
The Beatles were indisputably towering figures in twentieth-century popular culture. Consequently, much has been written about the lives, work, and influence of the Fab Four. The title under discussion here is a unique entry into that body of literature. The Beatles Encyclopedia: Everything Fab Four is a condensed (and more affordable) version of a two-volume hardcover encyclopedia with the same title. While the larger edition aims to be a comprehensive resource, the condensed version aims instead to hit the highlights.

While numerous other titles may offer much of the same information, The Beatles Encyclopedia: Everything Fab Four is unique primarily due to its reference book format. The title provides the reader with a wealth of in-depth Beatles history one would expect from a narrative account, but conveniently arranges that information in easy-to-access alphabetical entries. The entries dealing with specific compositions (which comprise the bulk of the volume) identify the author(s) of the song, provide details about the origins of the song, the recording sessions, the performers and their instruments, and the album(s) on which the song appeared. Entries devoted to albums provide similar information as well as cover art and chart performance. Additionally, readers will find biographical information on not only the individual Beatles, but also spouses, relatives, collaborators, and producers. Notable events in Beatles history, such as the Ed Sullivan Show performance and the Shea Stadium and Rooftop concerts, are also included. Other helpful features are a chronology and discography.

The entries are written in an accessible style and provide details ranging from the technical aspects of recording certain songs to excerpts from interviews in which individual Beatles provide their own accounts of the song writing and recording process. The result is a collection of vivid accounts of the band members and their creative processes.

In his preface, author Kenneth Womack states that the title is aimed at "readers of all levels, from the general public and students at the secondary and postsecondary ranks through advanced scholars and dyed-in-the-wool Beatlemaniacs" (xv). The Beatles Encyclopedia: Everything Fab Four is indeed suitable for such a diverse audience. It is therefore recommended for public, high school, and academic libraries. If your budget allows, you may want to consider purchasing the expanded two-volume edition, which also provides entries on the band members’ post-breakup solo efforts.—Edward Whatley, Instruction and Research Services Librarian, Georgia College and State University, Milledgeville, Georgia


This two-volume set organizes an array of chronic diseases and disorders into 323 concise entries, clearly described in lay language. Topics related to prevention, therapies, and societal factors such as poverty and health disparities are also included. Entries are mostly two to three pages long and are divided into categories such as “Overview,” “Symptoms,” “Causes and Risk Factors,” “Diagnosis,” “Prevention,” “Prognosis and Outcomes,” and “Future.” Entries are signed and contributor credentials are provided. Many authors are educators or writers experienced in communicating health information to the general public; some are medical professionals. “Further reading” lists at the end of each entry reference books and articles, many of which are freely available online. There is also a “Recommended Resources” section listing numerous books and websites for researchers seeking reputable sources that are relatively free of medical terminology and scholarly language.

One notable shortcoming of Chronic Diseases: An Encyclopedia is its complete lack of photographs, drawings, or other illustrations. While statistical data in print resources is of limited use since it quickly becomes outdated, some entries in this encyclopedia would have benefited greatly from a few illustrative charts. For example, the articles entitled “Men’s Health” and “Women’s Health” would be far more useful if they included comparative data tables showing readers the impact of certain chronic diseases across these populations. Such enhanced content would help set this work apart from free online resources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (cdc.gov) and the US National Library of Medicine’s MedlinePlus database (medlineplus.gov), which are also designed with non-professional users in mind.

While there are more comprehensive medical encyclopedias, such as Magill’s Medical Guide (Grey House, 2014) and The Gale Encyclopedia of Nursing and Allied Health (2013), there is no other print resource for non-professionals focusing exclusively on chronic illness and related issues. Chronic Diseases is intuitively organized and clearly written, so users looking for a straightforward source to help them untangle this complex phenomenon will likely appreciate its brevity.
Therefore, this set is recommended for general collections in public, community college, and college libraries.—Kathryn Fisher, Head of Patron Services and Instruction, Ursuline College, Pepper Pike, Ohio


The American criminal justice system affects people in all walks of life, from street crime to domestic violence to white collar crime. This two-volume set explores not only landmark cases and laws, but also covers prominent figures, policies, and scandals. Further, the set includes entries that explain broader issues such as “Biological Explanations for Crime” and “Sociological Explanations of Crime.”

An informative preface and comprehensive introduction provide a good foundation for the criminal justice novice. The introduction gives an overview of how crime data is collected and analyzed, how the public learns about crime, and the complicated ways in which society tries to understand victims, offenders, and crimes themselves. Underpinning these overviews are the complicated sociological issues that have shaped criminal justice over decades.

Editor Laura L. Finley, who also authored many of the entries in the volumes, has edited other timely encyclopedias on related criminal justice issues covered in this work, including school violence, juvenile crime, and domestic abuse. Her expertise is well applied here.

The 185 entries vary in length; the shortest entries run at least one page or more, and longer entries run several pages, incorporating a great deal of context. For example, “Disabilities and Crime” occupies approximately seven pages, and covers classifications, victims, criminality, police and courts, jails and prisons, the death penalty, and reform efforts as they apply to the topic. The entries are organized alphabetically and feature cross-references to related entries and recommendations for further reading. Black and white photographs appear in a fair number of entries, including both newsworthy and scene-setting images. In addition to a comprehensive index, the second volume includes an appendix of recommended resources sorted by type, including an annotated list of documentaries, books released after 2005, journals of interest, and criminal justice-oriented national organizations.

Though the encyclopedia is commendable for its commitment to timeliness, recent developments have already rendered a few entries out of date. For example, at the close of his administration, President Barack Obama pardoned Chelsea Manning and Oscar Lopez Rivera, who each have entries. This is not a major fault of the work; however, the entry for “Lopez Rivera” specifically cites activists on his behalf putting the odds he would be pardoned by President Obama at 1 in 5,000. The activists also noted that he had a 1 in 100 chance of being pardoned by President Bill Clinton, but Lopez Rivera declined a conditional offer of clemency in 1999 (315).

Crime and Punishment in America is not a duplication of Levinson’s Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment (Sage, 2007) or similar larger criminal justice reference works, given its American criminal justice context. The coverage of contemporary issues including asset forfeiture, cyberbullying, and police body cameras, as well as legal battles like the George Zimmerman trial, Kids for Cash, and United States v. Jones make the encyclopedia a timely stand-alone work, or a supplement to larger, more globally focused criminal justice encyclopedias.

The work avoids professional jargon and provides definitions and important context for key figures, laws, policies, and landmark cases. Due to its comprehensive coverage of current, complex crime and punishment topics, this set would be beneficial to both lower- and upper-division students seeking basic yet authoritative information in context as a starting point for further research. Recommended for college libraries that support criminal justice programs.—Emily Lauren Mross, Business and Public Administration Librarian, Penn State Harrisburg, Middletown, Pennsylvania


Africa has experienced more than its fair share of warfare and general strife during the past half century. Many of these struggles have their roots in colonialism, which inspired the ethnic division, military tactics, and brutality that characterized subsequent conflicts, even those occurring long after the colonial regimes caved to African independence movements. This encyclopedia covers the major colonial-era wars between Africans and Europeans and/or their allies and proxies, as well as the occasional fight among Europeans. While there are many works concerning colonialism, conflict, and specific wars in Africa, this work is unique in being a reference work dedicated solely to the colonial conflicts.

The set encompasses conflicts in North, South, East, West, and Central Africa during the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, although for obvious historical reasons based on the Scramble for Africa, the mid- to late nineteenth century encompasses the bulk of the book. Southern Africa appears to have the widest coverage in number of conflicts and across the longest stretches of time. The great nineteenth-century colonial powers, England and France, as well as lesser players such as Germany, Belgium, Italy, and more are covered, as are early wars conducted by the Dutch and Portuguese.

There are over 360 entries comprising the conflicts, major figures, events, combatants, and other relevant topics related to the subject. Other features include a good index, including a list of conflicts by colonial power and African country or territory, which complements the list of entries.