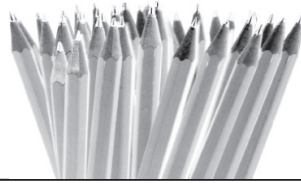


Page 2



OUT OF PRINT

JEFFREY R. DI LEO, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

America watched aghast as the halls of Congress were invaded by a mob of violent and angry supporters of a sitting President.

Five people lost their lives in the Capitol riot including a police officer.

Meanwhile, a freshman senator from Missouri, who was the first member of the Senate to announce that he would object to the counting of the Electoral College votes, raised his fist in solidarity with the mob assembled that day. Photographers captured the striking image for the world to see.

At forty-one, Senator Joshua Hawley was on that fateful Wednesday a rising star in the Republican Party with next term presidential aspirations. But the day after, the youngest sitting senator in America had the largest newspapers in his home state calling for his resignation, and one of the most powerful publishers in the world cancelling his book contract.

His book, *The Tyranny of Big Tech*, was scheduled by Simon & Schuster to be published in six months. It was to deal with technology corporations like Amazon, Facebook, and Google.

“We,” announced Simon & Schuster, “did not come to this decision lightly.”

But these were not the words of founders Lincoln Schuster and Richard Simon, who started the company in the 1920s to publish crossword puzzles.

Rather, they were a statement from a company owned a century later by Viacom CBS with dozens of imprints and a backlist of more than 30,000 titles including works by Don DeLillo, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Stephen King, and Edith Wharton.

In addition, a few weeks after the presidential election that fomented the Capitol riot, it was announced that Simon & Schuster would be sold to Penguin Random House for \$2.2 billion dollars — twice the asking price.

The resulting company would be the first megapublisher in the world as Penguin Random House is the largest book publisher in the United States and Simon & Schuster is the third largest. Also, the deal would transfer ownership of Simon & Schuster to the German media conglomerate Bertelsmann, which currently owns Penguin Random House.

In the estimation of News Corp — the owner of HarperCollins, who could not match the purchase price of Bertelsmann — Penguin Random House-Simon & Schuster would become the publisher of 70% of literary and general fiction in the US.

For those who still believe that American-made-fiction is fiction that is produced in the US, this merger will be a powerful reality check: it means that a single German media company will now control the production, distribution, and sale of the vast majority of fiction made in this country.

As one can imagine, this transaction sends yet another shock wave of fear into the world of small press publishing. If the merger of Random House with Penguin in 2013 was a terrifying prospect to the tens of thousands of presses who publish in their shadow, then the creation of an even more powerful literary leviathan through the acquisition of Simon & Schuster will be regarded as nothing short of catastrophic to those who oppose corporate publishing and all it stands for.

“The monstrously big Penguin Random House-Simon & Schuster,” said Dennis Johnson, co-founder and publisher of Melville House, “will be a threat to all the stuff about the book business that most of us in it champion, but are often too shy to shout about — free speech, art making, and perfecting and preserving democracy.”

Yet, despite the threat Penguin Random House-Simon & Schuster poses to democracy, Johnson does not plan to stop utilizing the megapublisher as Melville House’s distributor. Rather, they will continue to enjoy the golden gears of the corporate publishing distribution machine in full knowledge of the costs to free speech, the arts, and democracy required to maintain them. Plus, writes Johnson, this corporate publisher is “not only very, very good at what it does, but filled with, individually, the friendliest, hardest-working, most book-loving people.”

But contrary to Johnson’s view, Simon & Schuster regards their actions in the Hawley case as *protecting* democracy, rather than threatening to destroy it. So, whom should we believe?

“As a publisher it will always be our mission to amplify a variety of voices and viewpoints,” said Simon & Schuster upon cancelling Hawley’s book contract. “At the same time we take seriously our larger public responsibility as citizens, and cannot support Senator Hawley after his role in what became a dangerous threat.”

So, by their admission, there is nothing in particular about *The Tyranny of Big Tech* that led to its cancellation. But even though the content of the book is not objectionable, its author is. The position of this publisher is that in order to protect democracy from the threat posed to it by Hawley, they will not publish a book by him *that is not* a threat to democracy.

But isn’t this one of the things that Johnson was warning about as becoming amplified when Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster merge? Namely, the merger will result in the publication of fewer heterodox and controversial thinkers thereby inhibiting the freedom of speech that lies at the heart of democracy?

In many ways, the Hawley case turns the neoliberal economic imperative of corporate publishing on its head because presumably by not publishing his book they are — given his notoriety — missing out on potentially lucrative sales. Then again, a small press, which is much more ideologically rather than financially driven, faced with the prospect of huge sales from an author whose political views they find objectionable, would never be in the position of Simon

Di Leo continued on page 15

American Book Review

Founded 1977 by Ronald Sukenick
Published at the School of Arts and Sciences,
University of Houston–Victoria

Publisher: Jeffrey R. Di Leo
Editor: Jeffrey R. Di Leo
Managing Editor: Jeffrey A. Sartain
Assistant Editor: JJ Hernandez
Layout: JJ Hernandez
Subscription Manager: Vikki Fitzpatrick

Cover Image: © Keith J Finks
Shutterstock Image
ID 1271869393

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American Book Review appears bimonthly.

American Book Review is published by its editors and is made possible, in part, by generous support from the School of Arts and Sciences, University of Houston–Victoria and Friends of *ABR*. This project is also supported in part by awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes a great nation deserves great art, and the Texas Commission on the Arts. *ABR* is also a member of the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

Trade distribution by Hudson–RPM, 150 Black River Road, Worcester, MA 01607; and Armadillo, 7310 LaCienaga Blvd., Inglewood, CA 90302. Indexed in Humanities International Complete, Book Review Index, Current Contents/Arts & Humanities, and Arts & Humanities Citation Index.



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