

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
African American Experience
March 2010

INFORMATION DATABASE

Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.

The African American Experience from Greenwood Press/ABC-CLIO offers searchers online access to over 340 reference titles for the publisher's print publications, monographs, primary source and other unique materials (including historical legal documents, slave narratives, and Negro University Press imprints). Examples of key reference sources included are *Events in African History* (2002); *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights* (2003); *A Langston Hughes Encyclopedia* (2002); and *African American Dramatists* (2004). New material from print reference titles and multivolume sets includes *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*; *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Encyclopedia*; *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*; *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers*; and *Icons of Hip Hop*. There are hundreds of images and maps and a recently added time-line feature. A People Finder makes it easy to look for biographical content.

The database includes documents dating from the 1700's to present, and pulls together a fairly comprehensive reference and basic research collection covering topics in African American history, culture, and scholarship in an easy-to-search and navigate format. It is appropriate in scope and academic level for community college students exploring beginning research techniques. For a full title list see http://www.greenwood.com/mosaic/aae/pdf/AAE_fact_sheet.pdf.

SEARCH INTERFACE

Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

Searching is divided into modes familiar to most searchers: *Quick Search*, *Advanced Search*, and *Browse* (of the subject index). The three options, as well as other navigation features, are easy to locate and utilize from the home/entry screen, as well as all other screens users may encounter:

Home page



Other screens

The screenshot shows the website's search results for the term "hair products". At the top, the site's logo "the African American experience" is on the left, and navigation links "ABOUT | ADVISORY BOARD | CLASSROOM RESOURCES | HELP" and "HOME | BROWSE | RESOURCES | INDEX" are on the right. On the left side, there is a "QUICK SEARCH" box with a "GO" button and an "ADVANCED SEARCH" section with a "Search within Results" checkbox. The main content area displays "Search results for : hair products" and a message: "Too many results? Try placing quotes around your search term. Or click on 'Search within Results,' enter another word or phrase in 'Quick Search,' and click 'Go.'" Below this, a summary bar shows "ALL: 311", "ARTICLES: 262", "PRIMARY DOCS: 49", "IMAGES: 0", "OTHER RESOURCES: 0", and "TIMELINE: 0". A pagination bar indicates "1 to 50 of 311 items" and includes an "EMAIL" button and a "Next >>" link. The search results list two items: 1. "The Dekinking of African Hair" from "Blue Veins and Kinky Hair : Naming and Color Consciousness in African America" and 2. "HAIR CARE PRODUCTS INDUSTRY" from "Encyclopedia of African American Business History :".

Quick Search offers familiar keyword searching that yields relevant results for most needs. Results are weighted toward article/chapter titles, followed by source titles, a publisher-created subject index, and overall occurrence. Adding qualifiers such as quotation marks around phrases may retrieve a tighter hit set, but simple, unqualified term searching proves almost as accurate even for the broadest of topics.

Advanced Searching provides two search options, Keyword or Boolean, but since neither allows field or element searching its usefulness is limited. The ability to remove terms from a search set, identify variants in terminology, and filter by document type are helpful, but using the guided search boxes effectively is not very intuitive, and flexibility to expand or manipulate a complicated search strategy is limited. A “search filter” below the Search button is really just a document-type filter and is easy to miss:

The screenshot shows the "ADVANCED SEARCH" page. It features the same site logo and navigation as the previous screenshot. On the left, there is a "QUICK SEARCH" box and an "ADVANCED SEARCH" section. The main content area is titled "ADVANCED SEARCH" and has two tabs: "KEYWORD SEARCH" and "BOOLEAN SEARCH". Under "KEYWORD SEARCH", there are four input fields with labels: "All of these words...", "and this exact phrase...", "and any of these words...", and "and none of these words". Below these fields is a "Search" button. Under "BOOLEAN SEARCH", there are four radio button options under the heading "Search Filters": "Articles", "Images", "Primary Documents", and "External Links".

Browsable subject searching of the large topical index is available using the broad *Subject* list on the homepage, or by selecting the *Browse* or *Index* quick links on other screens. Both of the latter terms are somewhat misnomers and can easily confuse users as to their functions or how they differ. Once on the

pages to which these links go, it is easy to navigate and read screens and corresponding document results which are displayed horizontally across the screen:

“Browse”screen

The screenshot shows the 'Browse' screen of the AMERICAN experience website. At the top, the logo 'AMERICAN experience' is on the left, and navigation links 'ABOUT | ADVISORY BOARD | CLASSROOM RESOURCES | HELP' and 'HOME | BROWSE | RESOURCES | INDEX' are on the right. Below the logo is a search bar with 'QUICK SEARCH' and 'GO' buttons, and 'ADVANCED SEARCH' below it. The main heading is 'BROWSE'. Below this, there is a paragraph: 'For information on and instructions for the browse, [click here](#). Advanced users: try our **Advanced Browse**, containing the full index of over 23,000 terms.' The main content area is divided into three columns: 'Categories', 'Sub-Categories', and 'Results'. 'Categories' includes 'Arts and Media' (with sub-links for 'Actors and Acting', 'Advertising', and 'Art and Artists'), 'Sub-Categories' includes 'Acting' (with sub-links for 'Auditions' and 'Racial aspects') and 'Actors', and 'Results' lists three items: '1. A New Understanding' (From: 50 African American Audition Monologues), '2. A Warning' (From: 50 African American Audition Monologues), and '3. An Almost Perfect World'.

“Index” (Advanced Browse) screen

The screenshot shows the 'Index' (Advanced Browse) screen of the AMERICAN experience website. At the top, the logo 'AMERICAN experience' is on the left, and navigation links 'HOME | BROWSE | RESOURCES | INDEX' are on the right. Below the logo is a search bar with 'QUICK SEARCH' and 'GO' buttons, and 'ADVANCED SEARCH' below it. The main heading is 'Advanced Browse'. Below this, there is a paragraph: 'For a more streamlined browsing experience, return to the [Subject Browse](#). To access the Image Index, [click here](#). To access the Primary Source Index, [click here](#). For more information on how to use the Browse and Index, [click here](#).' The main content area is divided into two columns: 'Subject Headings' and 'Results'. 'Subject Headings' shows '1 to 100 of 448' items, with a 'Jump To:' search box and a 'Go' button. Below this are links for 'American Anti-Slavery Society', 'Anti-Slavery Society (Great Britain)', 'Antislavery movements', 'Antislavery societies' (with a sub-link for 'Pennsylvania'), and 'British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society'. 'Results' lists three items: '(1831-1860)' (From: ANTISLAVERY POLITICS IN ANTEBELLUM AND CIVIL WAR AMERICA), 'Abolitionist Movement' (From: Encyclopedia of Racism in the United States), and 'Abolitionists'.

Browse leads searchers to an index of broad subject categories. *Index* takes users to a page titled *Advanced Browse* that contains only the narrower sub-categories as well as names. Neither option provides “browsing” of other fields, and calling the *Index* page “advanced browse” implies that it offers more sophisticated searching of the exact same data as *Browse*. Except for the addition of a search box to jump through the index itself, it does not. The presentation of different, yet related, subject hierarchies, as well as the use of different terminology to describe similar things is confusing and may hinder, rather than promote, effective utilization of an otherwise good subject index.

Overall, the “advanced” search options offer limited functionality. A student looking for information on more obscure or multi-dimensional topics (for example, the emancipation of slaves by the British after the Revolutionary War) might find little more success using either *Advanced Search*, *Browse*, or *Index* over a simple keyword *Quick Search*. At best, the results would be better organized, but not necessarily different or better.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES

What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?

The “Help” pages provide mostly clear explanations of content, navigation, and features. Relevant and useful “Related Topics” links, citation assistance, and delivery options appear clearly in detailed document displays. Additional technical support is available via email and a toll-free number.

Delivery options (print and email) are limited in what they do. There is no feature for selecting multiple citations or full documents from different searches for later retrieval or uploading into a citation manager. Consequently, only one document or results list at a time can be printed or sent, and all is lost at the end of each login session. Furthermore, emailing only sends a link back to the document or results list in the database itself (not actual text or even citations), which may mislead and frustrate students who believe they’ve completed the document-gathering part of their research.

COST

If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?

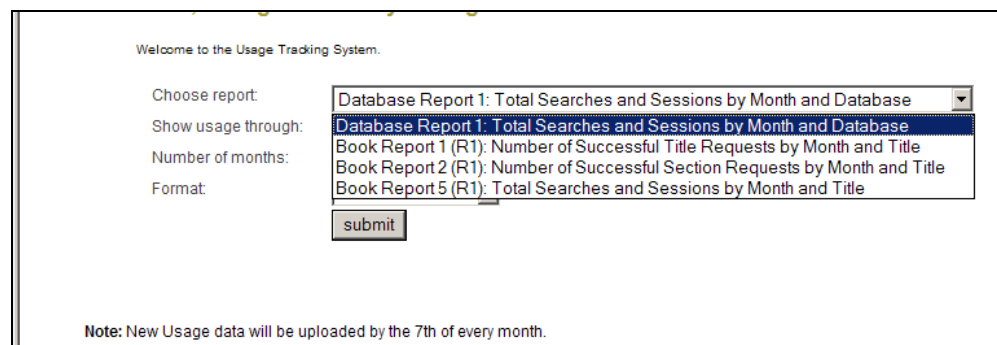
The African American Experience is very reasonably priced at less than \$1000 for the largest-FTEs sites, and may provide sufficient, stand-alone content to cover this area of subject and research completely for institutions with few other resources.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?

Both IP and proxy authentication are supported for remote users, and the product is ADA compliant.

At the time that this review was being written, the database did not provide an administrator’s module to set user or search page preferences. COUNTER compliant usage statistics track searches and sessions by month, successful title requests, successful section requests. Total searches and sessions by month and title are also available.



Welcome to the Usage Tracking System.

Choose report: Database Report 1: Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Database

Show usage through: Database Report 1: Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Database

Number of months: Book Report 1 (R1): Number of Successful Title Requests by Month and Title

Format: Book Report 2 (R1): Number of Successful Section Requests by Month and Title

Book Report 5 (R1): Total Searches and Sessions by Month and Title

submit

Note: New Usage data will be uploaded by the 7th of every month.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The African American Experience offers libraries relevant content with a lackluster search interface. Although sophisticated searching of obscure topics may be limited (either due to unavailable content or search restrictions), basic entry-level searching provides a wealth of information appropriate to most lower-division assignment. A single-themed database may be a luxury for community college libraries on tight budgets, but the range and quality of resources covered, and areas of study to which it applies (including history, cultural studies, political science, philosophy, legal studies, literature) make this one a good-value general education tool.

Other Reviews:

Brisco, Shonda. "Greenwood's African American Experience." *School Library Journal* 53.2 (2007): 71-72. Web. 16 Mar. 2010.

Quinn, Mary Ellen. "Black history databases." *Booklist* 1 Feb. 2007: 74. Web. 16 Mar. 2010.

Rollins, Deborah. "African American Experience." *Booklist* 1 Nov. 2006: 79+. Web. 16 Mar. 2010.

Similar Products:

- African American History Online (Facts on File)
- The African American Studies Center (Oxford University Press)
- Biography Resource Center: African Americans (Gale)
- Black Studies Center (Proquest)
- Black Thought and Culture (Alexander Street Press)