

The Battle of New Orleans, by Robert V. Remini (226 pages, September 1999), examines in detail Andrew Jackson's 1815 victory at Chalmette that, according to the author, "helped define the country" and made Jackson into a heroic personification of American democracy. The details of that victory are recounted by noted Jackson scholar Remini, who gives new significance to the final days of the War of 1812. \$24.95. Viking. ISBN 0-670-88551-7.

The Electric Chair: An Unnatural American History, by Craig Brandon (279 pages, October 1999), reveals the electric chair's origins in the rivalry between Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse for urban electrification contracts worth millions of dollars in the 1880s. Despite its intended use as a more humane form of execution than hanging, the chair has had its share of inhumane misfires and most states have switched to lethal injection. Brandon tells the story of the development and malfunctions of this dread device. \$39.95. McFarland. ISBN 0-7864-0686-0.

The **Encarta World English Dictionary**, Anne H. Soukhanov, U.S. general editor (2,075 pages, August 1999), seems to be Microsoft's answer to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, which burst upon the scene in 1969 as an island of relevance in a sea of pedantic, unabridged, and poorly updated dictionary dinosaurs.

Certainly one expects a Microsoft-sponsored dictionary to have an adequate number of nerd words and slang, and it does; abbreviations, proper nouns, and famous people are also well-represented. Perhaps the most striking feature is its use of "quick definitions" that appear in bold small capital letters for words that have more than one meaning. I found this annoying at first because of the repetition, but it proved a helpful visual aid when I looked at entries with 30 different meanings. An oddity that I haven't gotten

used to is its pronunciation system, which is homegrown and not the familiar International Phonetic Alphabet found everywhere else.

Like most other Microsoft first releases, this one has bugs. Many of the illustrations are substandard. Typos and misstatements exist, though not in profusion. Many definitions have been simplified, which works in some cases and not in others. Its "word key" annotations and synonym lists seem randomly selected. The rationale for including proper nouns is murky—why, for example, is Fort Sumter National Monument listed but not Gettysburg National Military Park? The etymologies are truncated and do not inspire confidence. Most annoying is Microsoft's touting of this as a "world English" dictionary ("English as it is used in all its varieties around the English-speaking world"). Why then are there completely different UK/European and Australian editions? Only relatively well-known British words are given in the American edition, making it inadequate for translating many Monty Python sketches. Anyone can find other specific quibbles.

As an editor and writer, I would not use this dictionary as a first choice. However, its most appropriate audience may well be ESL students or others who are learning to communicate and acquire a broader vocabulary. (This includes many college students.) Its inclusion of proper nouns will benefit the English-language learner who would otherwise need a biographical dictionary, atlas, and one-volume encyclopedia—not to mention a slang dictionary and pop-culture handbook—to get through one issue of *Newsweek*.

Perhaps the Encarta cachet will even be the lure that will draw Webheads away from their monitors long enough to rediscover print. If that's the case, then more word power to them. \$50.00. St. Martin's Press. ISBN 0-312-22222-X.

Compared to Encarta, the new 10th edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, edited by Judy Pearsall (1666 pages, September 1999), seems staid and stuffy, with no illustrations and an Anglocentric focus. The dust jacket proclaims this "the world's

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favourite dictionary," which tells you something. On the plus side, the typography has improved since the 9th edition (1995) and the Oxford imprimatur is still reassuring. It even has a few cuss words and slang, though it sadly lacks the ubiquitous adverbial "whatever" used by American teens. (Encarta defines it.) \$29.95. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-860287-1.

The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?

by John L. Esposito (328 pages, 3rd ed., October 1999), updates the author's 1992 deconstruction of the myth of a united militant Islam. New sections on the Taliban, Kosovo, Osama bin Laden, and international terrorism in the 1990s are included, but Esposito's basic theme remains the same: The West needs to better understand the history and realities of the Muslim world and recognize the diversity and the many faces of Islam. A wide-ranging and fair treatment. \$16.95. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-513076-6.

Life on Wheels: For the Active Wheelchair User,

by Gary Karp (549 pages, July 1999), was written for anyone who is using a wheelchair and who wants to make the best of it. Karp, who has been paraplegic for 26 years, looks at the rehabilitation process, access, how to stay healthy, how to select a wheelchair, intimacy, legislation, recreation, education, and employment. Those who find themselves newly disabled will especially benefit, and academic libraries with students who are wheelchair-bound should have this thorough and up-to-date guide on hand. \$24.95. O'Reilly and Associates. ISBN 1-56592-253-0.

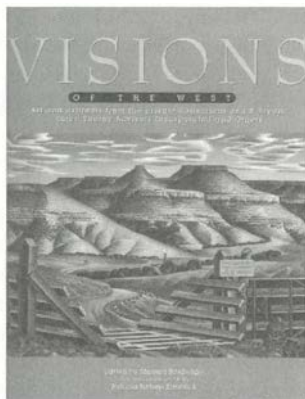
Northern Flights: Tracking the Birds and Birders of Michigan's Upper Peninsula,

by Sheryl De Vore (152 pages, July 1999), goes beyond the typical field guide and captures the adventure of birdwatching on the UP. De Vore describes the romance of banding hawks and owls, listening for loons, recording warblers, and cliff-climbing in search of peregrine nests. An environmentalist as well as a birder, she makes Michigan

above the mitten come alive with birdsong. \$12.00. Mountain Press Publishing, 1031 S. Third Street West, Missoula, MT 59806. ISBN 0-87842-400-8.

Notable Women in American History,

by Lynda G. Adamson (450 pages, September 1999), offers brief bios and annotated bibliographies of 500 women who have achieved recognition in 116 fields of endeavor (no librarians, however). Adamson consciously made the decision to cut back on the number of actors, authors, and entertainers in favor of other women who have achieved worthy recognition by their peers. This book is appropriate for undergraduate collections as a browser or for referral to other sources. \$49.95. Greenwood. ISBN 0-313-29584-0.



Visions of the West,

edited by Melissa Baldrige (320 pages, October 1999), showcases the Western art collection of the Houston-based Torch Energy Advisers, one of the largest corporate art collections in the United States. Assembled over 35 years by Torch executive J. P. Bryan, the collection is rich in Texana, Indian textiles, and Mexican religious art. Each of the ten chapters offers commentary on topics that

range from missionary-led Indian communities and Mexican fiestas to cowgirls, spurs, and firearms. Especially interesting is the essay by El Paso Museum of Art Director Becky Duval Reese on "The Search for Texas," which examines how Texas artists have depicted the state from 1850 to 1950. Libraries with a Western focus will want to add this well-illustrated volume to their collection. \$60.00. Gibbs Smith, P.O. Box 667, Layton, UT 84041. ISBN 0-87905-854-4.

Offering another view of the American West is *William Henry Jackson: Framing the Frontier*, by Douglas Waitley (217 pages, June 1999), a biography of the pioneer photographer whose stunning photos of the Rockies, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Mesa Verde, and the Tetons in the 1870s captured the public's imagination. More than 100 photographs accompany the well-researched text. \$36.00. Mountain Press Publishing. ISBN 0-87842-381-8. ■