

H-Net Reviews

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Haight-Ashbury in the Sixties. Compton's New Media.

Reviewed by John Andrew

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ABSTRACT: <p> A two-CD-ROM set of images, music, games and literature that found expression in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco during the 1960s. It works on both Macintosh and Windows systems. <p> BACKGROUND: <p> I was attracted to this title because as a Professor of History I teach a course in History and American Studies on the 1960s. I previewed the material, therefore, with an eye for either using it in the classroom or making it available to undergraduate seminar students who might do papers on counter-culture, Haight-Ashbury, or any related topics in my sixties course. I ran it on a PowerMac 6100 with a double-speed CD-ROM drive and 16 MB of RAM. <p> DETAILS: <p> This is a two-disc set contains the software QuickTime 2.0 and Sound Manager 3.0 (which you can download to your hard drive if you don't already have it installed), and three programs: Turn On, Tune In, and Drop Out. Disc 1 is called HAIGHT and Disc 2 is called ASHBURY. <p> From my perspective, the core and real value of the material lies in the Turn On and Tune In segments. Turn On provides a history of the rise and fall of Haight-Ashbury. Narrated by Allen Cohen, who edited the <cite>San Francisco Oracle</cite>, it provides good graphics and music from the period as it traces the rise of the counter-culture in Haight-Ashbury during the 1960s. This is good popular culture history, not only for the graphics but for a presentation of the ideas the drove it. The ideas, personalities, philosophy and cosmology of the counter-culture, along with the music, drugs and fashions of the period predominate. What emerges is a fine presentation that indicates how all of these fit together and became mutually reinforcing during this time. For the prudish, there is some nudity. But as is usually the case, those who worry about such things will find the ideas more dangerous than the genitalia. Another theme, to be expected given Allen Cohen's background, is the rise of the underground press

and its vision of the future. Drawing upon material from the Oracle, Cohen reminds us that these folks were not the intellectual luddites that their critics would have us believe. However flaky critics might consider their ideas, they drew on solid literary and artistic traditions to imagine a different future. He concludes that, despite the drug casualties, the Haight had been a success; it had broadcast its message to the world. <p> The second part, Tune In, is a reference section that enables the user to access materials in the first section (and apparently other material too) according to various categories. The choices include: the Oracle pages, 1966-68; music and videos; video clips and interviews with sixties people; and the ability to access the Turn On scenes by topics. You can also create your own order of scenes. The music includes selections from Janis Joplin, The Jefferson Airplane, and the Grateful Dead among others. Students pursuing research papers will find this section worthwhile—as an index to the larger volume. <p> The third section, Drop Out, is an interactive game for one or more players. Its purpose is to search for enlightenment. I looked at this section, but did not play the game. It is a bit difficult to figure out how to play, but you do learn about the sixties counter-culture as you play it. <p> The greatest drawback to using this set is the lack of printed material available to the user. You ABSOLUTELY MUST click on the Help buttons in each section if you want to have any understanding at all as to what's going on or what to do. But there was nothing included with the set that told users to do this, and I did not see any way to print out this Help material. Without it, however, you simply have to guess about how to access the materials. As useful as I found the information and graphics included here, this was a MAJOR drawback. Even pointing users to the Help menus through a printed insert would be a start. Providing the same material in printed form to accompany the 2-disc set would be even better. <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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