



Progressive Book Club Opens for Business

By Allyson Parks

Liberal books, particularly those critical of President Bush, have been a successful market for the past five years, and a new online club is hoping to develop this market into a movement, even after the president has left office.



“The Progressive Book Club, which officially launched [on June 16th], combines the offerings of a traditional book club with the interactive features of an online social network and the ideals of a grass-roots political party,”

according to the Associated Press.

The club offers a variety of books each month with discounts ranging from 10 to 40%. Two dollars from most sales will be donated on the given member’s behalf to such charities as Habitat for Humanity, the Animal Defense Fund, the Center for American Progress, and Save Darfur.

The club’s website features book reviews and recommendations, blog postings, videos, forums for debates, and audio clips, and nearly every publisher is participating, even smaller companies such as Soft Skull Press and Chelsea Green Publishing. Additionally, members will have the opportunity to meet authors and fellow members in person at book discussions, local events, and readings. The club is also receiving support from such blogs and magazines as *Salon*, *The Nation*, and *The Huffington Post*, and will run ads in the *New York Times*. Authors Barbara Kingsolver, Harold Evans, Michael Chabon, and Dave Eggers are some of the editorial board members for the club.

“The idea for this came a few years ago. I kept noticing how the right in America had an ability to get their message across in a way the left didn’t seem to have,” said Elizabeth Wagley, the club’s founder and CEO. No current liberal book club has the scope of the Conservative Book Club, which was founded in the 1960s and has more than 80,000 members.

“Most of our books aren’t going to be about how Republicans

are turkeys,” Wagley said, emphasizing that the books will be focused more on narrative, history, and policy, and will span a broad range of topics, including the environment, health care, globalization, the economy, and religion. There will be 15 releases each month, and the current selection ranges from Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* to the memoirs of former President Clinton to novels by Toni Morrison.

According to the Associated Press, “Wagley said she and fellow organizers quickly agreed on calling themselves ‘progressive,’ not because they feared the word ‘liberal’ — much disparaged in recent years — but because ‘progressive’ is more appealing and more accurate.”

“‘Liberal’ is a sort of ideology, and continues to be a very strong and valuable one that I proudly adopt, and everybody here would proudly adopt. But progressive is a way of thinking which encompasses what we are. This is a forward-thinking operation. This club is about what we can do about the future,” Wagley said.

The Progressive Book Club hopes to build its membership from the more than 72 million registered Democratic voters and to find success due to the growing trend in online book sales, which account for 21% of all books purchased in the US, according to the club’s June 16th press release.

“As Americans become increasingly involved with the political process and concerned about our nation’s direction, the progressive movement is at a critical crossroads. We’ve created an innovative platform that encourages people to explore important issues and engage in debate, while empowering them to learn more — and do more — to make a difference,” Wagley said.

Visit the club’s website, www.ProgressiveBookClub.com, to learn more and become a member.

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