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ESTABLISHING THE CONSERVATIVE GENRE

The Beginning of Political Censorship or Business as Usual?

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Final Thesis Paper
Portland State University
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Abstract: Is it reasonable to classify books written by today's far-right conservative authors as belonging to their own distinct genre, and if so, is the hesitation of mainstream publishers to acquire these books the beginning of political censorship or simply business as usual? This paper will seek to suggest that not only does conservative literature qualify as its own genre, but also that accepting this categorization can help increase conservative titles' visibility and sales.

Keywords: conservative publishing, genre literature, politics in publishing, market research

On April 7th, 2017, *Publishers Weekly* news director Rachel Deahl posted a piece in which she analyzed the aftermath of Threshold’s cancelation of Milo Yiannopoulos’s controversial *Dangerous* book deal. “With the country more politically polarized than ever,” she writes, “some are wondering whether the business is adequately prepared to hear, and publish, voices on the right.”¹ The piece, entitled “Is Publishing Too Liberal?”, discusses the implications of the Yiannopoulos fallout with a variety of anonymous industry members in the midst of an already highly charged political climate.

No one quoted calls the canceled deal censorship (although the word is coyly evoked a number of times throughout the narrative), but they do signal that the fiasco “put some [industry professionals] on alert” and highlight how “[conservative] authors are often treated with disdain and contempt.”² One editor states that “at a time that cries out for transparency, you would think [people in this industry] would want to celebrate the First Amendment, rather than trying to circumscribe it.”³

The First Amendment argument, however problematic when used in reference to private corporations, is an expected one, and its invocation is familiar to anyone following this controversy. January and February saw many articles published in response to Threshold’s decision (often erroneously framed as the decision of their parent company, Simon & Schuster), and most tended to focus on the moral implications of publishing or not

¹ Rachel Deahl, “Is Publishing Too Liberal?” *Publishers Weekly* (Apr 7, 2017). <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/73292-is-book-publishing-too-liberal.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

publishing Yiannopoulos’s book, or debate the extent to which free speech was violated by its cancelation. What Deahl manages to do in her piece is cut right to the heart of what she suggests is a systemic issue, asking a question that, while painted with a problematically broad brush, hits on a key pain point: “Is publishing too liberal? Are mainstream publishers who take a pass on conservative books actively playing politics to the exclusion of whole sectors of thought?”

According to Marjory Ross, president of conservative powerhouse Regnery Publishing, the rejection of Yiannopoulos could be the start of a new trend: “Liberal authors demanding not only their own right to offend others but the silencing of those they find offensive.”⁴ Ross’s trend, however, is not a new one. Since the beginning of the conservative publishing movement, the claim that “the New York publishing world clearly remains a liberal stronghold, uncomprehending of, when not outright hostile to, conservative ideas—and authors”⁵ has held strong. Yiannopoulos has merely brought this debate front and center in the eyes of the reading public.

If the American publishing industry is to be upheld as a facilitator of free expression in today’s divisive political climate, these allegations require an answer, one which I believe lies not in politics or literary criticism but rather in the definition of “genre” and its role in publishing. Through a brief analysis of the history of the conservative publishing industry and their current branding and marketing practices, as well as a discussion of mainstream publishing’s handling of genre, imprints, and market research, I will be attempting to answer this question with my own: Is it reasonable to classify books written by today’s far-

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Harry Stein, “The Future of Conservative Books,” *City Journal* (2008). <https://www.city-journal.org/html/future-conservative-books-13105.html>.

right conservative authors as belonging to their own distinct genre, and if so, is the hesitation of mainstream publishers to acquire these books the beginning of political censorship or simply business as usual?

A NOTE ON SOURCE ACQUISITION

I quickly found it more difficult than I initially anticipated to reconstruct a history of conservative books, for if there is a dearth of research into the publishing industry, there is an even greater scarcity of articles discussing the political nuances of that industry. Additionally, those informed writers speaking on the topic were either defensive or critical of conservative literature (or conservatism as a whole), making unbiased, scientific data aggregation even more challenging. While this initially seemed like a problem, further analysis revealed that this inherent partisanship provided me with a unique insight into a subculture, an insight necessary for understanding present day circumstances.

What I pieced together is an amalgamation of historical overviews, opinion pieces, book reviews, political manifestos, and publishing house mission statements all compiled into a cross-checked timeline of conservative book publishing. As I waded through these sources, they began to reveal to me a very particular mythology, one centered strongly around Ross's aforementioned trend of discrimination: There were the heroes, authors and small presses who preached truth to the masses as far back as the 1920s, and the villain, the empire of prejudiced liberalism, Sauron-like in its faceless ubiquity. The idea of competing

and winning against all the odds⁶ saturated the undertones (and often the blatant overtones) of many of these articles.

Regardless of whether or not this is an outlook validated by fact (defending the treatment of the political right by publishers throughout the decades is not a goal of this paper), this mythology is actually one of the key elements in the creation of the conservative genre and the allegations brought against Threshold this past January.

FROM CONSCIENCE OF A CONSERVATIVE TO KILLING REAGAN: A GENRE IN THE MAKING

In 1947, Henry Regnery founded a publishing house dedicated solely to the acquisition and distribution of conservative titles.⁷ There had been conservative books and conservative-leaning presses in America as far back as the 1920s,⁸ but Regnery quickly became an iconic stronghold of political thought, publishing books like William F. Buckley Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale* in 1951, which "marked the birth of the modern American conservative movement."⁹

In 1960, Kentucky-based Victor Publishing released *Conscience of a Conservative* by then Senator Barry Goldwater (ghostwritten by L. Brent Bozell Jr.). It quickly became "the conservatives' new bible"¹⁰:

Within a month, it ranked 10th on *Time* magazine's best-seller list, and two weeks later ranked 14th on The New York Times' list. By the time the 1960 election came along, just five months later, 500,000 copies were in print. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that it was selling best in college bookstores, comparable [sic] to the

⁶ Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against the Liberal Media Bias*. (Regnery, 2005). PDF e-book.

⁷ "About Regnery Publishing," *Regnery Publishing*, accessed May 10, 2017. <http://www.regnery.com/about/>.

⁸ Harry Stein, "The Future of Conservative Books."

⁹ Lee Edwards, "God and Man at Yale, Now," *National Review* (Nov 10, 2011).

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/282763/god-and-man-yale-now-nro-symposium>.

¹⁰ Alfred Regnery, "Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative* Transformed American Politics," *Washington Times* (Nov 17, 2014). <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/nov/17/goldwaters-the-conscience-of-a-conservative-transf/>.

perennial best-seller *The Catcher in the Rye*. Eventually over four million copies would be printed.

It may be worth pointing out that Regnery and author and historian Lee Edwards contradict each other here, as Edwards claims that *Conscience of a Conservative* “never made The New York Times bestsellers list because [it was] self-published and therefore did not count in the eyes of mainstream publishers” whom he calls ‘the liberal publishing cartel.’”¹¹ Regardless, Goldwater’s success as a political writer is well-established today and presented as something achieved in spite of mainstream publishers.

It is also fairly well-established that these early books were considered works of “key intellectual figures of the burgeoning conservative movement”¹² and “icons of twentieth-century conservatism” backed by brilliant scholars and journalists.¹³ These authors were credited with assisting “the rise of the right wing within the Republican Party and the building of new institutions and media to convey the movement’s message,”¹⁴ often in direct opposition to what Goldwater claimed were the “‘enlightened’ commentators” who “rule the mass communications media.”¹⁵

The emphasis on conservative intellectualism continued on into the early 1980s. The University of Chicago funded the Heritage Center, which

¹¹ Lee Edwards, “How Publishers (and Readers) Learned to Love Conservative Books,” *The Daily Signal* (Apr 13, 2015). <http://dailysignal.com/2015/04/13/how-publishers-and-readers-learned-to-love-conservative-books/>.

¹² Jeffery O. Nelson, “Ten Books that Shaped America’s Conservative Renaissance,” *The Imaginative Conservative* (Mar 7, 2013). <http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org/2013/03/ten-books-that-shaped-americas-conservative-renaissance.html>.

¹³ Daniel McCarthy, “Rediscovering the Beginnings of Conservatism, A review of *Flying High: Remembering Barry Goldwater* by William F. Buckley Jr.” The Intercollegiate Studies Institute (2008). <https://home.isi.org/rediscovering-beginnings-conservatism-review-iflying-high-remembering-barry-goldwateri-william-f>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Barry Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative*, (Martino Fine Books, 1960). PDF ebook.

[was] part of a network that prepared the free-market fare served up by Reagan and Thatcher. At the beginning of the decade, Heritage published *Mandate for Leadership*, a blueprint for reducing the federal government. It ran to 20 volumes, with an abridged version of 1,000 pages becoming a paperback bestseller.¹⁶

Meanwhile, in 1987, conservative professor and philosopher Allan Bloom published *The Closing of the American Mind*, lauded by the (liberal) *New York Times* as

essential reading for anyone concerned with the state of liberal education in this society. Its pathos, erudition and penetrating insight make it an unparalleled reflection on the whole question of what it means to be a student in today's intellectual and moral climate.¹⁷

Scholars and intellectuals like Bloom were said to “spur the explosive growth of movement conservatism in the 1980s and 1990s,”¹⁸ but their influence was overshadowed by the rise of right-wing political radio and cable television after the abandonment of the FCC’s Fairness Doctrine. Onto this newfound forum there emerged a different kind of purveyor of radical conservative agendas: the pundit. Radio host and political firebrand Rush Limbaugh published *The Way Things Ought to Be* in 1992 with Pocket Press, followed closely by *See, I Told You So* in 1993, both of which made the *New York Times*’s bestsellers list. He became one of the most well-received conservative voices of an era, despite possessing no personal political experience, and paved the way for a host of “sonorous and debonair liberal-bashers”¹⁹ who would move the spotlight from politicians and university organizations to what head of

¹⁶ Colin Robinson, “Alt-writing: How the Far Right is Changing US Publishing,” *The Guardian* (Jan 18, 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/18/alt-writing-how-the-far-right-is-changing-us-publishing>.

¹⁷ Roger Kimball, “The Groves of Ignorance,” *New York Times* (Apr 5, 1987). <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/05/books/the-groves-of-ignorance.html>.

¹⁸ Alex Pareene, “The Conservative Book Industry Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Embarrassing,” *Salon* (Mar 24, 2014). http://www.salon.com/2014/03/24/the_conservative_book_industry_isnt_dead_its_just_embarrassing/.

¹⁹ R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr., “The Way Things Ought To Be,” *The Conservative Book Club*, accessed May 12, 2017. <https://www.conservativebookclub.com/book/way-things>.

Center Street Books Rolf Zettersten calls the “one almost surefire route to success in conservative publishing”: “books by well-known personalities on Fox TV or talk radio, with a ‘take no prisoners’ brand of politics.”²⁰

This “take no prisoners” approach quickly became a trademark for successful conservative literature and remains so today. This is not to say no more moderate or politically-experienced conservatives are writing and publishing books, but due to an influx of flashier books that were more easily consumed and captured the sparks that flew on the radio and on television,²¹ the goalpost has been moved substantially. For example, governor Jeb Bush’s 2013 book *Immigration Wars: Forging an American Solution* has sold fewer than 5,000 hardcover copies to date,²² while Fox News TV star Bill O’Reilly sold 1,363,643 copies of *Killing Kennedy* the previous year,²³ and copped first place on *Publishers Weekly*’s “Bestselling Books of 2016” nonfiction list with *Killing the Rising Sun* (clocking in at 1,104,389 hardcover sales alone).²⁴

Editors of conservative literature and the heads of conservative imprints echo what the sales figures and bestseller lists suggest. In a 2006 BEA panel entitled “Selling and Promoting Right of Center Books Via Left of Center Channels,” a group of conservative editors and sales executives spoke to their need for “sparks to fly”:

²⁰ Lynn Neary, “Trump’s Win Changed the Game for Publishers on the Left and the Right,” *NPR* (Apr 12, 2017). <http://www.npr.org/2017/04/12/523625200/trumps-win-changed-the-game-for-publishers-on-the-left-and-the-right>.

²¹ Carlin Romano, “The Lonely Lives of Conservative Editors in the Liberal World of Book Publishing,” *Baltimore Sun* (Jun 4, 2006). http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-06-04/news/0606030186_1_new-conservative-editors-book-publishing.

²² Pareene, Alex. “The Conservative Book Industry Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Embarrassing.”

²³ Nielsen Bookscan, accessed May 12, 2017. <http://nielsen.bookscan.com/>.

²⁴ John Maher, “Bestselling Books of 2016,” *Publishers Weekly* (Jan 20, 2017). <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/72566-the-bestselling-books-of-2016.html>.

All three panelists [Bernadette Malone, senior editor for Sentinel; Harry McCullough Jr., former vice president and director of trade sales at Macmillan; and Marjory Ross, publisher of Regnery Publishing] agreed that houses specializing in conservative books don't want, as Ross put it, 'compromised-position books' or 'middle-of-the-road books.'"²⁵

This sentiment is echoed by Zettersten, who says: "If you are a polite voice in this market you don't really get listened to. We've certainly published our share of polite conservative books and they just don't sell as well."²⁶ Ross agrees: "I love flame throwers."²⁷

With the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and the resultant divisive political scene, publishers like Regnery have consolidated their readership base in the more radical fringes of the conservative movement and

pivoted to courting Trump voters with forthcoming books like *How Trump Won* by the Breitbart editor-at-large Joel Pollak and Larry Schweikart, and a series of *Deplorables' Guides* to issues like immigration, gun control and climate change, using a moniker Trump's supporters adopted for themselves.²⁸

But does this shift in perspective from professor to pop star, this abandonment of the literary middle of the road justify classifying today's conservative books as belonging to their own genre? According to author and journalist McKay Coppins, yes, it does:

[W]hat followed was the genrefication of conservative literature. Over the next ten years, corporate publishers launched a half-dozen imprints devoted entirely to producing, promoting, and selling books by right-leaning authors — a model that consigned their work to a niche, same as science fiction or nutritional self-help guides.²⁹

²⁵ Carlin Romano, "The Lonely Lives of Conservative Editors in the Liberal World of Book Publishing."

²⁶ Lynn Neary, "Trump's Win Changed the Game for Publishers on the Left and the Right."

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Alexandra Alter, "Publishers Encounter Political Storms in Turn to Right."

²⁹ McKay Coppins, "Killing Conservative Books: The Shocking End Of A Publishing Gold Rush," *Buzzfeed* (Mar 20, 2014). https://www.buzzfeed.com/mckaycoppins/killing-conservative-books-the-shocking-end-of-a-publishing?utm_term=.kaMJE590P#.yI7PZ2r8x.

To back up this statement, though, or to use it to explain the lack of receptiveness toward conservative books in mainstream publishing houses, we first need not only a working definition of genre, but also an understanding of how genre is handled within the industry.

PLUGGING CONSERVATISM INTO THE GENRE EQUATION

The definition of genre is a moving target, with the Merriam Webster definition—“a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content”—providing little nuance or industrial applicability. Marketing consultant and author Tara Jacobsen goes into a little more depth with her description: “What [genre] functionally means is that you have a group of books that have a similar plot, story line, character development or other defining factor that makes them appealing to a certain type of reader, be it fiction or non-fiction.”³⁰ Perhaps the most practical and elegantly simple definition comes from *Story Grid* author Shawn Coyne: “Genres are those things that tell the audience what to expect.”³¹

Equally as spotty as the definition of genre are the global rules for determining what is or is not a genre—or when a series of related books *become* a genre. On a sociological level, it is argued that

The discourse community has developed and continues to develop discursal expectations. These may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the

³⁰ Tara Jacobsen, “Author Marketing: The Riches are in the Genres,” *Marketing Artfully* (2016). <http://marketingartfully.com/2016/01/06/author-marketing-the-riches-are-in-the-genres>.

³¹ Shawn Coyne, “Genre and Nonfiction,” *Steven Pressfield Online* (Mar 24, 2017). <http://www.stevenpressfield.com/2017/03/15551/>.

discourse community. In so far as “genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them” (Martin, 1985), these discursal expectations create the genres that articulate the operations of the discourse community (Swales, 1985).³²

For the purposes of this paper, the “discourse community” includes authors, agents, editors, publishers, and readers who are dedicated to developing and circulating texts that conform to their discursal expectations. So is it appropriate to categorize a series of similar books as a genre once those books have substantially entrenched themselves in the minds of their expectant community, make money off of that community, and have industry professionals dedicated to their study and promotion? I would argue it is, but because this semantic exercise in the notion of genre has been endlessly argued by avid authors, editors, and marketers across the blogosphere and hypothesized to death by literature students and sociology doctorates alike, it might be more useful for our purposes to determine genre using a simple, publishing-specific equation that compiles key aspects of well-established genres across the board:

Imprint (dedicated brand & resources of a larger publishing corporation) + **industry relationships** (author/agent; agent/editor; sales team/booksellers) + **target audience** (set lucrative demographic and media targets) = **genre**

If the conservative literature of today can be plugged into this equation, what does that mean for the claims of exclusion from mainstream publishers so prevalent in the conservative literary mythos?

³² John Swales, “Discourse communities, Genres and English as an International Language,” *World Englishes* 7, No. 2 (1988). <http://epcc1301.pbworks.com/w/file/44944540/Swales%20-%20Discourse%20Communities%20and%20Genres.pdf>.

Imprint

Imprints are “aggregation[s] of similar books”³³ that collectively make up the body of a publishing corporation, operating as fiefdoms, editorially distinct from their parent company³⁴ (something Yiannopoulos protestors misunderstood when they threatened to boycott Simon & Schuster instead of their imprint Threshold). For the most part, imprints are responsible for running themselves:

The curation of projects to fit the objectives and personality of the imprint creates the brand.... The marketing staff select titles for promotion to different audiences and media. Sales staff select titles which are most attractive to the book buyers.³⁵

Savvy authors writing in a particular genre know that they have a better chance of being acquired if they submit their manuscripts to the imprint catered toward their market. Literary agents specializing in genres create relationships with editors within these imprints, while imprint marketing targets demographics and media formats most likely to yield readers of their genre. This is consistent whether the genre is romance, science fiction, fantasy, crime, or thriller.

In the early 2000’s, the Big Five (then the Big Six) began developing conservative imprints as Fox News pundits and other far-right conservative celebrities began building platforms and “becoming reliable players on the New York Times’s bestsellers list.”³⁶

Random House developed Crown Forum in 2002, the same year that Fox became the

³³ Giles Clark and Angus Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*. Routledge: New York, 2017. Print.

³⁴ Constance Grady, “Milo Yiannopoulos’s Book Deal with Simon & Schuster, Explained,” *Vox* (Jan 3, 2017). <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/1/3/14119080/milo-yiannopoulos-book-deal-simon-schuster-dangerous-boycott>.

³⁵ Giles Clark and Angus Phillips, *Inside Book Publishing*.

³⁶ Constance Grady, “Milo Yiannopoulos’s Book Deal with Simon & Schuster, Explained.”

top-rated cable news channel,³⁷ followed by Penguin’s imprint Sentinel in 2003, Simon & Schuster’s now notorious Threshold in 2006 (boasting “10 Years of Being Right” as of 2016), and HarperCollins’s Broadside Books in 2010.³⁸

The connection between the establishment of conservative imprints and the development of the conservative genre are plain. These imprints cater directly to the far-right authors and audiences developed over the last decade, claiming a backlist boasting Mike Huckabee, Charles Murray, Jonah Goldberg, Greg Gutfeld, and Matt Walsh,³⁹ a crop of writers whose fame is “usually garnered through television, talk radio, and major web platforms, like *The Blaze* or *Breitbart*.”⁴⁰ Meanwhile,

[e]ditors at these imprints face unprecedented pressure to land cable news and radio provocateurs like Ann Coulter, rather than promote the combative intellectuals, like Allan Bloom and Charles Murray, on whom the business was first built.⁴¹

Industry Relationships

The next part of the genre equation deals with industry relationships, or those connections made between authors, agents, editors, marketers, sales reps, and booksellers in order to get a manuscript to the portion of the public who will read it.

In a *Writer’s Digest* article, literary agent Chuck Sambuchino highlights the question, “Do you need a conservative agent for conservative books?” by asking fellow agents their thoughts. John Willig, founder of Literary Services, Inc., offers his marketing expertise while also casually contextualizing conservative works as belonging to a genre:

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Stassa Edwards, “How the Book Publishing Industry is Trolling Itself,” *Jezebel* (Jan 5, 2017). <http://jezebel.com/how-the-book-publishing-industry-is-trolling-itself-1790710608>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ McKay Coppins. “Killing Conservative Books: The Shocking End of a Publishing Gold Rush.”

There's a broader and critical issue at work here, and that is whether your agent (regardless of interests/religious or political persuasions) can effectively reach and knows the editors for your topic and presentation... [and] be your best advocate to publishers in that specific genre.... [The writer] should be doing their homework regarding the agent's expertise in specific categories... if he/she has the knowledge of the market, publishers and editors...⁴²

Tom Flannery, Yiannopoulos's literary agent at AGI Vigliano, illustrated this principle when pitching *Dangerous*, approaching the Big Five conservative imprints specifically with his writer's book. "We didn't go as wide as we normally would just because we understand the controversy Milo was going to bring to the table. They all knew who Milo was—all the conservative imprints were interested in talking to him."⁴³ This is a perfect illustration of the industry relationship between agents and editors who specialize in genre.

In terms of marketing and sales, imprints know their audiences very well, and tailor their efforts to target those specific demographics. For example, a romance imprint like HarperCollins's Avon would know that the majority of likely buyers are female, between 30-54 years of age, have an average income of \$55,000, and are highly represented in the South. They will also know that book recommendations will come from online book sites, subscription services, or friend recommendations, and that the majority of sales will happen online and be downloaded to e-readers or smartphones. If physical copies are bought from a store, they're more likely to be purchased at a big box store like Walmart, Target, or

⁴² Chuck Sambuchino, "Do You Need A Conservative Agent for a Conservative Book?" *Writer's Digest* (Sep 11, 2009). <http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents/do-you-need-a-conservative-literary-agent-for-conservative-books-a-liberal-literary-agent-for-liberal-books>.

⁴³ Caroline Kellogg, "Milo Yiannopoulos's Book Deal is Publishing Business as Usual," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 4, 2017). <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-yiannopoulos-book-deal-20170104-story.html>.

supermarkets.⁴⁴ This valuable information enables detailed and effective marketing and sales structures to be built by imprints.

Likewise, conservative imprints have honed their understanding of their audience and developed “a well-oiled promotional machine”⁴⁵ to get their books into the right hands. According to a recent Pew Research report, 47% of consistent conservatives get their news from Fox (a much more consolidated point of media consumption than outlets that consistent liberals reference), followed by local radio (11%) and local TV (5%).⁴⁶

The need for emphasis on audiovisual ad campaigns is well understood by conservative imprints. Going back to that 2006 BEA panel on conservatives in publishing, Ross claims “conservatives structure the selling of a book like a political campaign... Lots of talk radio, lots of ‘off-the-book-page’ coverage.”⁴⁷ This corresponds with Regnery’s former editorial director and vice-president Richard Vigilante said about Gary Aldrich’s book *Unlimited Access* (1996) and the press’s signature promotional strategy originating with it:

"We decided to forget that we were in the book business and imagined we were running a presidential campaign," [Vigilante] said. Responsible for marketing as well as editing, Vigilante came to eschew any distinction between the two roles as he worked with his staff to shape books to provoke an immediate response from readers and the media. "There were two books in every book," he said. "One for the readers and one for the [TV] producers."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “Reader Statistics,” *Romance Writers of America*, accessed May 13, 2017. <https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=582>.

⁴⁵ Alex Pareene, “The Conservative Book Industry Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Embarrassing.”

⁴⁶ Amy Mitchell, Jeffery Gottfried, Jocelyn Kelly and Katerina Eva Matsa, “Political Polarization and Media Habits.” *Pew Research Center* (Oct 21, 2014). <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>.

⁴⁷ Carlin Romano, “The Lonely Lives of Conservative Editors in the Liberal World of Book Publishing.”

⁴⁸ Christopher Dreher, “Right Turn: Conservative Publishing Comes of Age,” *Publishers Weekly* (Jun 30, 2003). <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20030630/18297-right-turn.html>.

To see these “campaigns” in action, one need only visit the Fox News website, which reveals a host of highly specific book recommendations, from Bill O’Reilly’s *Old School: Life in the Sane Lane* (Holt) to Rod Dreher’s *The Benedict Option: A Strategy For Christians in a Post-Christian World* (Sentinel) to Craig Shirley’s *Reagan Rising: The Decisive Years, 1976-1980* (Broadside).⁴⁹

Book clubs serve as another target media outlet for conservative imprints,⁵⁰ which makes sense when you consider that the aforementioned Pew Research report also listed 66% of consistent conservatives as having close friends who share political viewpoints (a higher percentage than any other listed political group).⁵¹ Salem Media Group (parent company of Regnery) even created a division called Conservative Book Club, providing “a much needed resource” while “the mainstream media tends to celebrate only books from the Left.”⁵² Founded in 1964, it has over 100,000 members⁵³ and has been endorsed by almost every conservative genre writer on the market including Sarah Palin, Bill O’Reilly, Ann Coulter, Dinesh D’Souza, Mark Levin, Mike Gallagher, Hugh Hewitt, and Stacey Dash.⁵⁴ On its current bestseller list are books published by Crown, Holt, Regnery, and even HarperCollins.⁵⁵

Even from this brief overview, the industry relationships are clear, tying authors to agents to imprints to parent companies. This kind of heavily circulated and highly

⁴⁹ “Books,” *Fox News*, accessed May 15, 2017.

<http://www.foxnews.com/category/entertainment/genres/books.html>

⁵⁰ Alex Pareene. “The Conservative Book Industry Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Embarrassing.”

⁵¹ Amy Mitchell, et al., “Political Polarization and Media Habits.”

⁵² “What Is CBC?” *Conservative Book Club*, accessed May 13, 2017. <https://www.conservativebookclub.com/what-is-cbc>.

⁵³ “Conservative Book Club Membership Soars,” *Human Events* (Oct 2, 2007).

<http://humanevents.com/2007/10/02/conservative-book-club-membership-soars/>.

⁵⁴ “Endorsements.” *Conservative Book Club*, accessed May 13, 2017.

<https://www.conservativebookclub.com/endorsements>.

⁵⁵ “Bestseller List.” *Conservative Book Club*, accessed May 13, 2017.

<https://www.conservativebookclub.com/bestseller-list>.

specialized internal promotion would not be possible without the dedication of individualized imprints and the connections they have engendered over the last decade and a half.

Audience

This is the third and final piece of the genre equation; without audience, without “the discourse community” creating a demand and feeding the machine, genres would cease to exist. Here we also get into a sticky point in the conservative publishing mythos of disenfranchisement at the hands of mainstream media: From this research, it seems that blatantly conservative literature has found a consistent place on the New York Times’s bestsellers lists for years (prompting the initial move toward conservative imprints by the Big Five in the first place⁵⁶), and their readership is in fact not only steady but growing.

Threshold has delivered five New York Times No.1 bestsellers in the past six years, including books by Dick Cheney and Laura Ingraham.⁵⁷ Bill O’Reilly’s *Killing Jesus* and Charles Krauthammer’s *Things That Matter* were two of the best-selling books of 2013 according to *Publishers Weekly*, and both are still on the Times Best Sellers list.⁵⁸ Meanwhile the May 21st edition of the 2017 New York Times Bestseller List for combined print and e-book nonfiction boasts a host of conservative titles.⁵⁹ *Shattered*, by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes (Crown), J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy* (HarperCollins), and *The American Spirit*, by Heritage Foundation’s

⁵⁶ Alex Pareene. “The Conservative Book Industry Isn’t Dead, It’s Just Embarrassing.”

⁵⁷ Colin Robinson. “Alt-writing: How the Far Right is Changing US Publishing.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Combined Print & E-book Nonfiction,” *New York Times Booksellers List*. (May 21, 2017).

<https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2017/05/21/combined-print-and-e-book-nonfiction/?action=click&contentCollection=Books&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2Fbooks%2Fbest-sellers%2Fcombined-print-and-e-book-nonfiction%2F®ion=Header&module=ArrowNav&version=Right&pgtype=Reference>.

“rock star historian”⁶⁰ David McCullough (Simon & Schuster) are all accounted for (and all of which made concurrent appearances on CBC’s bestseller lists). Bill O’Reilly is also in traditionally fine form, represented with *Old School: Life in the Sane Lane* (Holt).

A lot of these high-ranking sales can be at least partially attributed to the practice of bulk book buying common in the conservative community. In 2010, Mitt Romney kicked off a speaking tour by requesting his host universities and organizations buy his newly published book, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*.⁶¹ According to the report, he “asked institutions to pay at least \$25,000, and up to the full \$50,000 price, in bulk purchases of the book. With a discount of roughly 40 percent, that meant institutions could [each] wind up with more than 3,000 copies of the book...”

In 2014, POLITICO reported that “the Senate Conservatives Fund (SCF), the right wing group targeting establishment Republican senators, had spent \$427,000 to buy copies of Mark Levin’s four-year-old book *Liberty or Tyranny* to distribute to donors.”⁶² Bulk sales of conservative books offer imprints a tantalizing and commercially valuable potential outlet for new (and not so new) releases, as well as increased odds for a spot on bestseller lists.

But people are also just buying more conservative books in general. Amazon sales of conservative books beat out liberal books in a 2012 pre-election “heat map” representing percentages of purchases per state, as indicated by the graphic below⁶³:

⁶⁰ “David McCullough: Has He Turned Conservative?” *History News Network* (2005). <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/12452>.

⁶¹ Steve Benen, “How To Create a Bestseller (When No One Cares About Your Book),” *Washington Monthly* (Oct 18, 2010). <http://washingtonmonthly.com/2010/10/18/how-to-create-a-best-seller-when-no-one-cares-about-your-book/>.

⁶² Ben Jacobs, “A Right-Wing Group’s \$400K Purchase of Mark Levin’s Book Sets Off a Ruckus,” *The Daily Beast* (Jan 13, 2014). <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/01/13/a-right-wing-group-s-400k-purchase-of-mark-levin-s-book-sets-off-a-ruckus>.

⁶³ Ezra Klein, “Conservative Books Sell Better than Liberal Books,” *The Washington Post* (Aug 22, 2012). https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2012/08/22/conservative-books-sell-better-than-liberal-books-why/?utm_term=.51cda42a1ac0.

Amazon Election Heat Map 2012

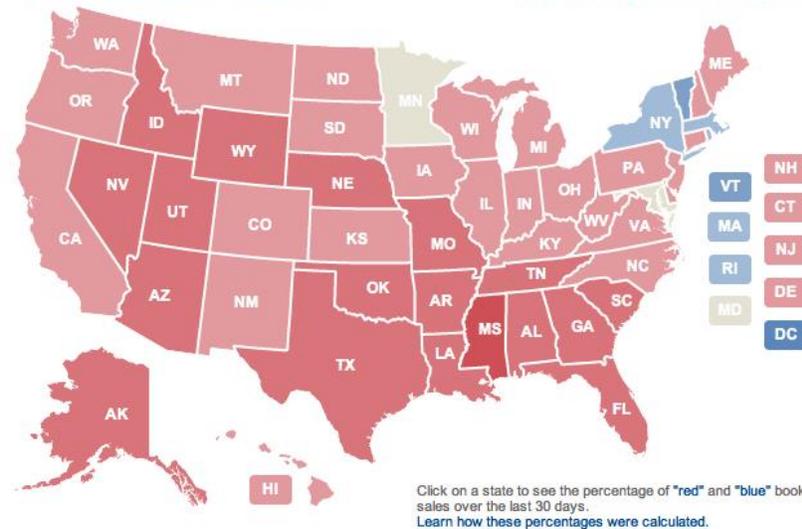
Presented by Amazon Best Sellers

What are Americans Reading? Updated daily

Share   

44% of Purchases Are "Blue" Books

56% of Purchases Are "Red" Books



"There's an undeniably large market for conservative books," Broadside's Bellow asserted in a 2003 interview that has remained relevant to this day. "As to the publishing industry, business rationality has trumped ideological aversion. And that's capitalism."⁶⁴ Ironically, this same appealingly large market and dedication to capitalism is what spurred the conservative publishing industry to move from polite intellectualism and middle-of-the-road literature to the genre-fication that comes with an increasingly honed target audience and a radicalized message.

“CONSERVATIVE”: A POLITICAL RALLYING CRY OR AN INDUSTRY TERM?

Assuming the genre equation posited at the beginning of this section is an accurate barometer—imprint, industry relationships, and target audiences combined—then today's

⁶⁴ Christopher Dreher, "Right Turn: Conservative Publishing Comes of Age."

conservative literature does appear to fulfill the three components necessary for a positive equation. At least in the last decade and at least insofar as they have allowed themselves to be dominated by a radicalization of the indignant pundit, conservative literature has become its own genre.

What does this mean, then, for Deahl, who proposed that the publishing industry's exclusion of conservative titles from more mainstream frontlists merited political bias? Is her source's damning assertion that he has "had editors tell me they wouldn't possibly consider a book by a conservative"⁶⁵ a blatant admission of partisan favoritism, or rather the same line they would offer any author or agent querying a house that doesn't cater to their genre: "I wouldn't possibly consider a book by a fantasy writer or a well-known chef or a poet." I hope that this line of questioning will lead my readers to concur that "conservative" is no longer a political word in this instance, but rather an industry one.

Next Steps for Conservative Publishing

What does this thesis mean for conservative publishing? First, I would suggest that acknowledging the genrefication of conservative literature can only help, not hurt, the pursuit of future publication. In fact, the adoption of and lobbying for the label of "genre" could do more for marketing than eschewing it. The utilization of this system could mean more imprints with dedicated sub-genres, standardized sections in bookstores and libraries, and individualized BISAC codes or Amazon book categories, resulting in greater visibility both in brick-and-mortar stores and online.

⁶⁵ Rachel Deahl, "Is Publishing Too Liberal?"

For conservative authors hoping to get their manuscripts acquired, understanding how genre works in the submission process could be infinitely helpful. It may also help explain why their book has had trouble being acquired previously. After all, to reject a book because it conflicts with one's backlist or because the publisher is not best equipped to market a genre is business as usual. In fact, this is manuscript submission 101 for new authors hoping to get their book acquired.

Genre author Ira Irvine cites "ignoring the submission guidelines on a publisher's website" and "not bothering to research the kind of work the publisher publishes" as primary ways to "irritate publishers and create a really bad impression."⁶⁶ Open Road Integrated Media CEO and co-founder Jane Friedman lists "research publishers and agents appropriate for your work" as one of the most important things when trying to publish your book.⁶⁷ Editor Julie Scheina of Little, Brown says her first two questions for every query she receives are: "Does this fit with what I have on my list at Little, Brown? Does this fit with what other editors have at Little, Brown?"⁶⁸ Knowing one's book will be subjected to this kind of thought process along with books of other genres can help conservative authors and agents better create an effective publication game plan.

Ultimately, I am hopeful that this thesis will help conservatives view their place in the publishing industry not as the effect of unfair political segregation. Rather, this is a positive indication that an ever-changing business is running as usual, with conservatives

⁶⁶ Ira Irvine, "What Publishers Hate," *The Truth About Publishing*, accessed May 14, 2017. <http://www.ian-irvine.com/on-writing/what-publishers-hate/>.

⁶⁷ Jane Friedman, "Start Here: How to Publish Your Book," *Jane Friedman* (Oct 13, 2015). <https://janefriedman.com/start-here-how-to-get-your-book-published/>.

⁶⁸ Laurie Pawlik-Kienlen, "17 Reasons Manuscripts are Rejected by Book Publishers and Editors," *The Adventurous Writer*, (Oct 24, 2008). <http://www.theadventurouswriter.com/blogwriting/17-reasons-book-manuscripts-are-rejected/>.

playing an integral role that they have fashioned for themselves since *God and Man at Yale*.

And if being a genre is not something that conservative publishers want, perhaps this paper will at least begin to point out how they can adapt their strategy to get back into the mainstream, however much they love to hate it.

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