

Against the Grain

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From the Reference Desk

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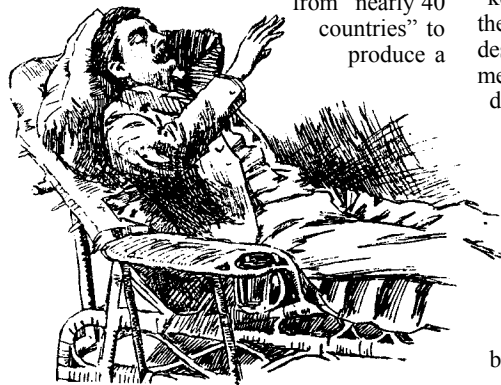


From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Adlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

There has been a surprising gap in the reference literature when it comes to political science. Although, there are numerous titles covering specific aspects of the field, what has been lacking is a comprehensive and thorough treatment of the discipline as a whole. The *Encyclopedia of Political Science* (2011, 978-1933116440, \$800), published by **CQ Press** with the assistance of the **American Political Science Association**, attempts to fill that void.

Editor-in-Chief **George Thomas Kurian** and his team have assembled scholars from “nearly 40 countries” to produce a



five-volume set containing more than 1500 entries. While the articles are listed in a basic alphabetical arrangement, a great deal of thought has gone into the foundation and the structure of this encyclopedia. In his preface, **Kurian** notes that there are six “classes” of articles starting with what he terms “core articles.” These are wide-ranging and “define a field or major analytical concern.” There are also “breakout” articles that are derivative of the core entries and explore specific elements of a field or major analytical concern. Added to these are long interpretive essays that deal with individual “key issues, concepts, and ideas...” and then there are those entries that are shorter, more descriptive, and less theoretical with no commentary. There are also entries that offer brief definitions of terms and concepts, and finally there are entries that offer solid biographical sketches of some 300 people who have had a major influence on the discipline. This attention to article typology results in a set that includes articles on topics as broad as political economy, foreign policy, and political ideologies as well as those that focus on microeconomics, gunboat diplomacy, and Peronism. There are also brief entries defining political terms ranging

from bandwagoning to open government and from the spoils system to parametric statistical models. An examination of the Thematic Table of Contents, which clusters topics within broad topics, shows the full results of this multi-layered approach. It also reflects the international flavor of the entries by pointing to numerous articles on European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Asian politics. This Topical Table of Contents, an alphabetical list of all entries, and a general index are reprinted in each volume. The set is also informed by recent and established scholarship from within political science and its related disciplines. **Kurian** notes in his preface that “each entry of more than five hundred words has a bibliography that includes journal articles.” The length of each bibliography is appropriate to the article contents and, in some cases, goes above and beyond what one might expect. Although some of the articles contain jargon specific to the discipline, the writing is accessible and reader-friendly.

The *Encyclopedia of Political Science* provides researchers with a thorough and comprehensive resource that reflects the key concerns and interests of the discipline. **Mr. Kurian**,

continued on page 50

From the Reference Desk
from page 49

along with his team of editors and contributors, has produced the type high-quality reference set long associated with **CQ Press**. While faculty, undergraduate majors, and graduates students will find this reference of particular value, lay readers will also benefit from the articles discussing key concepts and themes. The set is listed at \$800 which appears pricey, but it can be purchased via **Amazon** for \$592.49. Academic libraries supporting political science curriculums should have this title on their short list. This title is also available electronically, and pricing information is available at: <http://www.cqpress.com/product/Encyclopedia-of-Political-Science.html>.

(Interestingly, **Sage** is also planning an eight-volume set entitled the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* for a September 2011 release, tentatively priced at \$990. It looks like political science scholars will soon have an embarrassment of riches.)

On the other hand, reference works on African American history already seem plentiful, so one might wonder about the need for another. However, **ABC-Clio's** new *Encyclopedia of African American History* (2010, 978-1851097692, \$295) attempts to fill the possible need for a moderately-priced introductory reference work that could have broad appeal to high school and public libraries as well as some academic libraries.

Editors **Leslie M. Alexander** and **Walter C. Rucker** have chosen to organize the set in four major sections with each section introduced by a 5,000-word essay that serves as a foundation to the following articles. The four sections include Atlantic African, American and European Backgrounds to Contact, Commerce, and Enslavement; Culture, Identity, and Community; Political Activity and Resistance to Oppression; and Political Activity, Migration, and Urbanization. Articles are arranged alphabetically within each section and total 650 essays throughout the set. The results are entries that range from the *Atlantic Slave Trade* and **Nat Turner** to *Jet Magazine* and **Oprah Winfrey** as well as those dealing with *Abolition* and the *Underground Railroad* to those discussing *Soul Food* and *Kwanzaa*. A reading of some of the essays reveals that one of the editor's stated goals has been met. They have produced entries that are "clear, uncomplicated, and decisive" as well as "jargon-free" and

"devoid of specialized and technical language." All of the articles have brief bibliographies of four to seven citations. As you might expect, finding aids becomes more essential when a set is divided into sections like this. In keeping with this, the editors include a list of each article found under the four section headings at the beginning of each volume. They also provide a Categorized Index for each section, which is followed by a general alphabetical index for the entire set in the final volume. However, "see references" seem confined to related articles within the sections, and there is apparently no linking of articles from section to section in the general index either. This works generally but poses problems in linking related articles section to section. All three volumes are illustrated with crisp black and white photos as well as period etchings.

The *Encyclopedia of African American History* is not meant to replace classics in the field like **Oxford University Press'** *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century* (2009, 978-0195167795, \$625) and its companion the *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1619-1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass* (2006, 978-0195167771, \$495). However, this set provides valuable scholarly content at an affordable price and should find its way into high school libraries as well as public libraries, where it might have special appeal for branch collections. It could also be of interest to academic libraries looking for an updated supplement to similar but more comprehensive works like **Macmillan's** *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (2005, 978-0028658162, \$903) as well as those libraries wanting this type of encyclopedia in circulation. It is also available as an eBook, and you can call 800-368-6868 ext. 4 for pricing or by email: <suborder@abc-clio.com>.

Greenwood has published a specialized reference title that might be even more suitable for circulating collections. *Of the People, by the People, for the People: A Documentary Record of Voting Rights and Electoral Reform* (2010, 978-0-31338-551-3, \$180) is, as the subtitle indicates, a collection of primary sources that relate to voting rights and electoral reform. But more precisely, it is a collection of excerpts from relevant primary sources arranged chronologically with accompanying analysis that enables readers to trace the ongoing history of this essential aspect of our democracy.

The set consists of two volumes with the first covering the "foundations of modern franchise 1660-1959" and the second dealing with the subsequent electoral reform and extension of voting rights to African Americans and other minorities. The volumes are themselves further divided by chronological sections. The first volume covers the Colonial Period 1660-1775; Fledgling Democracy 1776-1828; Democracy Challenged 1829-1900 and Democracy Maturing 1900-1959. Volume II contains documents under headings like: the 1960s: Confirming the Franchise; 1970-1999: Refining the Franchise; 2000-2003 Reconsidering the Franchise; and 2004-2009: The Consequences of Reconsidering the Franchise. Given this arrangement, readers can start by tracing the early development of voting "qualifications" starting with state statutes like those in Connecticut, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania to their and other states' constitutions and then through the Articles of Confederation and U.S. Constitution. Further examination of the timeline embodied in these volumes indicates that in these early stages of our history (until the Civil War) most of the developments are seen in state documents. It is only after the Civil War that the Federal government dominates the discussion through constitutional amendments, decisions of the Supreme Court, and legislation passed by Congress.

While exploring the chronological arrangement of these two volumes gives readers a sense of the history, it requires examining the documents themselves and their accompanying analysis to trace the complicated twists and turns of this evolution and get the full story. This is not a straightforward progression. Federal action, whether through the courts or legislation, often reinforces restrictions and validates voting requirements. It is with the advent of the Warren Court in the turbulent 1960s where the focus shifts from discussions of voter qualifications to voting rights. The set provides support for this overview by reprinting the relevant text of specific documents, the date they were enacted or decided, their significance, and a very useful analysis placing them in context. The text is enhanced by selected tables, charts, and pictures, and there are sidebars providing supplemental information. In addition, there are useful finding aids including a general index and a Reader's Guide to Documents and Sidebars by category ranging from Black suffrage to Disputed Elections to Registration Requirements.

Of the People, by the People, for the People is focused on a fairly specific area of study but it is one that is essential for full understanding of American democracy and thus has application for students of both American history as well as politics. It also has obvious relevance for the study of election law and minority rights. The information and analysis this set provides is unique. It is a reference work that will find a welcome on both reference and circulation shelves in many academic libraries. It is also available as an eBook, and you can call 800-368-6868 ext. 4 for pricing or contact the publisher by email: <suborder@abc-clio.com>.

Op Ed
from page 48

to the whole campus. It is hard to believe that libraries are generating that value if they are not even able to appear in a prominent place on their universities' websites. The library was once the cornerstone of the university. If web pages are any indication, they now seem

to be about as important as the student health center and the campus parking office in the minds of their administrations. This isn't a death knell for libraries, but it certainly isn't anything positive. The canary in the coal mine dies if there's no air left in the environment. It also dies if no one remembers to feed it. I don't think the library canary is dead by any means, but it looks much thinner to me than is healthy. 🐦