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Parlez-vous Francais

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From the Reference Desk
from page 54

As alluded to above the main part of this set consists of more than 300 articles that cover the lives of numerous individual women, domestic concerns like courtship, marriage, and family life, women's perspective on military practices like conscription and enlistment, discussions of topics like girlhood and adolescence, as well as the actual involvement of women in specific battles. There is also discussion of issues that reflect the darker side of women's experience like prostitution, rape, and the impacts of guerilla war, as well as disease, bread riots, and both Confederate and Union widows.

The articles are relevant, readable and full of essential facts. Value added features include a chronology, a collection of 24 primary sources, a collected bibliography, a helpful general index and black and white photos that enhance the visual attractiveness of the set.

Women in the American Civil War provides thorough coverage of an era of American Women's history that is deserving of serious scholarly attention. Editor **Lisa Tendrich Frank** and her contributors have skillfully produced an accessible and easy to use reference work that should find a welcome home in both academic and larger public libraries. 🌻

Parlez-vous Français

by **Thomas Leonhardt** (St. Edward's University) <thomasl@stedwards.edu>

The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary, Fourth Edition, Edited by **Marie-Hélène Corréard** and **Valerie Grundy**, published by **Oxford University Press** (2007, ISBN-13 : 978-0-19-861422-7, \$55.00).

Companies flogging products often know no shame so my early warning antennae are on high alert when I read what could be misleading claims. The blurb that came with this new dictionary reads, in part, "This invaluable reference features:

- thousands of new words spanning everything from technology and medicine to colloquial slang
- headwords in color and changes to layout to further improve accessibility
- increased coverage of acronyms and EU terminology
- more material for students on their year abroad or anyone living in the French speaking world such as sample utility bills, bank statements, and leases
- new and updated cultural notes to help students grasp the essence of the language
- a numbers page at the start of the dictionary covers the increasing frequency of numeric abbreviations, such as '0800 number' and '24/7'

This time, the hype is justified because, as touted, it is up-to-date and it "gets right to the heart of both languages."

I really like this dictionary. If I were French (*zut alors, ne serait-ce que pour un instant*), I would be able to learn that a "goodfella" is a *gangster* and that a "goody two shoes" is a *modele de vertu* and that its meaning is ironic.

As an American whose French is rusty and never was that good, I

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re-learn to count in French and also learn when to use *en*, how to express approximate numbers, familiarize myself with phrases using numbers, and how to express calculations and decimals. All of these things are contained in one, easy-to-read box. There are similar boxes dealing with colours, the clock, nationalities, and age, as in "*Quel age avez-vous?* Months of the year, time units, surface area measurements, speed, currency & money, sizes, military ranks & titles, shops, trades, & professions, and games & sports are other quick reference areas that supplement phrase books and give usage tips besides.

Usage and contemporary vocabulary are major strengths of this dictionary. One can find usage guides for words such as *have*, *go*, *should*, *since*, and *do* for the French speaker and, for example, *ce*, *quelqu'un*, *qui que*, *quel*, *quelque*, and, *encore* for the English speaker.

There is a ninety-four page section titled "*Communication mode d'emploi/Guide to Effective Communication*" that covers Internet, SMS, telephone, business & general correspondence, living in France, and seeking employment with English and French language pages facing one another.

I will not dispose of my ragged **Cassel's** yet, however, because I suspect that it is better for literary needs and besides, you can never have too many language dictionaries but some are better than others and if I had to choose one, it would be **The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary**. Any library supporting French language studies needs to provide this reference work to its public. 🌻