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Tammy J. Eschedor Voelker, Editor

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*African Americans*. Ed. by Carl L. Bankston III. Great Lives from History. Pasadena, Calif.: Salem, 2011. 5 vols. alkaline \$595 (ISBN 978-1-58765-747-4). Online access included with purchase of print.

Dozens of reference books concerning the African American experience have been published in the past several years. Recent titles such as the *Encyclopedia of African American History* (ABC-Clio, 2010) and *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (Macmillan, 2006) are good examples of a comprehensive approach to the subject. As well, there are many up to date biographical works that focus on specific subsets of African Americans such as writers, women, or contemporary figures. This set combines the two and takes a comprehensive biographical view of African Americans spanning the earliest days of the United States to the present. It covers more than twenty fields and endeavors, from arts and entertainment to science and women's rights.

The illustrated encyclopedia consists of nearly 850 informative and well-researched essays spanning over 1400 pages. Each entry is broken into four sections, "Early Life," "Life's Work," "Significance," and "Further Reading." The consistent format for entries is a useful comparative tool for students to analyze and situate the profiled figures with their contemporaries as well as with those from different eras. The set is bolstered by a half volume of appendices and indexes. For example, there is a "Chronological List of Entries," a "Web Site Directory," and a "Mediagraphy."

By and large, the encyclopedia presents the major figures in African American history, but by the editor's own admission it is skewed toward contemporary popular culture and society. This choice meant the sacrifice of essays on many pioneers and other important figures from earlier eras. A glaring example of omission is highlighted by the recent death of sculptor Elizabeth Catlett who did not make the cut. Furthermore, although there are numerous jazz musicians profiled, some unfortunate exclusions are the luminaries Buddy Bolden, James P. Johnson, Art Tatum, and Kid Ory. More current examples of omissions include all of the pioneers of hip hop, such as Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Melle Mel as well as mainstays of the "Golden Age" of hip hop who shaped whole genres within the music such as Chuck D, Ice T, and KRS One, to name a few. The work is left with mostly rap moguls and crossover artists such as MC Hammer, Jay-Z, and Kanye West to represent the long and ever evolving history of the music.

These and other exclusions are regrettable; nonetheless, this biographical encyclopedia is still a good set for undergraduate and high school libraries.—Brent D. Singleton, *Reference Librarian, California State University, San Bernardino, California*