicine; work and economy; politics; effects of the war; and reconciliation and remembrance. Each section starts off with an essay outlining the basic characteristics of that segment of life and placing it in context with the other topics covered. The sections are then further divided into essays that describe aspects of day-to-day life during the American Civil War on both sides of the conflict. For example, the section discussing a soldier's life includes brief pieces on conscription, drill training, uniforms, women on the battlefield, and spies. Contemporary letters, photographs, illustrations, and advertisements are placed liberally throughout the volumes and provide thoughtful complements to the related entries. Each entry concludes with a bibliography of recent books and articles. The volumes are supplemented by a chronology of the war and a detailed index.

There are, of course, numerous works on the topic of the American Civil War, but, as the editor states, no other Civil War work focuses so completely on components of daily life as these two volumes. David S. Heidler's five-volume set, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (ABC-CLIO, 2000) has a much broader focus and, although articles are included about social life, there is not as much detail. In closer competition is Dorothy Dennen Volo's single-volume *Daily Life in Civil War America* (Greenwood, 1998). Volo's work is denser, with fewer illustrations, and therefore not as easy to read and flip through, nor does it give as much range while maintaining depth as the *American Civil War* does.

These volumes are recommended for academic libraries and, at the affordable price, for high school libraries as well.—*Jamie Seeholzer, First Year Experience Librarian, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio*

American Heroes. Ed. by Salem Press. Magill's Choice. Pasadena, Calif.: Salem, 2008. 3 vols. alkaline \$217 (ISBN 978-1-58765-457-2).

American Villains. Ed. by Salem Press. Magill's Choice. Pasadena, Calif.: Salem, 2008. 2 vols. alkaline \$120 (ISBN 978-1-58765-453-4).

Defining the qualities and achievements that make an individual a hero is highly nuanced process. It is thus a relief that the editors of Salem Press begin *American Heroes* with a publisher's note stating that the set's 209 subjects were chosen because "through their actions [they] have provided inspiration in all walks of society" from times ranging from the American Revolution to the present. Each entrant receives a five- to six-page signed essay that begins with a précis of their vital statistics and their accomplishments. The essay then provides more substantial information on their early life, their accomplishments, and their lasting significance. Phonetic guides to subjects' names are included, along with annotated bibliographies suggesting sources for further information. The final volume contains indexes of subjects by category, ethnicity, and name.

There are few surprises with regard to subjects, and many entrants are familiar names. The editors have made one potentially controversial choice by selecting Louis Farrakhan for inclusion, although their rationale is provided in Farrakhan's entry. It is curious to note that 2008 Democratic presidential contenders Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are included while the Republican nominee, John McCain, is not. And while the format is standard throughout the three volumes, the writing style is not uniform. There are several instances in which the reader is provided with seemingly inconsequential or faulty information. For example, the essay on Walter Reed notes that Reed's mother was his father's first wife, but no information is provided about any additional wives his father may have had, or what, if any, effect his mother's death may have had on Reed as a boy. The essay on Ralph Abernathy states that it was his experiences in the Army that gave him "firsthand knowledge of segregation," which seems curious given that Abernathy spent his childhood in the Deep South. Despite these instances, the information laid out in each essay is usually succinct, and the annotated bibliographies will be of great assistance to students embarking on research projects.

Perhaps because villainy is a quality easier to ascertain, the editors of Salem Press offer no explanation of how the 177 subjects featured in *American Villains* were chosen, save that they were culled from *Great Lives from History: Notorious Lives* (Salem, 2007). According to the publisher's note, the essays "have been updated to reflect the latest on the status of the criminals and other infamous personages covered," though there is no information about how many essays have been updated, nor how much total information has been added.

As with *American Heroes*, the set covers Americans from the Revolution to the present, although these entrants lived