



ACLS History E-Book Project

Eileen Gardiner and Ronald Musto



Two years ahead of schedule, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) History E-Book Project (HEB) is online with over five hundred books in history--selected and reviewed by historians--and the first royalty checks have gone out to publishers and individual authors who hold their electronic rights. In the next few months, the project will be adding its next round of 250 additional books. The period between the start of the project, in September 2002, and February 2003, saw an increase in the average number of hits per month, and over the next two years, depending on library budgets and the economy, the project hopes to expand its current hits tenfold. By the end of June, the active subscriber pool and hits will be sufficient to provide some first real data on title usage and areas of interest.

Almost two hundred of the books currently available are in American history, divided almost equally across the discipline from the colonial period through the twentieth century. Approximately 15 percent of these books were published before 1960; 15 percent date from the 1960s and 15 percent from the 1970s; 20 percent from the 1980s; 30 percent from the 1990s. These books were chosen from a pool of almost nine hundred books, which included Pulitzer, Bancroft, and National Book award winners, and books individually recommended by historians. These titles were then reviewed by a panel of distinguished historians and selected for inclusion based on continued importance to scholars, graduate students and upper-level undergraduates. HEB is currently working to obtain rights to almost four hundred additional books in American history.

In addition to these titles, which are known as HEB's backlist library, the project is adding new books, ranging from electronic conversions of books that have recently been released in print to titles "born digital" for the History E-Book Project. The project employs different technologies for the backlist library and the new books. Backlist titles are scanned page-by-page and these scans are displayed online as page images of the actual book. The text, processed by multiple, collated OCR (optical character recognition) scans, enables robust, simple, proximity, Boolean, and bibliographic searches. The backlist technology is the same as the one familiar to historians from [JSTOR](http://www.jstor.org) <<http://www.jstor.org>> and [Making of America](http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/) <<http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/>>.

New e-books are being developed and are now appearing online. Most of the first titles are print-to-online conversions using XML. The process of this "simple" conversion has helped HEB develop procedures and expertise for establishing e-publishing processes and for dealing with more complicated combinations of text, image, video, sound, plus more complex internal and external linking and image handling.

The first group of e-books includes electronic versions of three recent print books that will be of particular interest to American historians: Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: Extremism and the Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2001); John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War* (University of California Press, 2002), and Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (University of California Press, 2002). Iriye's book, which examines the concept of "global community" by looking at the emergence, growth, and activities of international organizations--both governmental and nongovernmental from the end of the nineteenth century to today--is enhanced in its e-book version by hyperlinks to the web sites of the organizations discussed.

The second group of titles includes a wide array of electronic enhancements. An e-book by Joshua Brown, director of the American Social History Project at the City University of New York, expands on his *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting*,

Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America, published by the University of California Press in late 2002. During the thirty-four years covered in this study, Brown focuses on Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper*, examining how Leslie's pictorial news coverage was driven by a continuous effort to find equilibrium amidst rapid social change, to encompass the demands of a broad "middling" readership that was increasingly characterized by different experiences and perceptions. Because of its visual nature, the topic is particularly amenable to electronic presentation and analysis.

This e-book allows the publication of almost twice as many illustrations as the one hundred figures included in the print version. In addition, it includes two slide shows including comparative versions and links to external URLs. Brown also recommends a related bibliography of titles that forms the basic historiography of his study. As with all frontlist books, HEB attempts to gain electronic rights to these books and link these "clusters" to the new e-books, as well as to the reviews of these books. For instance, along with *Beyond the Lines* is a digitized version of Frank Luther Mott's five-volume *History of American Magazines*. As the project grows, the clusters will begin to overlap and cross-fertilize in ways that will create dynamic possibilities for teaching and research.

Forthcoming titles in U.S. history also include a new online edition of *Scottsboro: A History in Prints* (NYU Press), which focuses on side-by-side comparisons between the 1935 edition from a copy in the Tamiment Library at New York University and a recently discovered artist's comp of the book in the Wolfsonian Collection at Florida International University. The differences reveal the decisions made by the editors and publishers to alter the political and graphic radicalism of the original work. It also offers a useful insight into the history of the book.

The History E-Book Project is a project of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). It was funded in June 1999 with a \$3 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Original partners in the project included the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, the Renaissance Society of America, the Society for the History of Technology, and the Middle East Studies Association. The project has recently added the Association for

Asian Studies and the African Studies Association and is currently in discussion with several additional constituent societies of the ACLS. The first titles in African and Asian studies will go online in 2004.

The project launched in September 2002, and in the first four months had over one hundred subscribing libraries, including major research libraries and small college libraries. These subscriptions allow students, faculty, and staff to access this collection anytime. Subscription prices are reasonable (from \$300 to \$1,300/year based on Carnegie designations and FTE). Users can enter the collection via the HEB homepage or through the cataloging (MARC) records, which are available free to subscribing libraries for integration into their online catalogs.

Eileen Gardiner and Ronald G. Musto are project directors for the ACLS History E-Book Project. For more information, visit the web site at <<http://www.historyebook.org>> or e-mail <historyebook@acsls.org>. For a trial access to the site, contact Ginny Wiehardt, Managing Editor for Library Relations <gwiehardt@acsls.org>. Suggestions for backlist titles or proposals for new e-books are also welcome.

OAH Newsletter. Copyright (c) Organization of American Historians. All rights reserved.

 [Table of Contents](#)