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Trends in Book Pricing by Subject Area - June 30, 2003

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Each year, Blackwell’s reports on pricing trends in academic monograph publishing. We derive this data from the books that were treated on our academic Approval Program during the previous year. In the year ending last June, we treated 41,639 academic monograph titles with an average list price of $61.88. Excluding 1,697 reprints, the average list price of the 39,942 remaining new titles was $62.94. This represents a 2% price increase in the average price of an approval monograph from the previous year.

Trends in Pricing in the Humanities

Within the universe of approval books, 14,084 Humanities and Fine Arts books increased 3% in price, from $46.99 to $48.56. Art books (1,375 titles) fell 1%, from an average price of $51.37 to $51.04. Books on Architecture (493 titles) also fell 1%, from $54.48 to $53.88. Performing Arts books (1,072 titles) increased 2%, from $49.63 to $50.79. Music as a subcategory of Performing Arts rose slightly more than the price of an average new title — 4%, instead of the average 3% overall. Within Humanities there were also some significant deviations from the average: the price of an average History title rose 6%, from $48.35 to $51.19, as did Folklore and Mythology books, from $39.98 to $42.57. The price of the average Literary text rose 3%, from $25.39 to $26.11, while the price of a volume of Literary Criticism rose just 2%, from $55.88 to $57.15. Religion titles also rose 2%, from $50.52 to $51.52 and Philosophy titles fell 3%, from $63.58 to $61.99.

Trends in Pricing in the Sciences and Technology

The average price of 13,774 books in the Social Sciences (including Law) rose 1%, from $57.17 to $57.91. Again, within the broader category, significant variations: 1,075 Law titles fell 4% — from $86.64 to $82.82. 1,266 Economics titles fell 1%, from $69.70 to $68.71. Also registering a decline, 270 titles in Military Science fell 17%, from $49.33 to $41.10. Books in Environmental Studies rose 4%, from $63.84 to $66.38, as did books in Education, from $48.51 to $50.53. International Relations titles held steady, rising only four cents on average, from $57.70 to $57.74. And Sports and Recreation titles fell 2%, from $38.27 to $37.54. Psychology titles rose 8%, from $60.92 to $65.69 and 83 Applied Psychology titles rose 11%, from $58.29 to $64.85. 109 Anthropology titles were up 4%, from $62.40 to $64.71. 1,266 Political Science titles stayed virtually the same, filling a nickel from $53.12 to $53.07. In another high publication area, 2,213 Business administration titles rose 6%, from $54.97 to $58.14, while 184 Management titles declined -1%, from $54.55 to $54.01.

Talk of the Trade

by Barry Fast (Deltabooks, 186 Cross Street, City Island, NY 10464; Phone: 718-885-9563) <barry0112@aol.com>

Radar Debuts with Boldface Boors

One of my favorite oxymorons is “popular culture”, and the latest entry in the media world, Radar magazine, is devoted to covering this aspect of American civilization (another oxymoron?). This new magazine launched in May with a cover story on celebrity “Monsters”, people who have “distinguished themselves in the area of physical and verbal abuse, overwhelming arrogance, and by the imposition of a particularly nasty influence over the culture at large.” Michael Moore (Stupid White Men) made the cut for acting out his everyday blue collar routine from his $1.7 million apartment in Manhattan’s Upper West Side. He sends his daughter to a prestigious private school, while “unsuccessfully pressing his writing staff at his TV Nation show not to join the Writers Guild.” He achieved fame and fortune with his pro-union activism, but apparently the only good unions are those in any business but his business.

Partition Review Killed by its Own Success

Speaking of popular culture, we Americans tend to measure success in terms of numbers, the more the better. By other measures, however, a relatively small magazine (circulation never more than 15,000) was brilliantly successful, exerting a powerful influence on political thought and literary taste for at least half a century. Quoting from the New York Times, “From its inaugural issue in 1937, which included Delmore Schwartz’s short story, In Dreams Begin Responsibilities, a poem by Wallace Stevens, and contributions by Lionel Trilling, Sydney Hook and Edmund Wilson, to its heyday,” the 1940s to the 70s, “the journal published an astonishing range of landmark work.”

For many Americans, Partisan Review was their introduction to Abstract Expressionism, Existentialism, and New Criticism, and the voices of talented young writers such as Norman Mailer, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Hardwick and Susan Sontag. When many intellectuals were in the thrall of communism and apologists for Stalin, the Partisan Review gave a strong voice to American liberalism, providing a forum for political ideas that opposed totalitarianism (a word we don’t hear much any longer, apparently) with a wide and eclectic array of articles, reviews, and book notes. In the 1960s, Partisan Review published a number of strong pieces on the status of black Americans and the reality of American racism, including a series of articles by a young black writer named James Baldwin. When Partisan Review was purchased by the University of Pennsylvania Press in the 1980s, the magazine continued to publish a wide range of articles on political, cultural, and intellectual issues, including pieces by figures such as bell hooks and Noam Chomsky.

Partisan Review was a key player in the New Left of the 1960s, and its influence can be seen in the work of later political and cultural critics, such as bell hooks, who wrote extensively for the magazine. Partisan Review was also instrumental in the development of the anti-war movement, publishing articles and essays by prominent anti-war activists such as Daniel Ellsberg and Daniel Berrigan. The magazine’s legacy continues to be felt today, with its commitment to publishing a wide range of voices and perspectives on political and cultural issues.