
Jim Crow: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic is essentially an abridged edition of the editors’ earlier two-volume The Jim Crow Encyclopedia published by Greenwood Press in 2008. The 275 entries in the latter edition have been pared down to 104 “geared toward the needs of high school students” and selected to “focus on the most important people, events, and institutions involved in the creation, maintenance, and eventual dismembering of Jim Crow” (xv).

The subtitle “American Mosaic” suggests more than the abridgment delivers. Coverage of “the American mosaic” is more fully treated in the original Jim Crow Encyclopedia which, for example, includes articles such as “Asian Americans,” “Japanese Internment,” “Bureau of Indian Affairs,” “Native Americans,” “Hispanics/Latinos,” and “Jews in the South,” all absent from Jim Crow: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic. Such attention as the abridgment pays to “the American mosaic” is mostly subsumed under broader categories such as “Eugenics,” reprinted from the earlier edition, and in overview articles addressing Jim Crow in states in which segregation was the norm and which included a significant population of other minorities as for example Native Americans in North Carolina and Mexicans in Texas.

Random spot checking indicates that the abridged edition by and large reprints the original articles as published in 2008. Save for minor differences here noted these checked articles are identical: “Confederate Flag,” “Health Care,” “Nadir of the Negro” (One additional, not current, citation for “Further Reading” is in the abridged edition), “Red Summer,” and “Wells-Barnett, Ida B.” (Wells-Barnett’s inclusive dates are in the 2008 article’s title and a black and white portrait reproduction is in the abridged version).

Jim Crow: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic includes more black and white illustrations than does its predecessor and has a short section not found in the latter of five primary source documents reprinted in whole or in part. Oddly, not numbered among this section of primary source documents is the excerpt from Berea College v. Kentucky, 1908, pp. 1–3, 10–11 which is included in the “Berea College v. Kentucky” article in the Jim Crow Encyclopedia but not in the abridged edition’s otherwise identical entry. Minor rewriting in the “Introduction” and an updating of websites in the concluding “Selected Bibliography” further distinguish Jim Crow: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic from the Jim Crow Encyclopedia.

Although The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights: from Emancipation to the Twenty-First Century 2 vols. (Greenwood, 2003), itself a revised and expanded version of the earlier Encyclopedia of African-American Civil Rights (Greenwood, 1992), shares many of the same people, events, and organizations among its 900 entries and 120 primary source documents its focus is on the actions taken to achieve civil rights for African Americans. In contrast, both editions of the Jim Crow encyclopedias have as their central purpose a historical introduction to the pernicious system of discriminatory laws created to segregate and disenfranchise African Americans. Especially useful in this regard are historical summary articles such as, for example, these essays (identical in both editions): “Black Codes,” “Disenfranchisement,” “Lynching,” “Prisons,” and “Sundown Towns.” These summaries complement The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights by giving students the historical context for the centuries-long civil rights struggle.

Libraries that already own The Jim Crow Encyclopedia need not acquire Jim Crow: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic. Libraries that own neither encyclopedia should consider whether or not the abridged edition is sufficient to meet their needs while weighing the greater cost of the original 2-volume work that remains in print.—Sally Moffitt, Bibliographer and Reference Librarian for Anthropology, History, Philosophy, Political Science; Africana Studies, Asian Studies, Judaic Studies, Latin American Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Cohen Library Enrichment Collection Langsam Library, University of Cincinnati, Ohio


Over forty years ago, Alfred Crosby published The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural consequences of 1492 (ABC-CLio, 1973), dissecting the many biologic and economic changes resulting from Christopher Columbus’s voyages to America. Dr. Cumo has built on this and created this quick reference work, which adds to and updates information on plants, animals and diseases which moved from the Old World to the New or vice versa. The scope of the volume also incorporates more modern “Columbian exchange” occurrences, such as the Irish Potato Famine and the Slave Trade and expands to discuss worldwide examples. The alphabetical arrangement and index provide easy access to information in 106 well written articles. Articles follow a standard format, divided into several sections. One section discusses the origins of the disease, insect or food, either Old or New World, and summarizes the documented appearance of the item in literature or letters. For each disease, an explanatory paragraph on its symptoms, dissemination, vaccines and outcomes furnishes a brief background and overview. Another section covers the Columbian Exchange(s), with such data as what group was first to carry it to the other World; this also includes alternative, often competing, theories of the movement, when multiple scenarios have been proposed over the years. In addition, some “old legends” and misinformation are touched on and corrected.