



A RESEARCH REPORT BY BOOKNET CANADA

BNC RESEARCH 07.2009

The Impact of Obama on Book Sales in Canada: Is Obama the New Oprah?

Summary

Based on the information collected from BNC SalesData, we were able to determine the following:

- Major events during the 2008 U.S. presidential election and the associated media attention had a great effect on the sale of books by Barack Obama in Canada. Sales began trending with the election as far back as February 2007 when Obama announced his candidacy.
- Unlike titles that were written by Obama himself, books about him did not result in significant sales increases in Canada throughout the election.
- While Canadian booksellers expected Hillary Rodham Clinton and John McCain's autobiographies to do well, it appears as though sales did not meet expectations. There were sales spikes at key points in each of their campaigns, but in comparison to Obama's books, sales were dismal.
- Having Obama back a book through interviews, Facebook or photographs led to interesting sales changes: literary fiction saw no significant sales change, but he did have an impact on political science.

Confidentiality

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Table of Contents

Summary.....	1
Confidentiality	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Approach.....	3
2008 United States Election Timeline	4
Obama the Author	5
Obama Election Sales Summary	5
Units sold during the 2008 presidential election.....	6
<i>Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance</i> and <i>The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream</i>	6
Format Comparison for <i>The Audacity of Hope</i> : Trade Paperback vs. Mass Market	7
Obama the Subject	8
Units sold during the 2008 presidential election.....	9
Other 2008 U.S. Presidential Election Figures	10
Hillary Rodham Clinton.....	10
Clinton Election Sales Summary	10
<i>Living History</i>	11
Units sold during the 2008 presidential election	11
Units sold, on hand, and on order during the 2008 presidential election for <i>Living History</i>	12
John McCain.....	13
McCain Election Sales Summary.....	13
<i>Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir</i>	14
Units sold during the 2008 presidential election	14
Units sold, on hand, and on order during the 2008 presidential election for <i>Living History</i>	15
Candidate Comparison.....	16
Obama vs. McCain vs. Clinton.....	16
Is Obama the New Oprah?	17
<i>The Post-American World</i>	18
<i>Team of Rivals</i>	19
<i>Song of Solomon</i>	20
<i>Gilead</i>	21
<i>Netherland: A Novel</i>	22
<i>Open Veins of Latin America</i>	23
Conclusion	24

Introduction

As the best-selling author of two books to date, the subject of numerous others, and a reportedly voracious reader of everything from political science to literary fiction, Barack Obama just might live up to his reputation of being America's most bookish president.

According to Publishers Weekly, having Obama simply mention *Netherland: A Novel* by Joseph O'Neill in an interview for the New York Times Magazine led Random House to jump on the phone and increase the print run by 2,500 copies "to start" – but does Obama's impact cross borders? In this study, we have looked at Canadian sales by volume during and after the 2008 United States election for books:

- By Barack Obama: *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*
- About Barack Obama: Obama has been the subject of numerous books, five of which will be the focus of this study.
- Associated with Barack Obama: Obama has mentioned various books in interviews, listed them on his Facebook page, and has been publicly given books as gifts
- About other candidates: John McCain and Hillary Rodham Clinton

Approach

We began our evaluation of U.S. President Barack Obama's effect on the Canadian book market by examining how the sales of his books and books about him trended through the 2008 United States federal election, looking back to October 2006 when Obama started to hint at the possibility of running for president.

Next, we examined sales trends by volume for other candidates: John McCain and Hillary Rodham Clinton. In this section we examined books both by and about the other candidates.

Since President Obama is such an avid reader, we looked at books he has listed as his favourites, books he has been seen reading, and books he has been given publicly.

Caveats

- Based on publisher feedback, it is estimated that BNC SalesData represents about 75% of book industry sales. Some non-traditional retailers and retail categories can be found in the remaining 25% that are not fully represented by BNC SalesData. As a result, sales from these categories may not be as accurately represented in this study.
- Data was compiled in situations where more than one edition of a title was available.

2008 United States Election Timeline¹

10/22/06	Democratic Senator Barack Obama hints that he may run for the presidency in 2008 on NBC News' Meet the Press
12/1/2006	Obama announces that he is considering running for president on The Tonight Show
12/3/2006	Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton begins discussions with New York Democratic officials, indicating the possibility of a 2008 presidential campaign
1/17/2007	Obama announces that he is forming an exploratory committee
1/20/2007	Clinton announces that she is forming an exploratory committee Clinton posts "I'm in" on her website
2/10/2007	Obama officially announces his candidacy
4/25/2007	McCain launches his presidential campaign
5/25/2007	First post from Obama on his Facebook page
2/1/2008	will.i.am's Emmy Award-winning "Yes We Can" video launched on ABCNewsNow's "What's the Buzz"
2/5/2008	Super Tuesday
3/5/2008	President George W. Bush endorses McCain.
3/14/2008	Media controversy begins over Jeremiah Wright's past comments on race and patriotism Wright leaves the Obama campaign's spiritual advisory committee
3/18/2008	Obama's "A More Perfect Union" address
6/7/2008	Clinton officially concedes the Democratic nomination, and endorses Obama
7/23/2008	Obama makes a trip to Europe and the Middle East
8/27/2008	Obama is officially nominated for President by the Democratic Party
8/28/2008	Obama accepts the Democratic Party presidential nomination
8/29/2008	McCain announces his selection of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate.
9/3/2008	McCain is officially nominated for President by the Republican Party
9/4/2008	McCain accepts the Republican Party nomination
10/23/2008	SNL Election Special
11/4/2008	Election Day McCain concedes the election in Phoenix, Arizona President-elect Obama gives his victory speech in Chicago, Illinois
1/20/2009	Barack Obama is inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States
2/9/2009	Obama gives his first White House press conference

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "United States presidential election, 2008 timeline," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=United_States_presidential_election,_2008_timeline&oldid=293620405 (accessed June 1, 2009).

Obama the Author

Barack Obama is the author of two texts that can be traced through the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* will be the focus of the following section of the study.

Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance is Obama's autobiography that was originally published in 1995 with Obama being offered the book contract after becoming the first black president of the Harvard Law Review. It was re-released in 2004 after his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream is the second autobiography from Obama. Released in October 2006, this book expands on his speech from the 2004 Democratic National Convention, laying out his political position in contrast to *Dreams from My Father* which was more of a memoir.

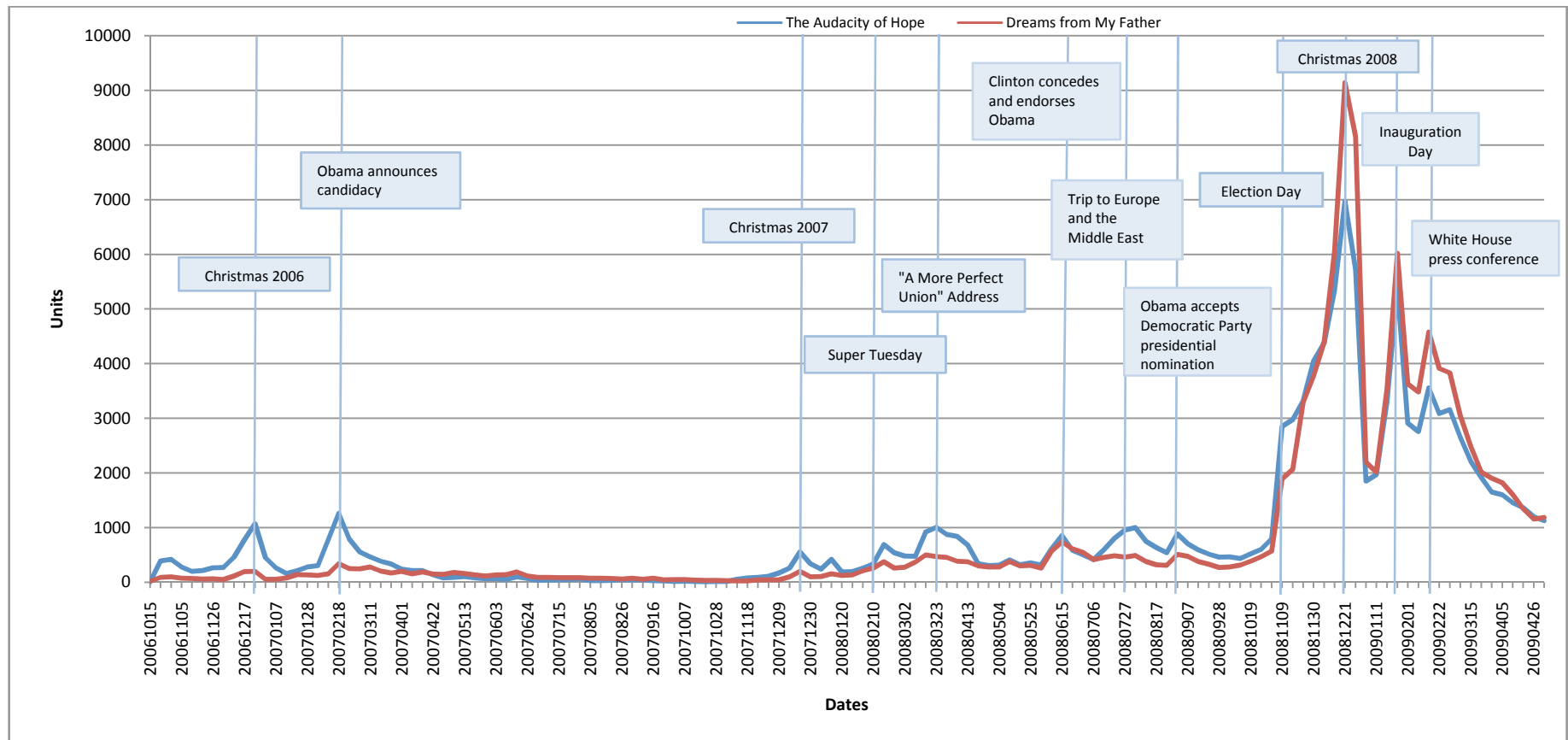
Obama Election Sales Summary

Aside from the usual Christmas spikes, sales of Obama's books rose considerably during peak periods throughout the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Some dates to note include:

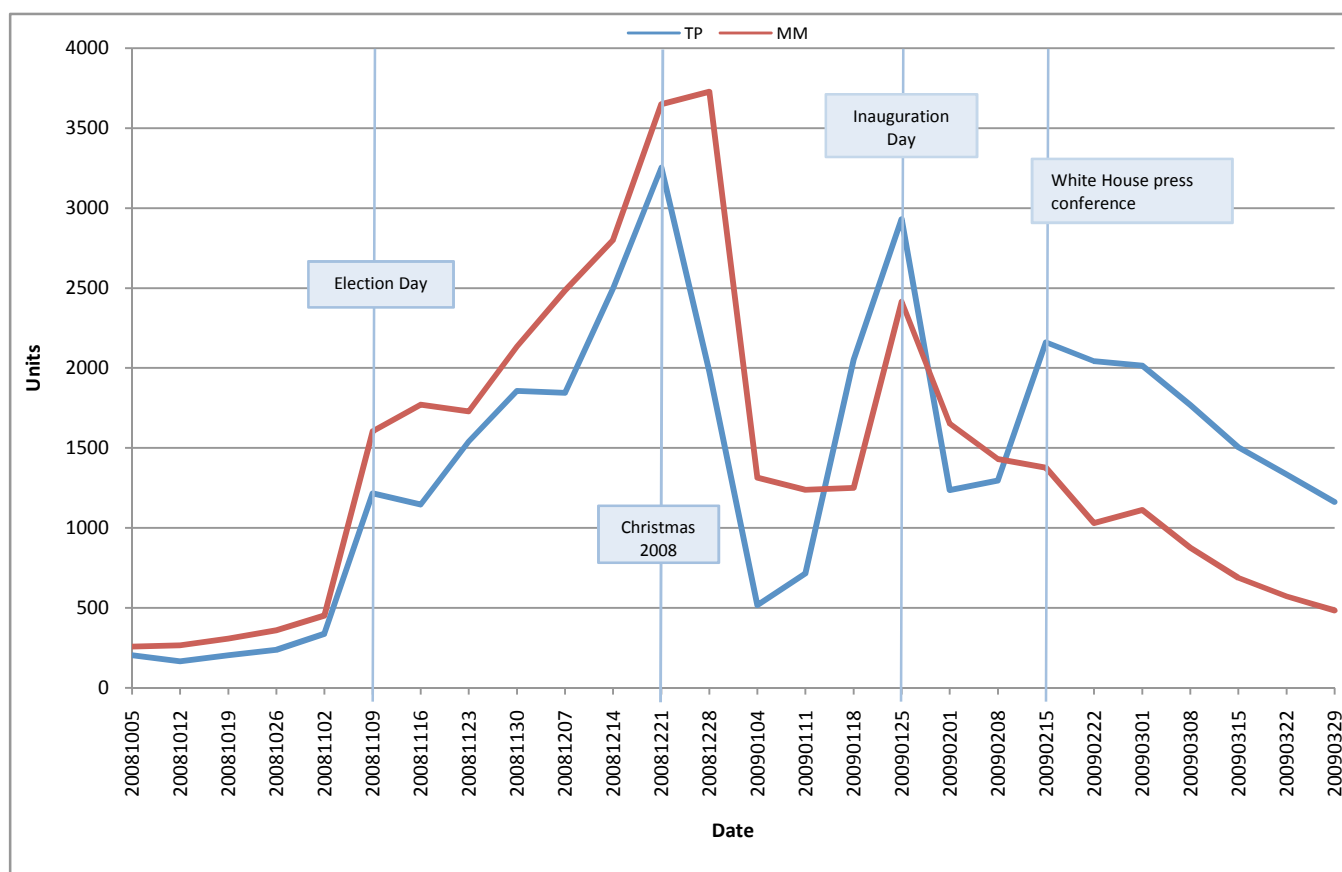
- February 10, 2007: Obama officially announces his candidacy
- February 5, 2008: Super Tuesday, the day when the majority of U.S. states hold primary elections.
- March 18, 2008: Obama's "A More Perfect Union" address, which responded to media attention being paid to controversial remarks made by Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor and former spiritual advisor for his campaign.
- June 7, 2008: Clinton officially concedes the Democratic Party nomination and endorses Obama.
- July 23, 2008: Obama makes a trip to Europe and the Middle East.
- August 28, 2008: Obama accepts the Democratic Party presidential nomination.
- November 4, 2008: Election Day
- January 20, 2009: Obama is inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States
- February 9, 2009: Obama's first White House press conference

Units sold during the 2008 presidential election

Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream



Format Comparison for *The Audacity of Hope*: Trade Paperback vs. Mass Market



Comparing sales of trade paperback and mass market paperback editions of *The Audacity of Hope* show that during the Christmas season the mass market edition sold higher volumes. On the other hand, around the presidential inauguration and the first White House press conference, sales of the trade paperback edition were much higher. Apparently quality counts when you become president.

Obama the Subject

Barack Obama has been the subject of numerous books, five of which will be the focus of this study. These five titles include the first biography about Obama, a biography from LIFE Magazine, a collectors item from TIME Magazine, a critique of the candidate, and a title that goes so far as to call Obama a threat to U.S. national security.

Hopes and Dreams: The Story of Barack Obama

Steve Dougherty
9781579127565

Released in January 2007, *Hopes and Dreams* was the first biography written about Obama. It saw a small increase in sales after the 2008 election, but quickly dropped back down.

The American Journey of Barack Obama

LIFE Magazine Editors
9780316045605

This biography from the editors of LIFE Magazine has appeared on numerous bestseller lists, including the New York Times and Publishers Weekly. It covers Obama's life from childhood to the 2008 National Democratic Convention.

TIME President Obama

TIME Magazine Editors
9781603200721

TIME President Obama contains original TIME Magazine content including photographs and was marketed as a collectors item. It was released in December 2008, with sales spikes being seen at Christmas and inauguration time.

The Obama Nation: Leftist Politics and the Cult of Personality

Jerome R. Corsi
9781416598060

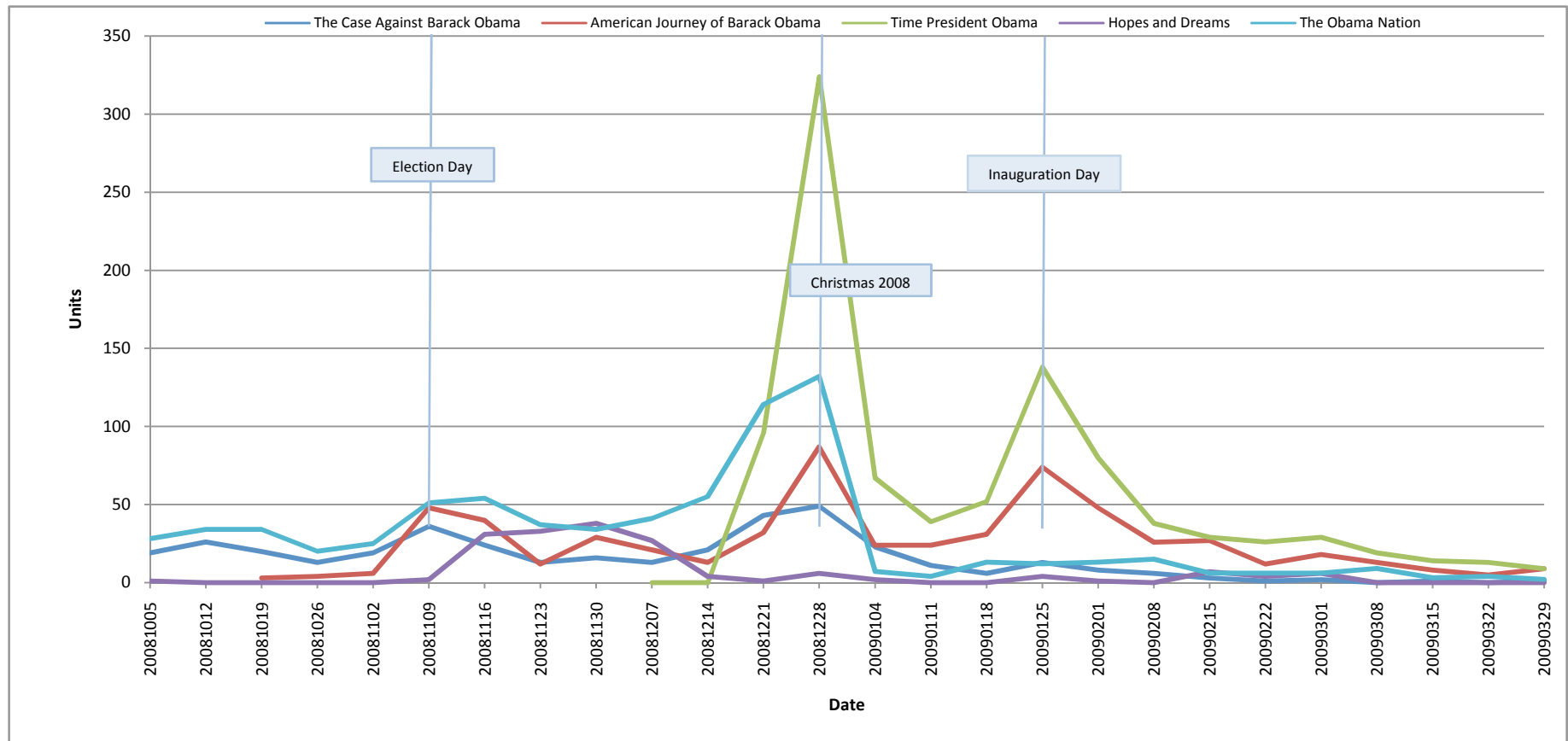
Painting Obama as a left-wing extremist, this biography is touted as being an extremely well-researched critique of the U.S. president. It has appeared on numerous bestseller lists and was mentioned on National Public Radio in October 2008.

The Case Against Barack Obama: The Unlikely Rise and Unexamined Agenda of the Media's Favorite Candidate

David Freddoso
9781596985667

Described as a shocking expose, Freddoso's text describes what he considers to be the real Obama and goes so far as to call him a threat to U.S. national security. It has appeared on numerous bestseller lists, including the New York Times and Publishers Weekly.

Units sold during the 2008 presidential election



Unlike titles that were written by Obama himself, books about him did not result in significant sales increases in Canada throughout the election. Each title saw small sales increases around Election Day, Christmas 2008 and the Inauguration Day, but only *TIME President Obama* made it over 150 copies sold in one week. It was launched two weeks before Christmas, sold well during that period and around Inauguration day, but quickly died out after that.

Other 2008 U.S. Presidential Election Figures

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Rodham Clinton is the author of two books: *Living History* and *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us*.

Living History is Clinton's autobiography and was published in 2003 after her election to the U.S. Senate. It came out with a bit of controversy surrounding whether it was unethical for her to publish an autobiography after getting elected, but was approved by the Senate Ethics Committee.

It Takes a Village is the first book by Clinton and was originally published in 1996. It is classified as a social sciences book and focuses on Clinton's vision for American children.

Although both texts were considered when beginning this study, the subject matter of *It Takes a Village* as well as the fact that its year to date sales amounted to 4 units, resulted in us focusing on the autobiography only. The same is true for titles by John McCain.

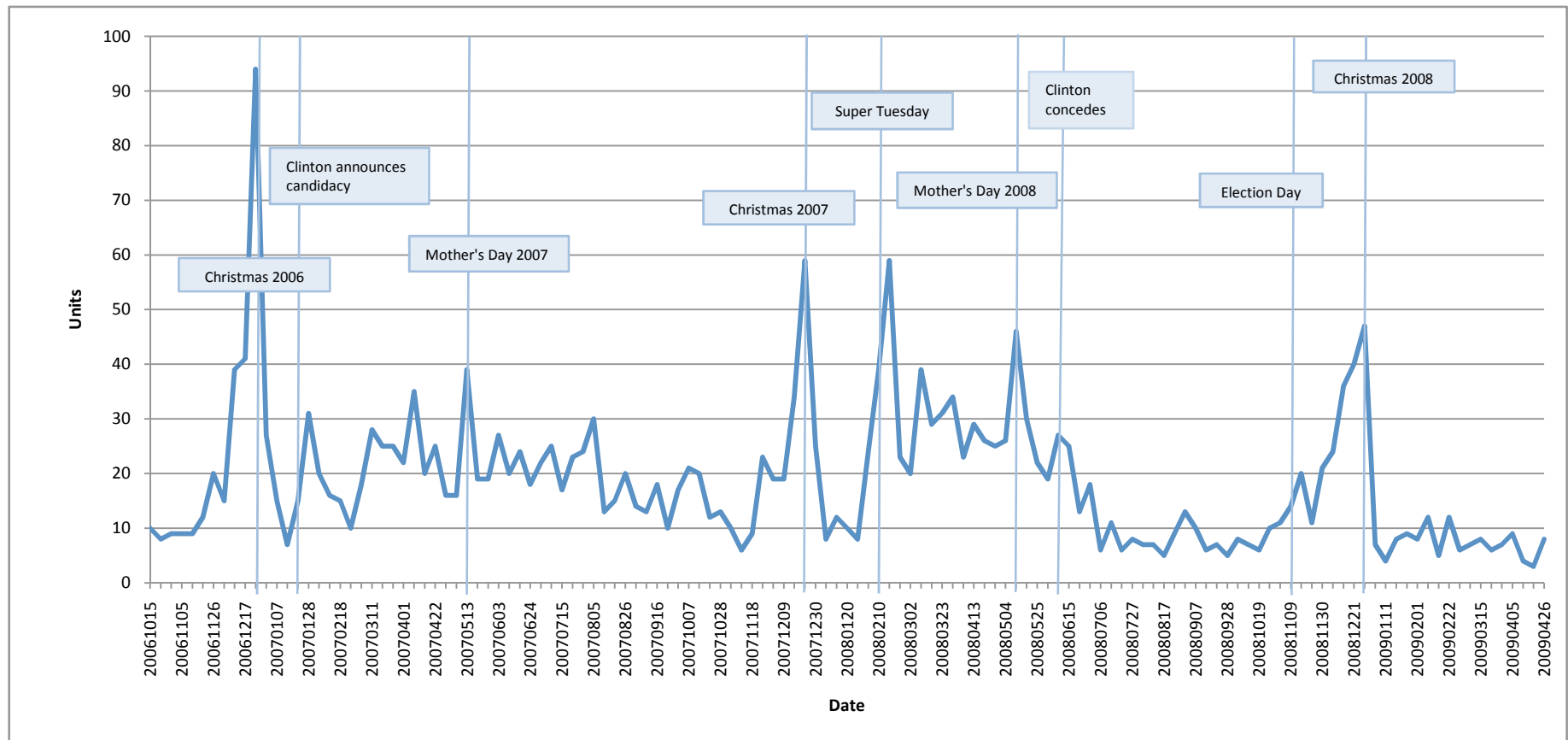
Clinton Election Sales Summary

Aside from the usual Christmas spikes, sales of Clinton's books rose slightly around Mother's Day as well as during peak periods throughout the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Some dates to note include:

- January 20, 2007: Clinton announces her candidacy
- February 5, 2008: Super Tuesday, the day when the majority of U.S. states hold primary elections.
- June 7, 2008: Clinton officially concedes the Democratic Party nomination and endorses Obama.
- November 4, 2008: Election Day

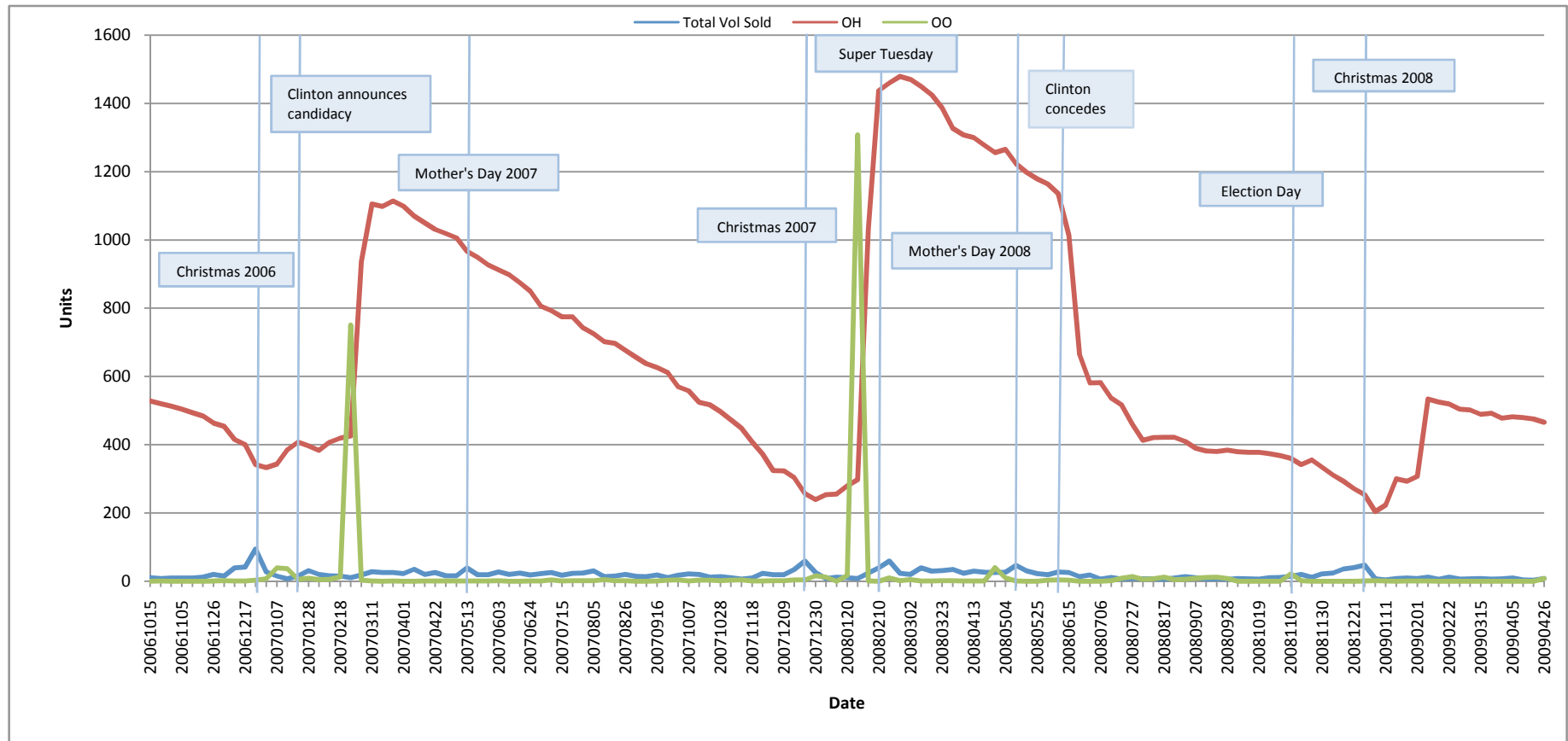
Living History

Units sold during the 2008 presidential election



Living History saw small sales increases during important periods of Clinton's presidential election campaign, but still did not top 100 copies in a week. The most significant spikes (other than Christmas) occurred around Super Tuesday and Mother's Day 2008.

Units sold, on hand, and on order during the 2008 presidential election for *Living History*



Election trends for *Living History* get much more interesting when looking at retailers' units on hand and on order. Canadian retailers were clearly expecting *Living History* to perform much better than it did once Clinton started her campaign as well as around Super Tuesday, but actual sales were far from meeting expectations.

John McCain

John McCain is the author of five books: *Faith of My Fathers*, *Why Courage Matters*, *Worth the Fighting For*, *Character is Destiny*, and *Hard Call*. As with Clinton, only one of McCain's titles is an autobiography with trends being seen throughout the election. As a result, this study will focus on *Faith of My Fathers*.

Faith of My Fathers is McCain's autobiography. It was originally published in 1999 and recounts what McCain learned and applied in his life from his father and grandfather.

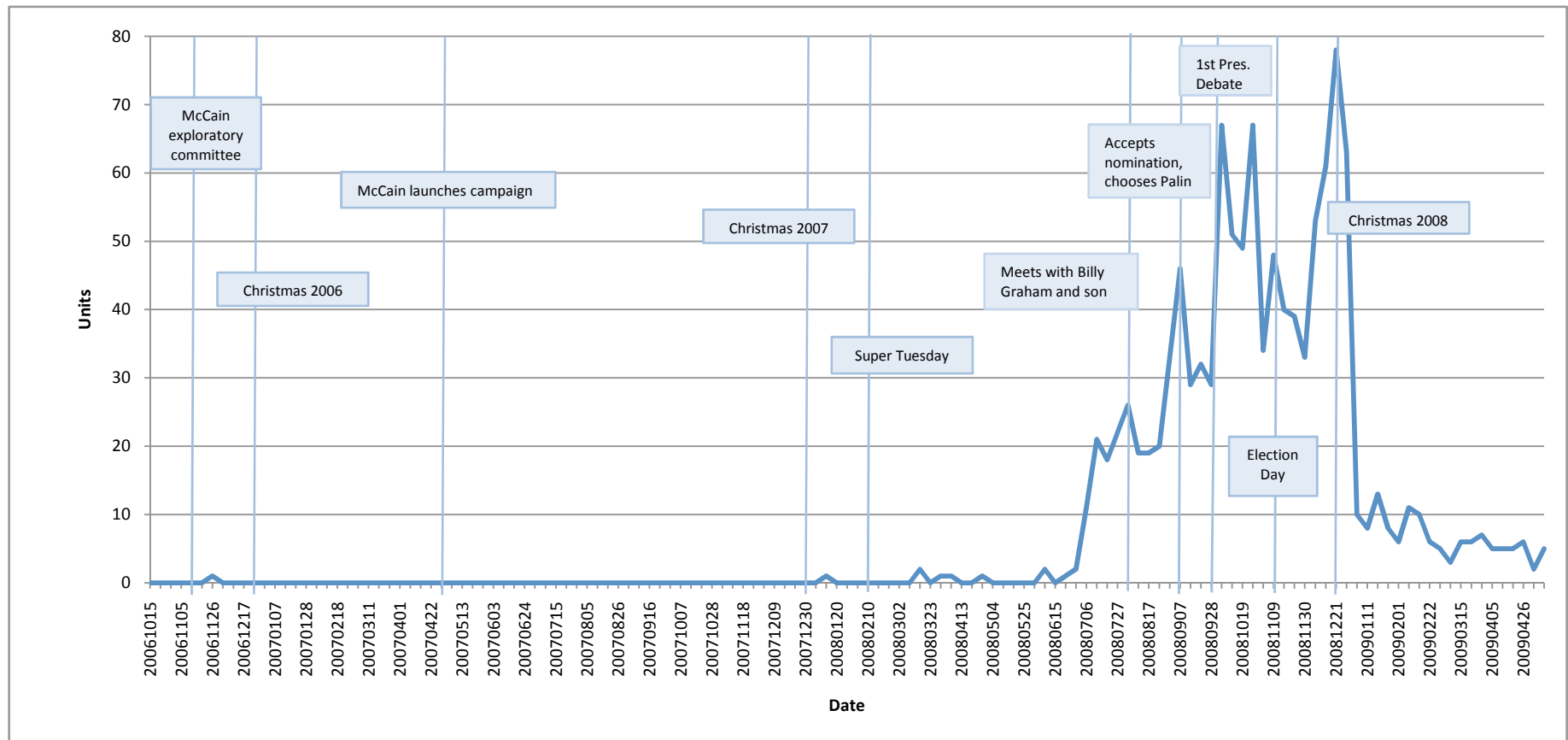
McCain Election Sales Summary

Unlike Obama and Clinton, McCain's sales didn't start to spike until just before the election. Some dates to note include:

- June 29, 2008: McCain meets with Billy Graham and his son.
- September 3, 2008: McCain accepts the Republican presidential nomination.
- September 26, 2008: McCain appears at the first Presidential Debate with Obama.
- November 4, 2008: Election Day

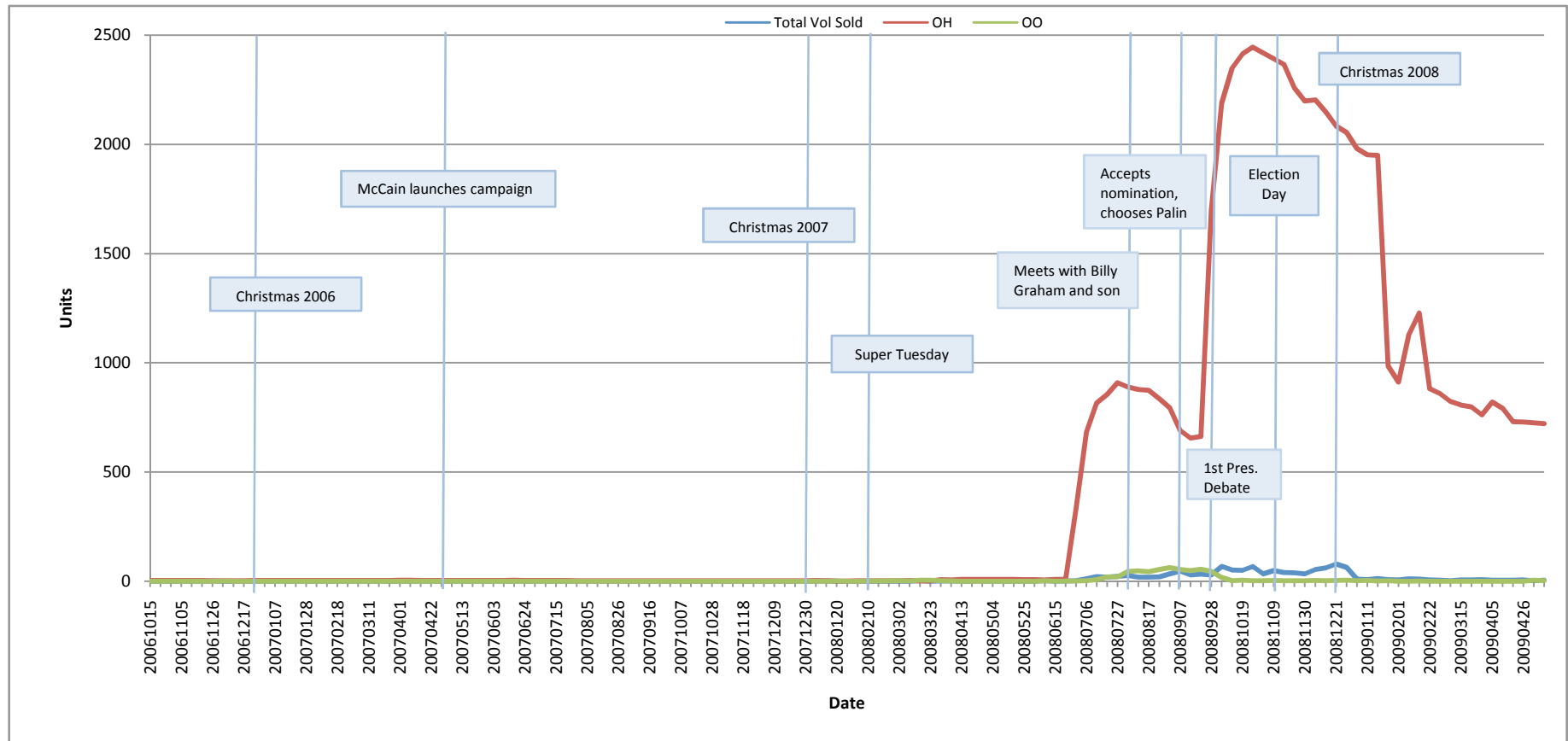
Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir

Units sold during the 2008 presidential election



Unlike Obama and Clinton's books, sales for McCain's *Faith of My Fathers* did not start to increase in relation to the election until the end of the campaign at which point sales increases can be seen when McCain meets with Billy Graham, accepts the Republican Party nomination (and chooses Palin as his running mate), participates in the presidential debates, as well as around Election Day.

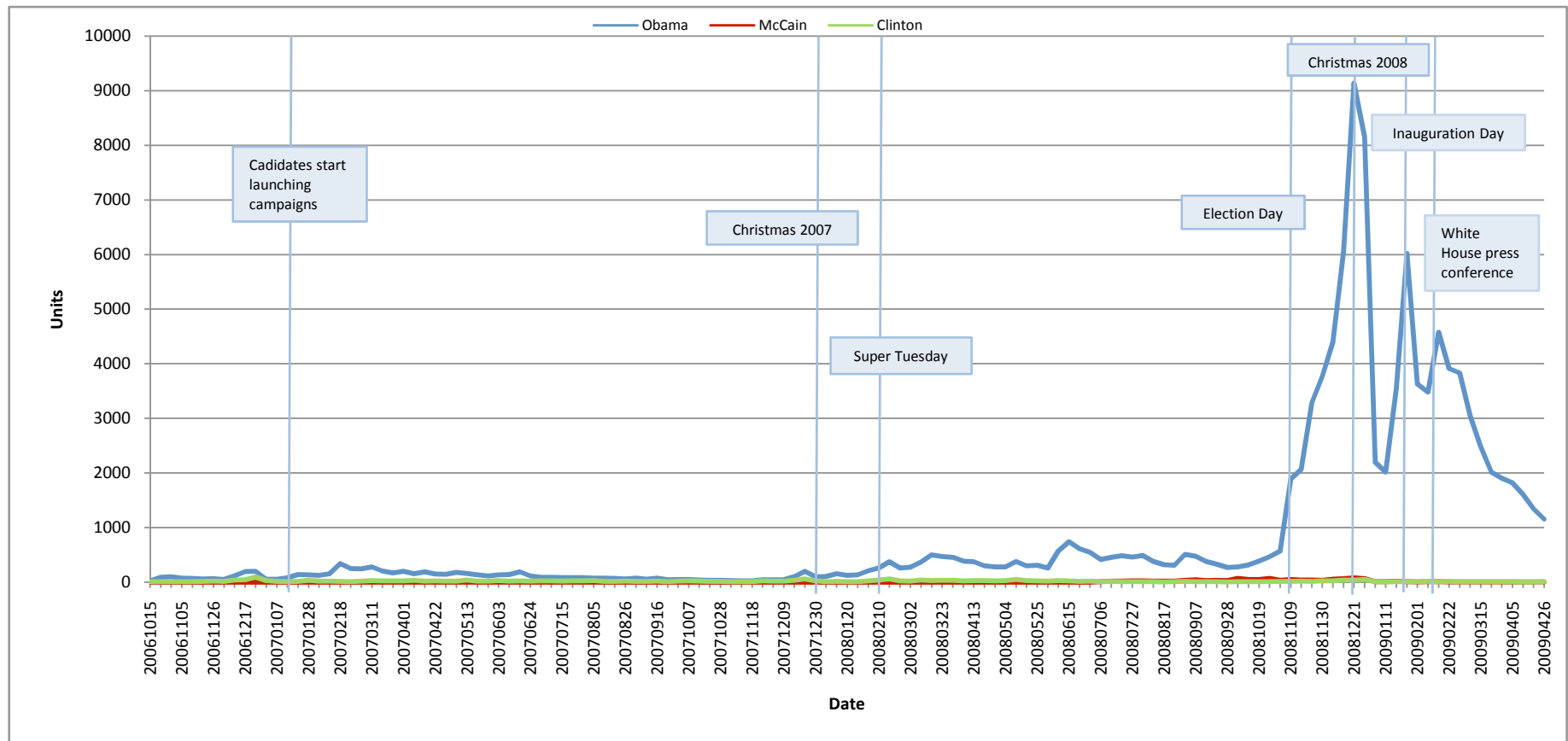
Units sold, on hand, and on order during the 2008 presidential election for *Living History*



Once McCain's sales started increasing as the election day approached, retailers clearly expected greater sales increases as units on hand increased significantly. It appears as though actual sales did not live up to the expectations of booksellers.

Candidate Comparison

Obama vs. McCain vs. Clinton



Although Clinton and McCain each saw sales increases that trended with their election campaigns, this chart makes it clear that they were nowhere close to the sales spikes seen by Obama.

Is Obama the New Oprah?

Obama has been called America's most bookish president, but does his penchant for reading translate to sales in Canada?

The following section will examine the effect Obama has on books that are not authored by him nor about him. Each of the titles is one that Obama has listed as one of his favourites, been seen reading or been given publicly. The titles we will be looking at are:

The Post-American World

Fareed Zakaria

Obama was photographed carrying *The Post-American World* in Bozeman, Montana on May 19, 2008 during a campaign stop.

Team of Rivals

Doris Kearns Goodwin

In January 2008 during Katie Couric's "Primary Questions" series, Obama listed *Team of Rivals* as a book that he thought would be essential to have in the Oval Office. Once elected, media touted Obama's cabinet choices as a team of rivals.

Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison

Song of Solomon was listed as a favourite of Obama's during a Rolling Stone interview on July 10, 2008 as well as in a New York Times article from October 2008. Obama's Facebook page also lists Morrison's book as one of his favourites.

Gilead

Marilynne Robinson

Gilead is listed on Obama's Facebook page, as well as his last work of fiction read in interview with The Associated Press that can be found in a USA Today from May 17, 2007 and a FoxNews.com article from May 14, 2007.

Netherland: A Novel

Joseph O'Neill

Mentioned in interview with New York Times, which made headlines on April 29, 2009. Earlier, O'Neill won the PEN/Faulkner award on Feb 25, 2009 with the ceremony being on May 9, 2009.

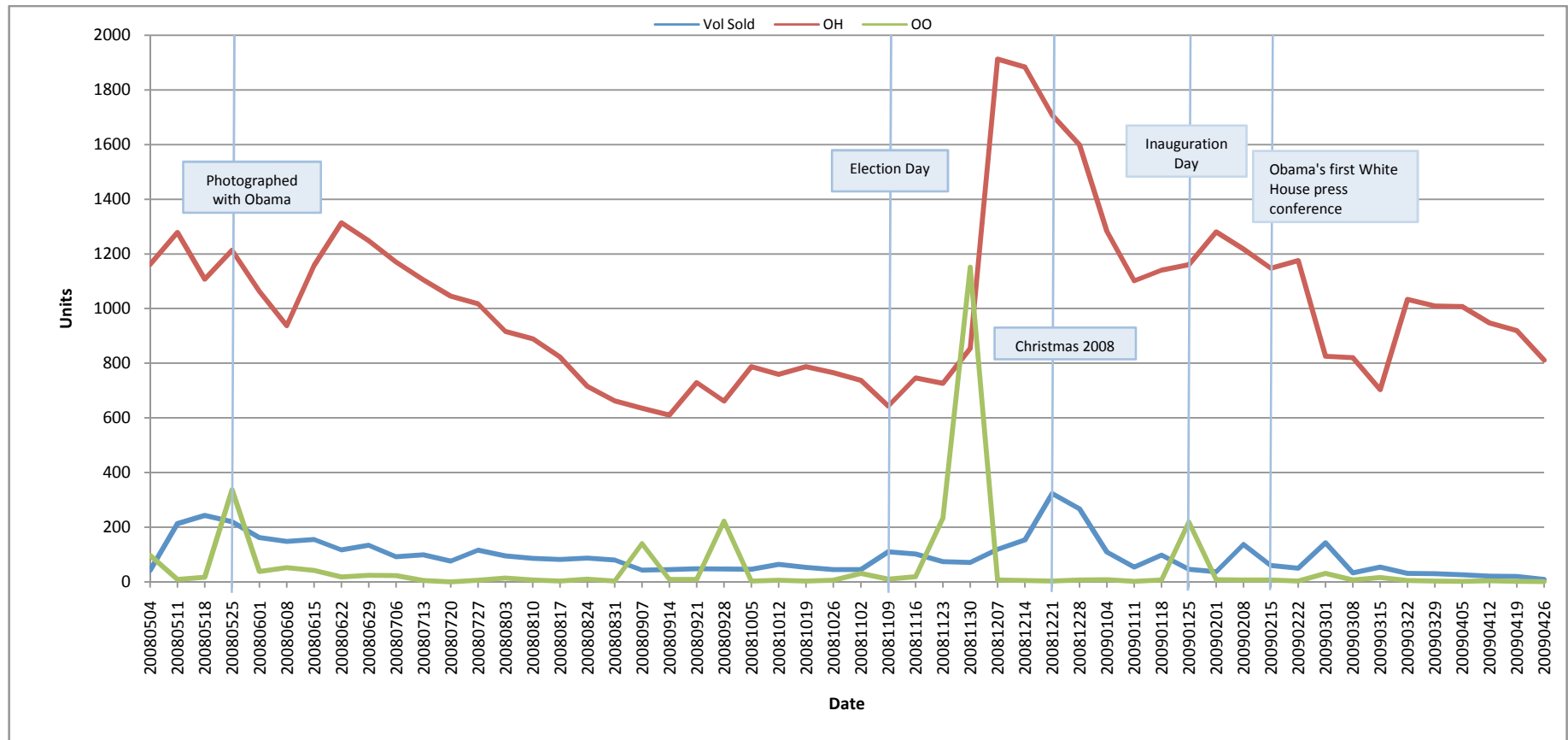
Open Veins of Latin America

Eduardo H. Galeano

Originally published in 1971, *Open Veins of Latin America* gained a new life when Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez gave the book to Obama at the 5th Summit of the Americas April 17 – 19, 2009. By April 19, the book had soared to number 2 on Amazon.com's bestseller list.

The Post-American World

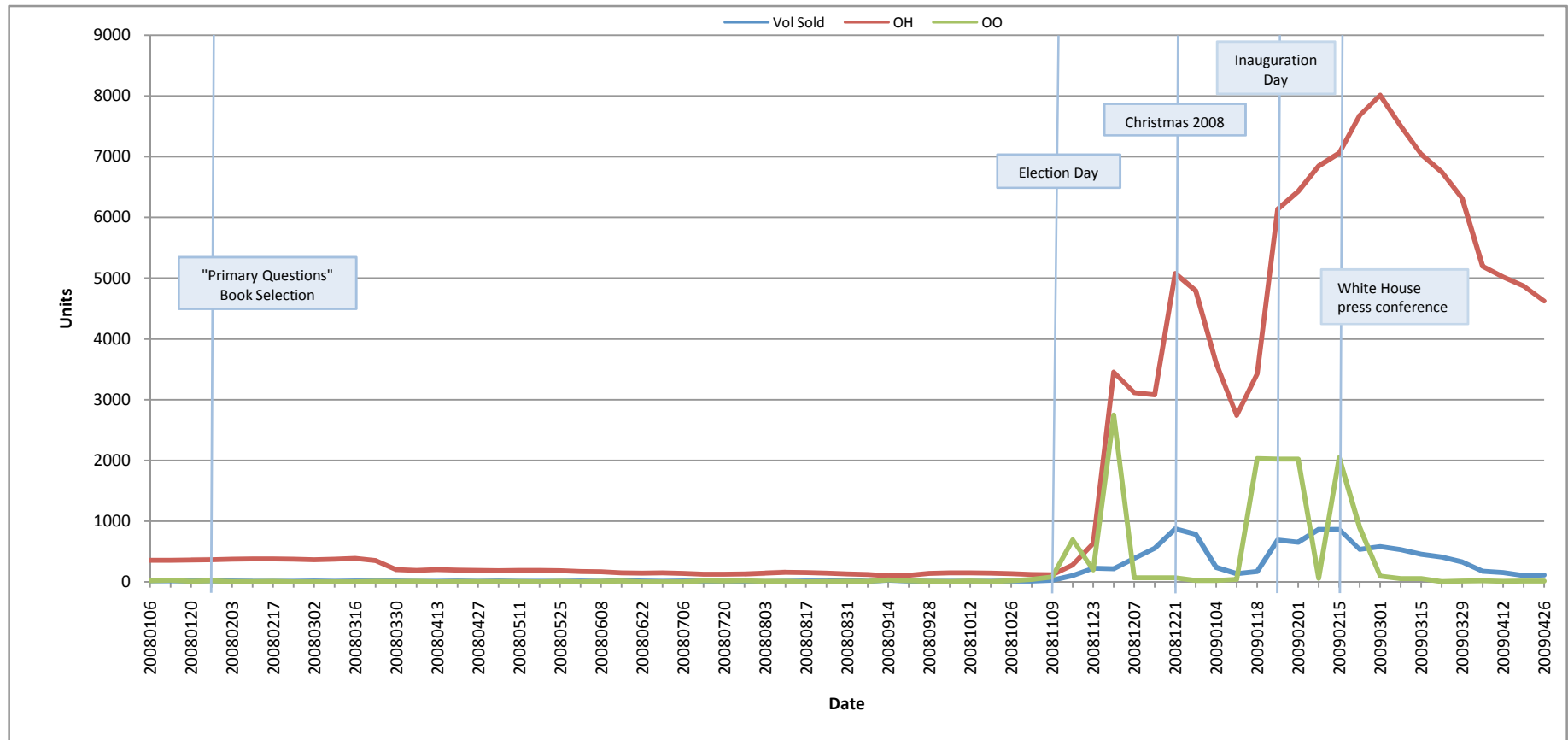
Fareed Zakaria



The Post-American World came out at the beginning of May, but orders spiked after it was photographed with Obama. Sales steadily declined after this event, with a slight spike around Election Day. Booksellers clearly expected it to do well over Christmas with orders rising to 1,152 units at the end of November. It sold well over Christmas, but sales peaked at 323 copies – nowhere near expectations.

Team of Rivals

Doris Kearns Goodwin



Obama's mention of *Team of Rivals* during Katie Couric's "Primary Questions" series had no effect on sales. It wasn't until the media began referring to Obama's cabinet as a team of rivals that orders and sales started to increase, with the 867 units sold at the peak around the first White House press conference almost matching the 875 units sold at the peak Christmas season. But, between Inauguration Day and the end of March when sales started to decline, *Team of Rivals* sold 5,923 units while the entire Christmas season only totaled 3,148 units.

Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison



Song of Solomon was mentioned many times during Obama's campaign, but the only mention that seems to have had any effect was the article in the New York Times that listed *Song of Solomon* as one of Obama's favourite books. At that point orders rose slightly, but there does not seem to have been any impact on sales.

Gilead

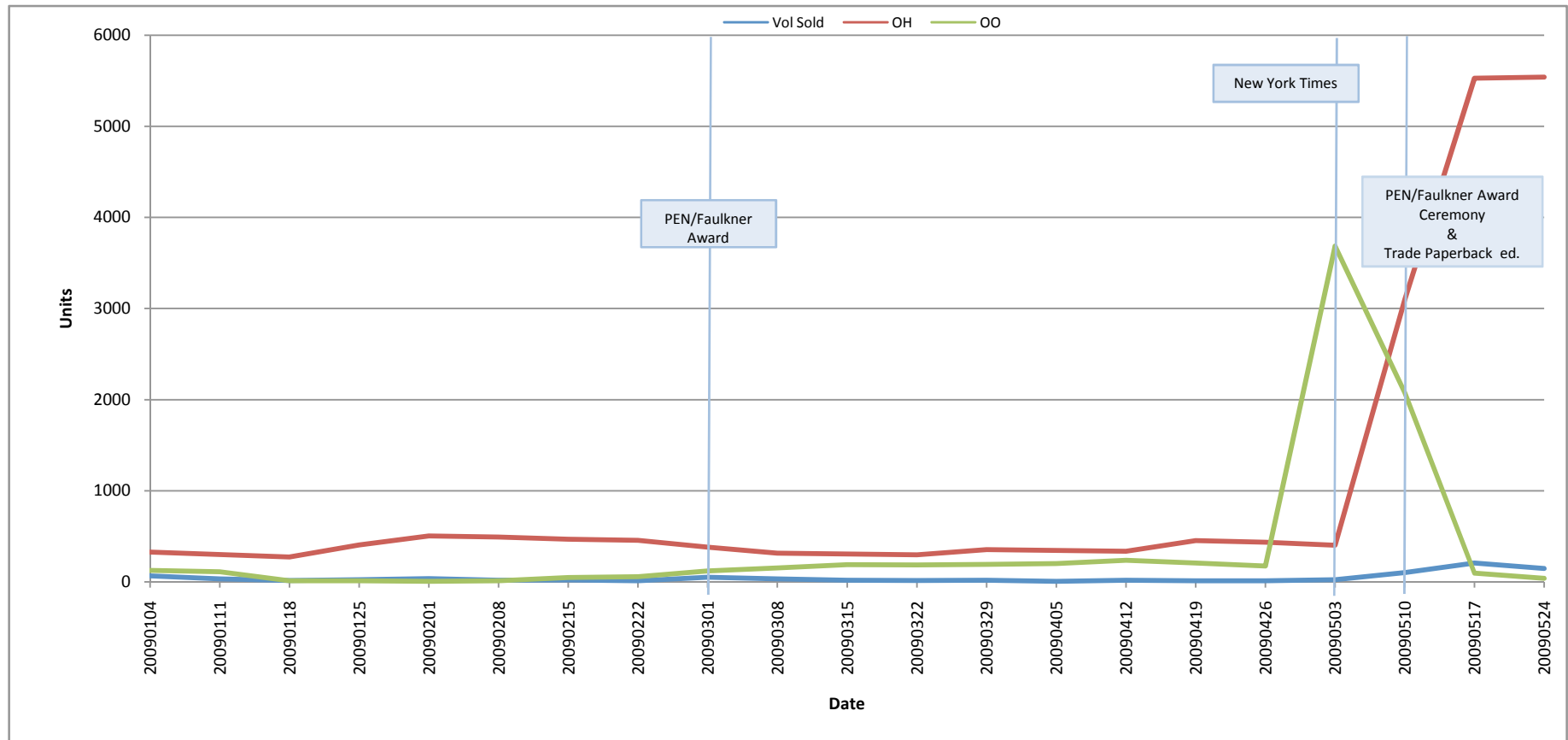
Marilynne Robinson



Gilead has been mentioned twice as a favourite of Obama's: once in his list of favourite books on his Facebook page and the other in an article by the Associated Press that appeared on numerous news websites. The Obama mentions do not seem to have had any effect on sales, other than a small increase in orders around Inauguration Day.

Netherland: A Novel

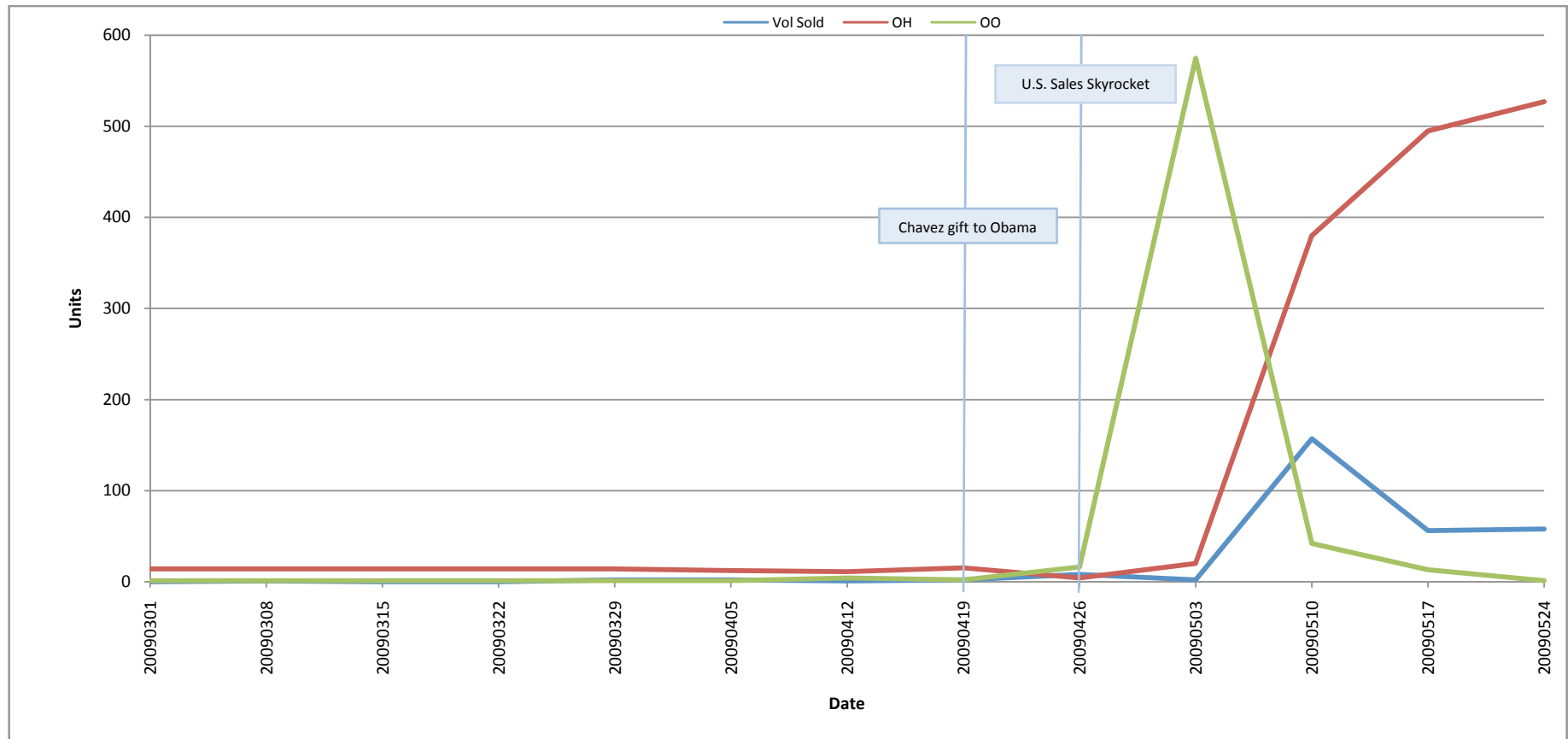
Joseph O'Neill



Netherland: A Novel was awarded the PEN/Faulkner Award at the end of February 2009, with the ceremony taking place on March 9. The announcement of O'Neill's win in February does not seem to have had any effect on sales, units on order or units on hand. In contrast, when the New York Times published an article stating that Obama was reading *Netherland* at the end of April, units on order rose from 173 to 3,685 in one week. While this corresponded with the release of the trade paperback edition, sales history alone did not warrant that kind of increase in orders.

Open Veins of Latin America

Eduardo H. Galeano



Open Veins of Latin America was originally published in 1971. During the 5th Summit of the Americas, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez gave Obama a copy of this book as a gift – a sharp distinction from his years of feuding with former President George W. Bush. The story quickly made headlines and sales skyrocketed in the United States, moving the title to number 2 on Amazon.com's bestseller list by the last day of the summit. Canadian orders soared the week after the summit and sales went from 2 to 157 the following week.

Conclusion

Sales of Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope* began trending with the election as far back as February 2007 when Obama announced his candidacy. His sales spikes match up perfectly with key points in the election campaign such as his "A More Perfect Union" address, Election Day, Inauguration Day and Obama's first White House press conference.

When comparing formats of Obama's books, sales of the mass market edition of *The Audacity of Hope* were higher over Christmas, but sales of the trade paperback edition rose to the top around Inauguration Day and the first White House press conference.

Unlike titles that were written by Obama himself, books about him did not result in significant sales increases in Canada throughout the election. The majority of these books saw small increases over Election Day, Christmas and Inauguration Day.

Spikes in units on order indicate that Canadian booksellers expected Hillary Rodham Clinton and John McCain's autobiographies to do well, but it appears as though sales did not meet expectations. Clinton's high profile resulted in Canadian booksellers stocking up on *Living History* after she announced her candidacy and again immediately before Super Tuesday, but Canadian buyers were not as enthusiastic. McCain, on the other hand, did not see the same initial order spike as Clinton. He officially announced his candidacy later in the game, and retailers did not stock up until closer to Election Day. Although there were sales spikes at key points in each of Clinton and McCain's campaigns, sales were dismal in comparison to Obama's books.

Obama has been called America's most bookish president. He apparently reads voraciously and has been photographed with books, listed favourite books as well as what he's currently reading in interviews and has been publicly given books as gifts. Obama's connection to books leads to interesting sales changes. For the most part, it appears as though Obama has an impact on book sales that are political in nature, but not on those that are literary.

In the battle of Obama vs. Oprah, it appears as though Oprah still has more impact on book sales in Canada than the President of the United States.