

economic life. It is not comprised of individual articles on certain topics, like an encyclopedia or dictionary, nor is it arranged in chronological order, like an almanac. For example, if one were looking for information on how the Dead Sea Scrolls community played a part in the daily life of first century Jews, one must turn to the index, which then leads to a handful of pages that discuss this issue.

This book does not compare with other reference works. For example, *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (Routledge, 1998) provides several articles, with bibliographies, on different topics, arranged in alphabetical order. Patrons are typically pointed to reference books as a starting point for their research in part because many reference works offer bibliographies that lead to further sources. *Daily Life in the New Testament* does have a bibliography, but it is not organized by subject. Instead, it lists resources arranged by the author's last name, which makes it difficult to find additional sources on a specific topic.

*Daily Life in the New Testament* is recommended for any library's general collection, but not their reference collection. It provides a brief, up-to-date, and scholarly overview of the socio-historical setting of the area where Christianity and Judaism claim their heritage.—Garrett B. Trott, *Reference/Instruction Librarian, Corban College & Graduate School, Salem, Oregon*

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***Disasters, Accidents, and Crises in American History: A Reference Guide to the Nation's Most Catastrophic Events.*** By Ballard C. Campbell. Facts On File Library of American History. New York: Facts On File, 2008. 461p. acid free \$95 (ISBN 978-0-8160-6603-2).

Unpleasant though it may be to contemplate, the brutal reality is that death, destruction, and despair are just as much a part of the American Story as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is made abundantly clear by the 201 main entries, eight essays, and two appendixes of this recent offering. Covering a broad spectrum of both natural incidents (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and so on) and results of human folly (wars, depressions and financial panics, riots, and others), this volume serves as an effective antidote to nostalgia. While not explicitly stated as such, the tacit message is that the "good old days" exist only in our imaginations.

Editor Ballard Campbell, a professor of history at Northeastern University in Portland, Maine, states in the introduction, "The goal of this book is to describe the most destructive, influential, and fascinating of these events" (xii). Between Acts of God and the hand of man, Campbell and his contributors had a wealth of material upon which to draw. Ultimately, it was decided that the selection criteria would consist of the "dramatic, memorable and consequential" (xiii). Thus there is coverage of the well known (Johnstown Flood, Great Chicago Fire) and the obscure (1832 New York City cholera epidemic, a disease that few today are familiar with); the long ago (lost colony of Roanoke, Virginia in 1590) to the seemingly yesterday (2005's Hurricane Katrina).

Clearly and concisely written, each entry is signed by its author. Unfortunately, there is no contributors page, so their individual qualifications cannot be ascertained. Campbell himself appears to have been a good choice to helm this project: the author of a number of works on the American past, he is currently president of the New England Historical Association and a distinguished lecturer for the Organization of American Historians.

A number of interesting features bear mentioning. First, the observant reader will note that the subtitle reads "Reference Guide," rather than "Encyclopedia" or "Companion" or some other synonym for works of this nature. Rather than the standard alphabetical arrangement, the contents are listed chronologically, year by year, in the order of their occurrence. Secondly, the table of contents appears in two formats: one follows the timeline layout of the book itself, while the other is topical, so that like events are grouped together under such headings as "Sensational Crimes" and "Ship and Maritime Accidents." Additionally, each entry carries a shaded "Factbox" that highlights the most important details of the event in question, just the thing for ready reference questions. Lastly, the aforementioned essays throw a spotlight on the alphabet soup of federal government "doomsday" agencies, such as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). One quibble is that the book is poorly illustrated. What few graphics there are appear only in black and white and are generally so small as to be of little use in helping the reader understand the gravity of the situations presented.

A diligent search of the reference literature reveals no other work of this scope within the last ten years. Having said that, Checkmark Books, an imprint of Facts On File, seems to have cornered the market on calamity titles, each with a very specific focus: *Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Cyclones* (2000); *Shipwrecks* (1996); and *Man-Made Catastrophes* (revised ed., 2002) are a few examples. *Disasters* itself would be a fine addition to the American history collections of both public and academic libraries.—Michael F. Bemis, *Assistant Librarian, Washington County Library, Woodbury, MN*

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***The Eighties in America.*** Ed. by Milton Berman. Decades. Pasadena, Calif.: Salem, 2008. 3 vols. alkaline \$364 (ISBN 978-1-58765-419-0).

The purpose of *The Eighties in America* is to explore the "iconic personalities, issues, and moments of the decade" (ix). This three volume collection, edited by Milton Berman, professor emeritus of history at the University of Rochester, is a companion set to *The Sixties in America* (Salem, 1999), *The Fifties in America* (Salem, 2005), and *The Seventies in America* (Salem, 2006). *The Eighties in America* is a comprehensible, thorough, and readable examination of the decade synonymous with Reaganomics, compact discs, Madonna, and MTV.

*The Eighties in America* contains 663 alphabetically arranged articles ranging in length from one to six pages.

## SOURCES

Articles are signed and composed primarily by academics. The text's coverage is from January 1, 1980 to December 31, 1989. The majority of the work is devoted to American events and individuals but also included are sixty-one articles on Canadian topics ("Canadian Caper," "Trudeau, Pierre"). The encyclopedia's articles discuss matters that symbolize the decade ("AIDS," "Reagan, Ronald") and traverse other periods ("Academy Awards," "Globalization"). In addition to the articles, the text is complemented with useful supplementary features including three hundred black-and-white photographs, sixty sidebars, sixteen appendixes, and three indexes.

The major assets of this encyclopedia include its readability, breadth of coverage, and organization. The text effectively covers traditional topics such as popular culture, government, politics, social issues, arts, and literature. In addition, it contains entries related to race ("Minorities in Canada," "Racial discrimination"); women ("Domestic violence," "Mommy track"); and sexual orientation ("Homosexuality and gay rights," "Military ban on homosexuals"). Its coverage of Canadian as well as American topics permits readers to compare and contrast key issues in the two nations. For example, the entry on abortion notes that although it took longer to establish abortion rights in Canada than in the United States, these rights became less curtailed in Canada in comparison to U.S. In addition to the work's comprehensiveness, it is well organized. For instance, each essay begins with a section that briefly defines or describes the topic and concludes with a segment that evaluates the topic's significance. This structure contributes to the reader's overall understanding of the topic. In addition to precise subject and personages indexes, the work contains a very useful photograph index that provides straightforward access to the work's three hundred images.

Other works on the 1980s include Ellen Meltzer and Marc Aronson's *Day by Day, The Eighties* (Facts On File, 1995) and Bob Batchelor and Scott Stoddart's *The 1980s* (Greenwood Press, 2007). *The Eighties in America* is significantly different from both of these other works. Meltzer and Aronson's work is a two volume, daily chronology of key events that occurred in the United States and the world between January 1, 1980 and December 31, 1989. Batchelor and Stoddart's text is a single volume work that features twelve lengthy essays focussing primarily on developments in popular culture in the United States.

Readers will likely find information on some of the topics explored in *The Eighties in America* in other subject reference works (for example, Reagan and his administration, as well as entries related to popular culture, technology, and topics that intersect with other time periods); however, matters explored in this title such as "Cyberpunk literature," "Valley girls," and "Wave, the" may not get extensive, if any, treatment in another encyclopedia. Additionally, this set accumulates a range of topics significant to the 1980s and provides a unique perspective by discussing the importance of these topics within the context of the decade. It is recommended for public and undergraduate libraries.—Michelle Hendley, *Reference Librarian, State University of New York, College at Oneonta*

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*Encyclopedia of African-American Literature*. Ed. by Wilfred Samuels. Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Literature. New York: Facts On File, 2007. 624p. acid free \$75 (ISBN 978-0-8160-5073-4).

The Ethnic American Literature series comprises three encyclopedias covering American Indian, Asian American, and now African-American writers and their works. The series is true to the familiar Facts On File format with entries arranged A-to-Z followed by a short list of relevant works. This volume features established and lesser known writers and pertinent works of African American literature from the eighteenth century to current best selling authors, with an "emphasis on new and emerging writers" (ix). The biographical scope includes writers of fiction and nonfiction, poets, playwrights, musicians, artists, celebrities, educational and political leaders, and other important voices. Author entries are descriptively bibliographical, highlighting their most significant works and influence in historical and cultural context.

Editor Wilfred Samuels, associate professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Utah, has previously published a book on author Toni Morrison and many scholarly articles on African American literature and culture. More than five hundred entries signed by 114 contributors are even in tone, style, and quality. Most entries range in length from a half page to four pages. Allowing cross-referencing, headings for literary works note the name of the author. Appendixes include a bibliography of major works and a bibliography of secondary sources. There is a list of contributors and the index completes the work and includes major entries in bold.

The larger focus of the volume is given to twentieth century voices. However, several prominent authors from the eighteenth century and the turn of the nineteenth century are included, such as Fredrick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Booker T. Washington. Treatment is also given to movements (Black Aesthetic, Black Arts, Negritude), fictional characters (Mammy, Tea Cake, Sethe), publishing outlets (Black World, Callaloo, Third World Press), terms (Black Power, trickster, womanist/womanish), important organizations, and collections and anthologies. A significant number of entries cover canonical works, for example, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. There are also entries on relevant nonliterary topics, for instance, AIDS and Testifying.

Although more selective in scope, many collections may already hold *African-American Writers* (Facts On File, 2004). Reputable for more critical source material and scholarly treatment on the subject is *The Columbia Guide to African American Literature* (Columbia Univ. Pr., 1997) and *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (Oxford Univ. Pr., 2005), as well as *The Handbook of African American Literature* (Univ. of Florida Pr., 2004). For critical bio-bibliographical treatment on more historical writers is *African American Authors, 1745-1945* (Greenwood, 2000) and Macmillan's *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000* (1999). More approachable for beginning researchers