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Prisons and Prison Systems: A Global Encyclopedia (Review)

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Writing a dictionary surely ranks as one of the most difficult jobs in the world. It's both enormous (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* sports 165,000 entries, for example, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* more than 500,000) and complex. Language ebbs and flows as words are born, mutate, and die, and keen judgment calls are necessary to determine which words deserve definition or are likely to land in history's dustbin. No wonder dictionary publishers maintain extensive staffs and even more extensive files to measure and direct the flow of that mighty river, language. Lexical expertise clearly amounts to more than just one man's opinion.

So who died and made Samuel Johnson king?

Seriously, while the scientific study and documentation of language obviously demands scholarly training, it is still true that what makes a word a word often comes down to a judgment call—somewhere along the line someone has a gut feeling. How else do we account for *brain freeze*? Individuals—even flawed, eccentric individuals—can make meaningful contributions to our dictionaries (see Simon Winchester's *The Professor and the Madman*, 1998). And nowhere has the citizen-scholar ideal been embraced quite so voraciously as on the World Wide Web: where there's a will, there's a wiki. (*Wiki*, incidentally, is not defined in the eleventh edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.)

As a warm-up for an upcoming "Reference on the Web" in which Mary Ellen Quinn and I will debate the pros and cons of Wikipedia, I decided to explore Wiktionary. This discussion will be limited to the merits of contributor-created "serious" dictionaries, not dictionaries of slang (for

a discussion of slang sites, see "Reference on the Web: Cut Me Some Slang," BKL S 15 03). Ironically, Merriam-Webster gets into the wiki-slang game itself with Merriam-Webster's Open Dictionary [<http://www3.merriam-webster.com/opendictionary/>], in which users log silly words like *knoobular* ("one who does or says something that is ridiculous or dopey") and *awfulize* ("to assume [consider] the worst possible outcome to a set of events"). (Site last visited January 26, 2006.)

Wiktionary. [<http://en.wiktionary.org/>].

Talk about speed. Wiktionary entered the world on December 12, 2002, and currently has 115,490 entries in various states

of completion. (By contrast, poor Sam Johnson, toiling alone, compiled 42,773 words in 9 years for his *Dictionary of the English Language*—still prodigious—and Noah Webster spent 27 years compiling the 70,000 words in his *American Dictionary of the English Language*.)

That's not 115,490 definitions of English words, however; Wiktionary's goal is something larger—"to describe all words of all languages, with definitions and descriptions in English." So, alphabetical lists include plenty of foreign words, and alphabetical sorting is joined by several unusual characters as well. Appendixes also sort words into interesting and useful categories (Countries of the World, Declensions, Fictional Characters, Suffixes, and so forth).

But a glance at the word lists reveals that Wiktionary isn't simply a free, casual-Friday version of the dictionary on your desk. Every alphabetical list starts with a very lengthy list of (often obscure) acronyms and initialisms (*DPOAHC*—"Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care"—anyone?). Foreign terms can be useful, but when mixed in with English words, they seem like so much clutter (the Dutch word *lagen* is the plural of *laag*, or *layer* in English). And some words or phrases that are included (*Ocarina of Time*, "The musical instrument that Link of the *Legend of Zelda* video game franchise used in the video game *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* to travel through time") remind us why we love stern and opinionated editors.

On the other hand, the definition of the word *terrorist* is clear and logical ("1. One who governs by terrorism or intimidation. . . . 2. Anyone who uses terror as a weapon in a political struggle") and includes hyperlinked etymology ("French *terroriste*. . . . First used by Edmund Burke"), 27 translations, 4 related terms (*terror*, *terrorize*, *terroristic*, *eco-terrorist*), and a helpful usage note ("The use of the label 'terrorist' is often controversial or subjective, since one person's terrorist may be another's *freedom fighter*, and vice versa").

By contrast, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* requires that users find the word *terrorist* under the entry for *terrorism*, then backtrack to the fourth definition of *terror* ("violent or destructive acts [as bombing] committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands").

Is there a place for Wiktionary? Undoubtedly. The industry and enthusiasm of its many creators are proof that there's a market. And it's wonderful to have another strong source to use when searching the odd terms that pop up in today's fast-changing world and the online environment. But as with so many Web sources (including this column), it's best used by sophisticated users in conjunction with more reputable sources.

authors are included in other biographical reference works. Gale's *Contemporary Authors* database has entries for 43 of the 74 authors in *Irish Women Writers*. *Contemporary Authors* provides the basic biographical information, a bibliography of works, and a short sidelights section that is usually written by the author and focuses on the personal aspects of her writing. The information in *Irish Women Writers* is more analytical and geared to scholars, researchers, and college students. Because of its in-depth discussions of major themes in each writer's work, and because many of the women who are treated are not included in other reference works available in the U.S.,

Irish Women Writers is strongly recommended for all college and university libraries and for large public libraries with sizable literature collections. —Merle Jacob

Prisons and Prison Systems: A Global Encyclopedia. Ed. by Michael P. Roth. 2005. 392p. index. Greenwood, \$75 (0-313-32856-0). 365.

Prison, also known at different times and in different countries as *band house*, *bate sohar*, *big house*, *big pasture*, *bit kili*, *calaboose*, *kala-bus*, and *quod*, plays a significant role in the society and history of a nation. This global encyclopedia provides a glimpse into important

prisons, prison reformers, famous prisoners, prison architecture, prisoner culture, and more. According to editor Roth, "this book is dedicated to offering the most current research available on all the prison systems in the world, past and present." Because of the limitations inherent in a one-volume encyclopedia, larger ethical issues such as the death penalty were purposely excluded, as were war-related prisons such as POW camps, concentration camps, and internment camps.

Arrangement is alphabetical. Entries range in size from a few sentences to a few pages and include sources consulted. The material is well written and easy to digest. A substantial

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number of the more than 450 entries cover individual countries and their prison systems; these are complemented by more specific entries, such as *Gulag* and *Midnight Express*.

Introductory material includes an alphabetical list of entries, a topical list of entries, and a chronology of the world's prisons from circa 1900 BCE to 2004. The encyclopedia also offers a bibliography and 14 appendixes on a variety of topics, including writings by prisoners and prison employees, prison museums, famous prisoners, and general, French, and Soviet prison slang.

Several titles, including Garland's *The Encyclopedia of American Prisons* (1996), Facts On File's *Encyclopedia of American Prisons* (2003), and Sage's *Encyclopedia of Prisons and Correctional Facilities* (2005), offer a U.S. perspective on prisons, prison facilities, and broader prison issues, like death row, parole, and escapes. Roth's encyclopedia is unique in its coverage of global prisons and prison systems. It is recommended for academic libraries, particularly those with criminal justice, political science, or international studies programs. —*Sue Polanka*

Youth, Education, and Sexualities: An International Encyclopedia. 2v. Ed. by James T. Sears. 2005. 981p. illus. index. Greenwood, \$175 (0-313-32748-3). 371.826.

This ambitious international encyclopedia is intended to encompass the extant knowledge on research, policy, and practice regarding queer sexualities, "focusing specifically on its intersection with young people and their formal as well as informal schooling." Youth is considered to fall in the period of adolescence and postadolescence (to midtwenties), although entries related to children and primary education are included. A lineup of distinguished contributors provides nearly 250 entries ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 words and enhanced by bibliographies, references, and generally one or more related annotated Web sites. Examples of entries include *Children of LGBT parents; Discrimination; Internet, lesbians and the; Mentoring; Passing; Queer pedagogy; and Single-sex schools*. Extensive cross-references facilitate access to content that is described as "never before presented in an encyclopedic format."

Many of the bibliographies are not as current as they might be. The entry *Suicide*, for example, does not include any references from 2005. A related concern involves cited Web sites. Some entries, such as the aforementioned *Suicide*, do not include any Web sites; others, such as *Alcoholism*, fail to list core sites, such as Alcoholics Anonymous' site, which includes a message to teenagers, found at http://www.aa.org/en_is_aa_for_you.cfm?PageID=15.

These concerns aside, the work succeeds in detailing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sexualities as they relate to youth and education. Sears and his team of contributors have done much to synthesize and advance the dialogue and further our knowledge and understanding of youth, education, and sexualities. Recommended for large public libraries as well as academic libraries.

—*Sarah Watstein*

Youth Activism: An International Encyclopedia. 2v. Ed. by Lonnie R. Sherrod. 2005. 759p. illus. index. Greenwood, \$199.95 (0-313-32811-0). 320.

This eclectic collection of 185 entries covers a limited group of familiar and obscure topics that may involve or be relevant to teens and young adults in a variety of countries. Introductory chapters address three components of the topic—"activism and civic engagement, youth development and activism, and the political nature of activism including its international dimensions"—that provide the basis for the encyclopedia. The entries are signed and include bibliographies of recommended readings. Information appears accurate, and the writing is accessible to general readers. Front matter includes a list of entries organized by broad topic, and the entries are followed by a list of organizations and a bibliography consisting primarily of Web sites.

Some of the choices are puzzling. For example, although there are essays titled *India, youth activism in* and *Russia, youth activism in*, to learn of Chinese youth activism, one must find the entry *Tiananmen Square massacre (1989)*. Another entry (*Homie unidos*) is on gangs in El Salvador and L.A., but the only mention of neo-Nazi gangs in the index is to the entry *Immigrant youth in Europe—Turks in Germany*.

The range of content is wide: *4-H, Palestinian Intifada, Positive psychology, Riot Grrrl*. The person starting with a general question on youth activism will find much to browse and read here. However, without good catalog contents notes, the person seeking information on almost any of the topics discussed is unlikely to notice this work. It is a discretionary purchase when potential reference use is a factor in selection. —*Linda Scarth*

Youth Reference

Development of the Industrial U.S. Reference Library. 3v. By Sonia G. Benson. 2005. 720p. illus. indexes. UXL, \$165 (1-4144-0174-4). 330.973.

One of the most attractive features of UXL Reference Library offerings is their balanced coverage. The authors take great pains to present even representation of the diverse facets and manifold views inherent in broad, overarching subjects. This current offering is no exception. All three volumes, *Almanac, Biographies*, and *Primary Sources*, offer researchers accessible and satisfying essays that effectively introduce students to industrialization and its impact on the U.S.

This evenhandedness can be seen in the *Biographies* volume. Subjects range from social workers to society divas and from industrialists to labor organizers and political activists. Articles average about 10 pages and include portraits, illustrations, and sidebars. The *Almanac* volume consists of 14 chapters, each thoroughly examining one aspect of industrialization, such as railroads or early factories. User-friendly features (research and activity