

Reference Books

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Editor

American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History. Ed. by Gina Misiroglu. New York: Sharpe Reference, 2009. 3 vols. alkaline \$299 (ISBN 978-07656-8060-0).

American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History explores individuals, groups, and ideologies that “stand outside the mainstream and that actively or implicitly, [seek] to change the status quo” (xxxii). This three-volume set presents a broad and engaging examination of countercultures and their effect on American society.

The encyclopedia is extensive in its coverage. It contains more than five hundred well written, alphabetically arranged articles. Articles are signed and most contributors are scholars. Entries contain cross-references and a list of further readings. The encyclopedia investigates a wide time period extending from the arrival of the Puritans to the present day. In addition to its expansive coverage of time, the encyclopedia includes a variety of subjects, such as personalities (“Nader, Ralph”); groups (“Baby Boomers”); places (“Greenwich Village, New York City”); art, literature, and music (“Warhol, Andy,” “*Catcher in the Rye*,” “Snoop Dogg”); media and publications (“Film, Cult,” “MAD”); recreation (“Biker Culture”); ideologies (“Bohemianism”); and religious, political, and social factions (“Quakers,” “Green Party,” “White Supremacists”). The articles clearly state the association between the subject under discussion and countercultures. For example, the article on Frank Zappa notes that the musician appealed to his fans to question “the political and ideological machinations of the status quo” (777). Additionally, the text discusses international countercultural influences on the United States (“Volkswagen Beetle”). Furthermore, countercultures explored span a wide ideological spectrum (“Communism,” “McCarthyism,” “Fundamentalism, Christian,” “Unitarianism”). Finally, there are some entries that, at first glance, may appear not to belong in an encyclopedia of this nature (“Advertising,” “Democratic Party”); however, the relationship of these topics to countercultures is made evident. For example, countercultures use “subvertising” to oppose the advertising industry’s role in maintaining the status quo (12).

In addition to the main text, the encyclopedia contains useful supplementary features. For example, an introductory essay clearly defines and characterizes countercultures. Moreover, a bibliography and annotated filmography guide users to other resources. Another helpful tool is the collection of primary source documents. Additionally, black-and-white photographs complement the text. Finally, each volume contains a common index.

Another volume that examines nonmainstream groups and individuals is Neil A. Hamilton’s *Rebels and Renegades: A Chronology of Social and Political Dissent in the United States* (Routledge, 2002). In *Rebels and Renegades*, Hamilton examines radicals, extremists, and moderate reformers in 180 articles. Examples of topics covered in Hamilton’s work include civil rights campaigners, women’s rights activists, abolitionists, white supremacists, anarchists, cults, and militia groups, all of which are covered in *American Countercultures*. On the other hand, the focus of Hamilton’s single-volume title is narrower than *American Countercultures*, which extends its coverage beyond social, religious, and political nonconformists. Additionally, *Rebels and Renegades* contains significantly fewer articles than *American Countercultures*.

American Countercultures and *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture* (Routledge, 2001) share some similar content. Both encyclopedias have entries on Generation X, marijuana, pornography, *Doonsbury*, and the Internet, among others; however, these works also have significant differences. For instance, the goal of *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture* is to encompass all facets of American culture. Additionally, this encyclopedia contains a considerably greater number of articles (twelve hundred) than *American Countercultures*. Furthermore, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture* contains a greater coverage of topics related to race and ethnicity, sports, architecture, and science and technology. Finally, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture* explores a shorter time frame than *American Countercultures*.

American Countercultures is an accessible text that shows how dissidents have influenced U.S. society. It complements other works on American culture and nonmainstream groups and is recommended for public and undergraduate libraries.—Michelle Hendley, *Reference Librarian, State University of New York, College at Oneonta*

Civil Disobedience: An Encyclopedic History of Dissidence in the United States. By Mary Ellen Snodgrass. Armonk, New York: Sharpe Reference, 2009. 2 vols. \$199 (ISBN 978-0-7656-8127-0).

American history has been marked by countless acts of protest and dissent as individuals and groups struggled to define the meanings of liberty and freedom. Regardless of the political viewpoint being asserted, civil disobedience, or the willful refusal to obey the law as a form of peaceful protest, has been an important tactic employed in the pursuit of freedom, justice, and equality. Author Mary Ellen Snodgrass, who has written a number of reference works, describes the people, groups, events, movements, and ideas that constitute the history of civil disobedience and dissidence in the United States. The primary strength of this work is that it brings together in one source entries on topics that would otherwise have to be located in a variety of reference works such as general encyclopedias, biographical sources, and specialized reference works on topics such as slavery, the civil rights movement, religion, and women’s suffrage, to name a few.

Volume 1 comprises encyclopedic entries arranged al-

phabetically. Entries range in length from a few paragraphs to several pages, and many include important cross-references and further reading citations. The range of topics included is good; however, some of the entries could have been shortened to allow for additions. For example, inclusion of an entry for Mohandas Gandhi covering his use of nonviolent resistance and his influence on subsequent protest movements would have been a great addition, since Gandhian tactics and influences are mentioned in several entries. Also included in some entries are lists of persons involved in specific events or movements. These lists are sometimes of questionable use, and it's often unclear whether or not the lists of persons involved in various acts or events is comprehensive or, as is more likely the case, a sampling of individuals.

Volume 2 is composed entirely of supplementary material, such as a chronology of historical acts of conscience and a glossary of technical terms related to civil disobedience. The glossary is particularly important given that many of these terms are used throughout the encyclopedia. I would have preferred to see it placed at the beginning or end of volume 1, since it is difficult to locate in the midst of the supplements, and I found myself wanting to refer to it on several occasions. Also included in volume 2 are charts of acts of civil disobedience on record sorted by the target of the act (for example, anti-abortion laws) and also by geographical location in which these acts occurred. The supplementary material is rounded out by a highly selective group of relevant documents (for example, "John Brown's Final Speech"), a helpful bibliography that is divided by primary and secondary sources, and a comprehensive index.

This source would be most suitable for collegiate and large public or research library collections. Effective use at the high school level is questionable because of the density and length of many articles, the lack of color illustrations, and the sophisticated vocabulary used. For example, the encyclopedia's entry for "civil disobedience" begins with the following: "Ingrained in lovers of democracy is a gut-level defiance of cumbersome, dehumanizing, or unconscionable laws, a concept that American philosopher Henry David Thoreau described in 1849 as 'civil disobedience'" (1:65). I had to reread this statement a couple of times in order to ascertain a definition, and it seems a more straightforward statement might better begin what could be considered the most important entry in this work. For libraries looking for a comprehensive source on topics related to American protest, dissidence, and civil disobedience, this set will make a good addition to their reference collections.—*Cara Gilgenbach, Head, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University Libraries, Kent, Ohio*

Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction: The Essential Reference to the Great Works and Writers of Adventure Fiction. By Don D'Amassa. Facts On File Library of World Literature. New York: Facts On File, 2009. 364p. acid free \$75 (ISBN 978-0-8160-7573-7).

D'Amassa's latest addition to the Facts On File Literary Movements series joins his *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and *Encyclopedia of Fantasy and Horror Fiction*.

The introduction describes adventure fiction as fast-paced stories "where the adventurous element is of primary importance" (vii). Thus, although many stories contain an element of adventure, included here are only those tales in which the adventure is an overarching feature. This directive is fairly subjective, although the author attempts to include titles from overlapping genres and authors from antiquity to present day.

Entries include novels and short stories, from classics like *The Odyssey* to classic American texts such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to the more modern *The Da Vinci Code*, to Carl Stephenson's short story *Leiningen versus the Ants*. The entries primarily concentrate on novels and short stories, although some authors and a tiny number of adventurous protagonists (James Bond, The Spider, The Shadow) receive coverage. Adaptations are mentioned when applicable; the entry for "First Blood," the first of the Rambo series, for example, also includes a comparison of the novel to the cinematic version.

Typical story entries are two to three pages in length, providing nominal information about the author and a concise plot summary followed by a brief analysis of author and plot, usually including a comparison to other stories within the genre. Author and thematic entries contain brief overviews of works. Although more detailed than a reader's guide such as Michael B. Gannon's *Blood, Bedlam, Bullets, and Badguys* (Libraries Unlimited, 2004), the *Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction* is limited by its brevity. In comparison, entries in Magill's various Masterplots series (Salem), although similar in format, are superior to the *Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction's* for brief summary and critical analysis; Masterplots entries contain more detailed analysis, themes, and bibliographic references and are a stronger reference tool.

The *Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction* would better serve users if the list of entries was a more traditional table of contents, including page numbers for speedier navigation. Its "Bibliography of Adventure Fiction" details only the adventure stories of the authors included in the book; it is by no means a comprehensive list and does not claim to be so. Its "Selected Bibliography of Secondary Sources" is also less than comprehensive, with its sixteen entries seeming merely an afterthought and not a memorable feature, although the index enables strong cross-referencing.

This work is suitable for school, public, and lower-level undergraduate library populations to provide a quick summary and an introduction to critical analysis; purchase only if Masterplots is out of reach.—*Amy F. Fyn, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio*

Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century. Ed. by Paul Finkelman. New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2009. 5 vols. alkaline \$495 (ISBN 978-0-19-516779-5).

The *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century* takes up the history of African Americans from where its three-