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American Booksellers Association's National "Boxed Out" Campaign Returns as Antitrust Legal Action Heats Up in Time for Amazon's Prime Day

(White Plains, New York) While the hopeful signs of a post-pandemic life are growing, many small businesses are still struggling to recover. And while the United States faced the worst economic crisis in almost a century, Amazon's operating income increased from \$4.0 billion in Q1 2020 to \$8.9 billion in Q1 2021, a 123% increase.

Last year during Prime Day, the American Booksellers Association (ABA), a not-for-profit trade association supporting 1,800 independent bookstores across the country, launched #BoxedOut, a national marketing campaign that received widespread coverage. Independent bookstore storefronts were covered with cardboard facades, reminiscent of the ubiquitous Amazon brown boxes on porches and in lobbies across America, and quotes such as "Don't box out bookstores" and "Books curated by a real person, not a creepy algorithm," and hundreds of indie bookstores took to social media to start a conversation about the cost and consequences of "convenience" shopping and how the growing market dominance of Amazon adversely affects local communities: the erosion of jobs, a loss of character for our hometowns, and less money for the local

economy. The 2019 Civic Economics *Prime Numbers* study reports that 28 percent of all revenue from indie bookstores immediately recirculates in the local economy vs. only 4 percent when you shop with Amazon.

As Prime Day 2021 approaches, a significant national conversation about antitrust and monopolies is already underway. In the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, legislation has been introduced that would curb the monopoly power of Amazon and other dominant Big Tech corporations. District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine has launched an antitrust lawsuit against Amazon to end practices that have raised prices for shoppers, stifled innovation, and limited choice for consumers, and the Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, California, New York, and Washington State attorneys general are reported to be conducting investigations into potential antitrust violations by Amazon. And this week, the Biden Administration announced that the most prominent legal voice for effective antitrust enforcement in the 21st century — Lina Khan — has been appointed as chair of the Federal Trade Commission, the agency charged with enforcement of civil U.S. antitrust law and the promotion of consumer protection.

In contrast to Amazon's record profits this past year, more than one independent bookstore a week has closed during the pandemic. Others were able to survive and, in some cases, thrive through resilience, innovation, and community support. Bookstores launched virtual event series, FaceTime personalized shopping, and Facebook Live storytimes; started local delivery and subscription services; opened pop-up locations and shifted their businesses online; and offered community support through book drives, hotlines, food pantries, voter registration, COVID testing, antiracism resources, and more. Thirty-two independent bookstores have opened so far this year and thousands of readers are going to IndieBound.org and Bookshop.org every day to find their local bookstore. But bookstores, like many small businesses, are on precarious ground coming out of the pandemic: they are facing unprecedented expenses, supply chain disruption, and safety concerns continue, and in the weeks and months ahead they will be challenged by inflation, the labor shortage, and more uncertainty.

Amazon is marketing its Prime Day event as two days of “epic deals,” but ABA’s #BoxedOut campaign is returning to talk about what’s at stake. Danny Caine, the owner of Raven Bookstore in Lawrence, Kansas, speaks to the cost in his recently published book, *How to Resist Amazon and Why: The Fight for Local Economies, Data Privacy, Fair Labor, Independent Bookstores, and a People-Powered Future*.

In a recent op-ed piece, ABA CEO Allison Hill stated, “This is a crucial moment in history. As the pandemic subsides and we return to the social spaces that bring us together, we will decide whether we want to be commoditized or recognized as individuals. Independent businesses all across the country add diversity, character, and humanity to our communities and they need our support. Without them, we’re just another brown box.”

About ABA

Founded in 1900, the American Booksellers Association is a national not-for-profit trade organization that works to help independently-owned bookstores grow and succeed. Our 1,800 bookstores act as neighborhood anchors; offering a third place to gather, promoting authors and reading, enriching the cultural life of communities, and creating economically vibrant neighborhoods.

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