

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



American Business Leaders. ABC-CLIO.

Reviewed by K. Austin Kerr

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This CD-ROM is a convenient if limited use of the medium to provide students with an attractive and easy to use reference. The author of the entries is Neil A. Hamilton, who has brought his expertise as a professional historian to the task. (Hamilton has also written *American Business Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary*, issued by the same publisher in June, 1999.) Here Hamilton and the publisher's staff have provided over four hundred short biographies of American business leaders. Although the selection criteria are not apparent, important figures from colonial times (e.g., John Jacob Astor) to the present (e.g., Katharine Graham) appear. Each biography is clearly written and includes hyperlinks to places and definitions of terms (e.g., great depression; communism). Most entries include an image of the individual. Each entry concludes with a brief bibliography for further reference. The entries rely on up-to-date sources—scholarly works when available and journalistic pieces for more recent figures. Each entry is easy to read and appears to summarize accurately the most important information about a subject's business career. The display is attractive and is easy to export to a printer or to a word-processing program in rich text format. The interface for the user is the best I have seen on a CD. Installation procedures went quickly on my computer running the Windows 98 operating system. There are several ways a user can navigate the CD: with a search for a name, a subject, or a text string (the latter using a convenient form to guide the user through the Boolean logic of the search engine). The user can also look for "attributes," such as all Caucasian women born after a particular date, and from the resulting list select biographies to read. Another useful feature, for someone

trying to relate the biographical information to a historical context, is the timeline feature. The user can search for a subject, and, once obtaining the list of names, have the computer display those names on a timeline relating to some main events in American history. From that timeline, the user can then click on a name to obtain the biography. The program also includes its own notebook feature, allowing a user to take notes without exiting. It is also possible to toggle between the program and another one already running on the computer. The only complaint I have about the interface is the way the program takes control of the windows desktop. Users can use Windows toggle keys (Alt + Tab) to go to an already running word processor. Today's computers are commonly capable of multi-tasking, but in this case the task must be running before loading *American Business Leaders*. (Presumably many users will already have a word processor file open, if they are using this CD as a reference work, so they will have no problem in this regard as long as they remember the key combination for toggling between running programs.) ABC-CLIO has aimed this CD to the broadest market, schools and libraries below the collegiate level. This is not a reference work for advanced work. It does feature hypertext, which can be useful (and also sometimes confusing when facing the need to structure information in the clearest, most useable manner). Thus when reading an entry, the user can obtain definitions of terms like "plantation" or "communism" and maps to provide the user with a basic geographical orientation. With the hypertext, search, and sort capabilities, the medium has exploited its advantages over the traditional printed reference work.

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