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Book Reviews: Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (Adjunct Instructor, Clemson University) <vaughn.deborah@gmail.com>

Column Editor's Note: *It has been just over 15 years since I crafted my first book review for ATG: it explored the book **Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart** by **Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day**. Published in 2000, **Nardi and O'Day's** title very gently broaches the impact of technology in society and focuses on using our values to interface with technology and to think critically about its role in our lives. I'm sometimes staggered by how libraries and technology have evolved in such a short period of time; I'm also comforted by how many things have remained the same. As **ATG** reviewer **David Durant** writes, there are those among us, including author **George Stachokas**, who feel that the all-digital library is a given; what a shift that is from our (or at least my) approach to technology in Y2K! At the same time, though, there are those, including **Durant** himself, who view "old" (namely, print) and "new" (namely, electronic) technologies as complementary — an approach that is likewise espoused in **Information Ecologies**.*

*Of course, the quest to balance and understand the relationship between the old and the new goes beyond information and technology and even the western world. Consider the volume of change experienced in the Middle East in the last 15 years, particularly in the United Arab Emirates and the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. What an exciting challenge for a city planner! Reviewer **Raymond Walser** takes a peek at adventures in massive development in **Michael Dempsey's Castles in the Sand: A City Planner in Abu Dhabi**.*

Many thanks to this month's reviewers, and happy reading, everyone! — DV

Stachokas, George. *After the Book: Information Services for the 21st Century.* Chandos Information Professional Series. Oxford: Chandos, 2014. 9 78-1843347392. 224 pages. \$80.00.

Reviewed by **David Durant** (Associate Professor/Federal Documents and Social Sciences Librarian, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <durantd@ecu.edu>

According to **George Stachokas**, the question is not whether libraries should transition to a fully-digital model, but simply how and when to do so. In his view, "the cumulative impact of the growth of scientific knowledge, experimentation with new technology, and millions of individual consumer choices has made the shift to the electronic library inevitable."¹ Of course, libraries have already adapted to the digital age by embracing a hybrid model that combines print collections with spaces and resources that facilitate access to electronic information. For **Stachokas**, however, the hybrid library is merely "a transitional stage toward a completely electronic library."²

Completing what **Stachokas** sees as this necessary and inevitable transition will require a major shift in how librarians conceive of themselves, their libraries, and their profession. Librarians, in his view, need to move beyond outmoded, print-centric visions of librarianship, and focus on how to manage, provide access to, and instruction for, primarily digital collections. The future library will exist as "an organizational unit, not a building or physical facility."³ This transition will include a major revamping of LIS education programs to foster the development of highly specialized, digital-specific skills. Finally, librarians will need to transcend the notion held by some that they are "a secular priesthood presiding over temples of knowledge" and understand that "what is new is just as important as understanding what is old. Preserving the past is arguably best left to specialists...rather than being the focus of the librarian in the twenty-first century."⁴

To implement this vision, **Stachokas** proposes a nine-phase process culminating in the elimination of open-stack print collections and

the removal of all remaining print materials to special collections, archives, or remote storage facilities. While he certainly forecasts resistance among both library staff and users to this all-digital vision, and concedes that there will still be some need for print materials in the near term, he believes that "this transition could be completed in five to ten years in most academic libraries in North America, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand."⁵ Public libraries and libraries in other parts of the world will need a few years more to complete this transition, but are all fated to travel the same path.

Many of **Stachokas's** specific ideas and proposals for adapting to the digital environment, such as those concerning open access and the usefulness of patron-driven acquisitions, are already broadly held within the profession. Others will be controversial. To the extent that many of his proposals are problematic, it is because they are symptomatic of a broader flaw with his argument.

This flaw is that **Stachokas's** thesis rests on a crude technological determinism that assumes *a priori* that the all-digital library is an inevitability, and that the print codex is an outmoded technology doomed to disappear. In fact, **Stachokas's** argument is an almost perfect

representation of what technology writer **Michael Sacasas** has termed the "Borg Complex": a phenomenon "exhibited by writers and pundits who explicitly assert or implicitly assume that resistance to technology is futile."⁶ While **Stachokas** confidently asserts that print is soon to be irrelevant, numerous surveys of academic library users show a distinct preference, even among undergraduates, for print books when engaging in extended, in-depth, or immersive reading. These survey results reinforce the substantial scientific and anecdotal evidence showing that the print codex enables in-depth immersive reading in ways that digital texts do not.⁷ **Stachokas** makes no acknowledgement of this evidence.

Contrary to **Stachokas's** claims, then, librarians are best advised to think of print monograph collections and electronic information resources as complementary, not interchangeable, with each format facilitating a different way of reading, research, and thinking. The current hybrid model is not simply a transition period, or a waystation on the path to an all-digital future. Rather, whether by design or accident, it reflects the need for libraries to offer access to the full range of information formats in order to support the full range of user information needs. This insight does not preclude further adaptation by libraries to facilitate use of electronic materials, nor does it mandate that print collections need be maintained at the same level they are now. It does, however, mean that most academic and public libraries must maintain open stack print book collections for the foreseeable future. There is nothing inevitable about the digital library. To bring it about via a self-fulfilling prophecy would be to do our users a disservice.

Endnotes

1. **Stachokas**, p. 9.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
6. **Michael Sacasas**, "Borg Complex: A Primer," *The Frailest Thing*. Posted March 1, 2013. Available at: <http://thefrailestthing.com/2013/03/01/borg-complex-a-primer/>. Accessed March 1, 2015.
7. For an overview of this evidence, see **David M. Durant** and **Tony Horava**, "The Future of Reading and Academic Libraries," portal: *Libraries and the Academy* 15 (1), January 2015, pgs. 5-27.

Dempsey, Michael Cameron. *Castles in the Sand: A City Planner in Abu Dhabi.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014. 978-0786477609. 220 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by **Raymond Walser** <raymondwalser@gmail.com>

When I picked up this book, I expected a dry technical discussion on city planning, using the author's experiences in Abu Dhabi.

However, as I read, I discovered a well-written, thoughtful and literary perspective of boom

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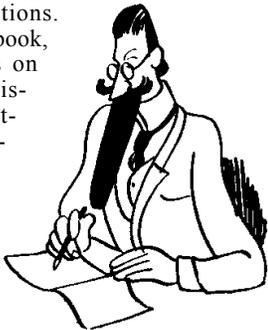
times in the small Middle Eastern Emirate from 2009 to 2011. **Mr. Dempsey** shows his skills not only in city planning but also as a writer, capturing varied and often funny experiences in a self-effacing manner.

Dempsey took the position in Abu Dhabi following a tour in Iraq and worked in the Emirate's Urban Planning Council during a frenetic period of expansion. *Castles in the Sand* discusses his work challenges and day-to-day experiences, describing a modern city engaged in a massive, reckless attempt to transform itself. He presents an outsider's view of a country in the midst of an almost unconstrained construction boom and the resultant impacts. Along the way, the author provides lively anecdotes of technical failures when he portrays the poor quality of construction through his own housing experiences and attempts to navigate the city's merciless traffic. He also discusses social issues, particularly in regards to the incredible number of immigrants living in slave-like conditions.

Throughout his book, **Dempsey** draws on news articles, history and even literature, all copiously footnoted, to provide comparisons and give the reader clearer understanding. When things seem to get a little dull, he takes a break to describe a funny incident. Of particular note is the almost four-page description starting on page 64 devoted to an epic haircut received while visiting one of the construction labor camps.

By the time I was done, I found myself sad that the book was finished and wanted to know more about the author. In reading his biographical note, I learned of his unfortunate passing. Not satisfied with the book's explanation, I conducted a Google search and discovered the following article, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/06/a-death-in-the-family/>.

After reading **Mr. Dempsey's** book, I have no desire to visit Abu Dhabi and feel as if I have been there simply by having read the book. This is a testament to **Dempsey's** narrative skills. All too briefly, he mentions visits to Yemen and Damascus prior to taking his position in Afghanistan. It is too bad that we do not have any more of his insights during that time period from this volatile portion of the world. In any case, his book is a pleasure to read and one from which anyone interested in the Middle East can learn.



From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*, and Head of Reference Emeritus, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401) <gilsont@cofc.edu>

Asian American Society: an Encyclopedia (2014, 978-1452281902, \$595) is a joint publication of the **Association for Asian American Studies** and **SAGE Reference**. Edited by **Mary Yu Danico** and **Anthony C. Ocampo**, this reference is a four-volume set with the first two volumes providing more than 300 alphabetically arranged articles and the third and fourth volumes containing numerous primary source documents, as well as a series of appendices and a general index. The intent of this encyclopedia is to reflect what it means to be Asian American from historical, social, cultural, political, and economic perspectives with discussions of both how the American experience has shaped Asian Americans as well as how they have impacted broader society.

The entries in the first two volumes speak to this effort. There are numerous articles that deal with specific aspects of broader themes ranging from education, religion, arts and culture to politics, social movements, family life, and class and labor concerns. Individual entries discuss topics as diverse as Tiger mothers, nail salons, **Kamehameha Schools**, the **Harold & Kumar Films**, Thai refugees, and the **Asian Exclusion Acts**. There are also entries that focus on the various ethnic groups comprising the Asian American community as well as articles that discuss identity issues like acculturation, language, and LGBTQ identity. The writing is accessible to undergraduates as well as the informed lay reader and employs a straightforward and factual approach informed by recent research. As one would expect, each entry has a useful list of further readings, not to mention "see also" references linking to related articles and document sections when relevant. As noted above there is a general index that enables readers to locate specific information as well as a thematic Readers Guide that gathers related articles under broad subject areas lending further access to relevant entries.

The editors have paid a lot of attention to providing interesting primary source documents that provide valuable context for the Asian American experience. There are over 200 documents ranging from an 1849 agreement of indenture between **Jacob Primer Lese** and a Chinese immigrant named **Awyte** to a 1908 article in Seattle's *Ranch* magazine warning of the "Yellow Peril" to a 2013 statement by the **Hindu American Foundation** on immigration re-



form priorities. Not only is the text of the document provided, but a descriptive annotation is given for each source reinforcing its relevance.

A four-volume set like *Asian American Society: an Encyclopedia* is increasingly rare but given the complexity and scope of the subject, it is fully warranted. Editors **Yu Danico** and **Ocampo** present an Asian American experience that is far more diverse and complicated than the stereotype of the "model minority" who are the "most successful and happiest" of America's racial groups. They do it by highlighting both the struggles and the triumphs of Asian Americans in entries with a sense of historic context and awareness. Most academic libraries will be interested in adding this title to their collections, and larger public libraries, especially those serving Asian American communities will want to add it to their wish list.

SAGE Reference has also published another in its collection of education encyclopedias. The *Encyclopedia of Education Economics and Finance* (2014, 9781452281858, \$375) is a two-volume set edited by **Dominic J. Brewer** and **Lawrence O. Picus** with a focus on how and who funds education, both public and private. The emphasis is primarily on the economics and finance of education in the United States, and the intention is to provide a solid background for understanding key concepts and issues as well as laying the foundation for further exploration.

In examining this reference work it becomes apparent that the economics and financing of education is a complex endeavor calling for sophisticated approaches. Numerous entries are devoted to budgeting strategies, economic statistical models, methods of taxation, and other sources of income like tuition and fees. Core economic concepts are discussed like the theory of markets, public choice, opportunity costs, and economies of scale. A myriad of complex issues impacting school financing also get attention including educational equity, lotteries, home-schooling, bilingual education, dropout rates, vouchers, private and public partnerships, and teacher performance and compensation.

The usual value-added features found in **SAGE** publications are here including an alphabetical list of entries, a Reader's Guide, "see also" references, solid bibliographies, a glossary, and a general index.

The *Encyclopedia of Education Economics and Finance* is intended as a non-technical introduction to a field that finds its foundation in the technical and empirical analysis of economics. While it does not shy away from discussing such topics, it does make a concerted effort to make the content reader-friendly to practitioners and undergraduates alike. Nonetheless, the approach remains serious and scholarly with entries being informed by the latest research. As one looks through the

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