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## Meaning Making Over a Lifetime: A Case Study of Pat Boone

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MEANING MAKING OVER A LIFETIME: A CASE STUDY OF PAT BOONE

by

Samuel Wisneski

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in Media Studies

at

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May 2022

## ABSTRACT

### MEANING MAKING OVER A LIFETIME: A CASE STUDY OF PAT BOONE

by

Samuel Wisneski

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022  
Under the Supervision of Professor Richard Popp

In the mid-1950s, Pat Boone was one of the most popular singers in America. Several years later, Boone's mass appeal as a star had begun to diminish and he was left without an obvious fanbase. Yet, today 60 years later, Boone is the star of several television ads, has appeared on one of the biggest shows on television, and has recently had a song explode to over five million views on social media. In order for Boone to achieve the continued fame he enjoys today, Boone has shapeshifted his celebrity to cater to receptive audiences. Using Boone as a case study, this study explores how stars engage in meaning making to cater to different audience bases. By closely tracking and analyzing the path of Boone's celebrity, we better understand how stars come into positions of power and maintain influence over society.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

I first learned about Pat Boone as an endorser on television. This is an unusual way to first learn about someone who was once one of the most popular singers in America. Being acclimated to seeing high energy, often young people on the screen as endorsers, seeing Boone on the screen was a change of pace. Not knowing who he was at the time, I wondered how his name carried enough weight for companies to seek him out as an endorser. As it turns out, had I been paying attention to certain areas, I would have certainly heard of Boone. I could have found out about Boone in the evangelical Christian community where Boone regularly makes appearances at churches and releases popular Christian music. I could have heard about Boone in right-wing circles where Boone has endorsed candidates for decades and wrote for conservative news website NewsMax from 2009 to 2020. Or, I could have learned about Boone in business where Boone makes investments, and even appeared on Shark Tank in 2015. Today, for those who pay attention to television commercials, it's hard to miss Boone as he appears in commercials for companies like the Wonder Bible, Safe Step Tub, Swiss America, and TV Ears.

Boone is a character that continually unraveled through my research, showing himself to be more and more interesting as a case study on building one's celebrity through their lifetime. This study will look to Boone as a prime example of conservatism, religion, and entrepreneurship coming together to form a character carefully positioned to cater to his fanbases. There are many stars who have appeared in ads or have significant meaning as a celebrity. Yet, I chose to study Boone for several reasons: At one point, Boone was one of the

biggest stars in America, giving him significant relevance as a figure in American culture. As Boone has aged, his meaning has changed to be focused on his politics, religion, and entrepreneurship. This change in celebrity is ripe for study as I analyze how a star's meaning changes to cater to specific audiences. And he is simply an interesting character, despite being a conservative pop singer in the late 1950s, in 1997 he released a hard rock cover album called *In a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy*.

In the following pages, I will review the literature on celebrity studies, the celebrity endorser, and Boone's biography. Understanding what led to Boone's appearance on television can give us insight into what his presence on the screen really means. While he is a giant in television advertising, he is not the only celebrity endorser. Exploring what meaning celebrity endorsers carry will help us frame Boone's actions as an endorser. Then, I will talk about Boone's rise as a towering conservative figure in pop music in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Coinciding with the widespread adoption of television, Boone grew in popularity in the 1950s. He was the second best-selling artist of the late 1950s, only behind Elvis Presley.<sup>1</sup> Despite their mutual popularity, Thomas Ryan, a journalist at the time, notes that the stars couldn't have been more different.<sup>2</sup> Boone was conservative, college-educated, religious, and married at 22, while Elvis was a single rocker, living the rock lifestyle. In chapter two, I will argue that while Elvis' fame and legacy looms larger, it's Boone's path as the more socially acceptable pop singer that increased his nostalgic value today. I will then track how Boone's fall in

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<sup>1</sup> Don Cusic, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music: Pop, Rock and Worship*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009), 26–30.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Ryan, "Rock 'n' Roll Battle BOONE vs PRESLEY," *Collier's*, October 26, 1956, 109-113, <https://www.unz.com/print/Colliers-1956oct26/>.



popularity led to his more active role as an endorser in television advertisements. Boone participated in advertisements and sponsored shows for more mainstream companies like Chevrolet at the height of his fame, but it was later in his life, after his music career faded that he began appearing in more advertisements such as Swiss America (a gold broker), Relief Factor (pain relief medication), and Wonder Bible (a Bible-playing speaker). I argue that the products and companies Boone promotes are relevant to him as an endorser. Boone pivoted throughout his career to target different audiences, and the products he endorses aligns with the audiences to which he caters. Finally, I will consider the impact that celebrities, especially as they change, have on our culture.

An analysis of Boone as an endorser allows for a rich, focused view into how celebrity endorsers form their persona over time. To supplement this case study, I have identified two areas which my literature review will cover: celebrity studies and the celebrity endorser. The questions this study seeks to answer include: What is it about religious and conservative figures like Boone that lends themselves to television advertising? What steps do stars take throughout their lifetimes to change their meaning as a celebrity? How does the changing meaning of a celebrity impact our society?

Studying a changing celebrity is important because our culture spends much time and energy idolizing, copying, and being influenced by celebrities. By understanding how a celebrity shapes their meaning to best reach their audiences, we can better understand our own culture and how stars maintain power over us.

Boone is a good subject for analysis because the meaning of Boone as a celebrity has changed significantly over his lifetime. As he went from being one of the biggest stars in America to a constant figure in TV advertisements targeting older adults, we can see his stardom narrow toward his audience. In addition to the importance of his audience, he has significant cultural relevance as an entrepreneur, religious figure, and political commentator. In chapter three, I will present a case study on Boone, analyzing his celebrity through the three facets of his celebrity I have identified. For each facet, I have found a relevant moment that speaks to his reach in the area. Concerning Boone as an entrepreneur, I break down his appearance pitching a product on the show Shark Tank; speaking to Boone's relevance as a religious figure, I analyze his ads for an audio Bible called Wonder Bible; and regarding Boone's political involvement, I break down his ads for gold and silver company Swiss America.

Boone's political affiliation and strong association with the Christian right makes him more than an anonymous endorser, instead, he is a figurehead charged with cultural meaning. In addition to his cultural meaning, he was the subject of a lawsuit regarding celebrity endorsers. In 1978, he was the first celebrity in a commercial to be held liable for issuing refunds to buyers of the advertised product. Boone's central role in a landmark case on endorsers, as well as his long history of over 50 years as an endorser, makes him rich for analysis.

### **Literature Review**

This study analyzes how celebrity comes about, is developed over time, and how it changes throughout the course of a star's lifetime. The study will first seek to understand the

work that has already been done in celebrity studies. Then, the study will discuss the celebrity meaning making process. Finally, it will look at how celebrities capitalize on this meaning as endorsers.

### Celebrity Studies

Authors Anthony Elliott and Ross Boyd begin the Handbook of Celebrity Studies by writing, “celebrity is at once astonishingly mesmerizing and mind-numbingly dull, crazily libertarian and depressingly conformist.”<sup>3</sup> This description of celebrity is a good primer to what makes celebrity such an interesting study that has continued to gather steam as an up-and-coming field in academia. Celebrity is often seen as a reflection of society, or at the very least a reflection of what society is most interested in. Celebrity studies asks what celebrity tells us about society and what the implications of celebrity culture are. The study of celebrity tends to place high importance on the media ecosystem in which the celebrity exists. Graeme Turner writes that celebrity would have once been somewhat confined to a specific range of print and television outlets, but with the growth of new media, celebrity has now exploded across the media channels.<sup>4</sup> Turner says that the rise of shows like *American Idol*, *Big Brother*, and *America’s Got Talent* have taken us to the point where whole television formats depend on taking advantage of the viewer’s interest in the opportunity of becoming a celebrity. This is not a brand-new phenomenon; the show *Star Search* was explicitly looking to find the next stars starting in 1983. Yet, Turner says this focus on celebrity making has represented a major shift in the production of television. As new media has fostered the growth of celebrity making

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Elliott and Ross Boyd, “Celebrity and Contemporary Culture,” in *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies*, ed. Anthony Elliott (Milton Park: Routledge, 2018), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” *Celebrity studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 11-20

content, academic interest in celebrity studies has also increased. The foundation of celebrity studies remains within media and cultural studies where academics interested in popular culture have applied their work to the study of celebrity.<sup>5</sup>

The terms “celebrity” and “stars” are commonly used throughout the academic conversation in celebrity studies. In his seminal work, Richard Dyer uses the term “stars” almost exclusively.<sup>6</sup> Yet, today, the field’s leading journal is titled *Celebrity Studies* and “celebrity” is commonly used in book titles on the topic. In her book *Celebrity: Capitalism and the Making of Fame*, Milly Williamson puts the distinction between stars and celebrities aside, choosing to use them interchangeably.<sup>7</sup> Williamson draws from Dyer’s work, writing that despite any supposed differences between stars and celebrities, they are both “made for profit.”<sup>8</sup> Like Williamson’s research, this study is not focused on the difference of meaning between stars and celebrities, but their function in society. Given that they share the function of profit and power, I sometimes use the terms interchangeably. For clarity, I have chosen to refer to the person, such as Boone, as a star and the meaning they carry as their celebrity.

Celebrity studies is a field that has been long used for, and continues to be used for, the study of the famous as media texts. Recently, there has been a movement for celebrity studies to go beyond textual analysis of performances to offer a well-rounded view of celebrities including industrial production as well as celebrity discourse.<sup>9</sup> Turner points out that a textual analysis of celebrity alone is insufficient in mounting much cultural studies research.<sup>10</sup> To take

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<sup>5</sup> Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 11-20.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Dyer and Paul McDonald, *Stars*. (London: BFI Pub, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Milly Williamson, *Celebrity: Capitalism and The Making of Fame* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Williamson, *Celebrity: Capitalism and The Making of Fame*

<sup>9</sup> Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 11-20.

<sup>10</sup> Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” 11-20.

Turner up on his suggestion that celebrity studies should widen beyond textual analysis, this study takes the approach of both analyzing Boone's television appearances and discussing Boone as a celebrity and as an endorser with a history of relationships with companies.

Building on the work of O.E. Klapp, Dyer describes stars as fitting into one of three social types: The Good Joe, the Tough Guy, and the Pin-up.<sup>11</sup> Dyer points out that these social types are not to be taken as to be written in stone, but rather as a general typology subscribed to by much of society. As Dyer describes the "good joe" social type, he uses Boone as an example of fitting the category. According to Klapp, a good joe is,

"Friendly and easy going; he fits in and likes people; he never sets himself above others but goes along with the majority; he is a good sport--but, also a he-man who won't let anyone push him around where the basic rights are concerned"<sup>12</sup>

By analyzing the "good joe" social type that Dyer describes, we can see how Boone's persona has contributed to his lasting stardom. For example, Klapp describes the "good joe" as the "central theme of the American Ethos"<sup>13</sup> Older adults are more likely to identify as patriotic and to believe in American exceptionalism.<sup>14</sup> Boone's alignment with the American ethos might be what makes him an attractive endorser for products targeting older adults.

### The Celebrity Endorser

The advertising campaigns that this study analyzes presents Boone as more than a narrator discussing the merits of their products or services. Instead, Boone offers a smile as he

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<sup>11</sup> Dyer and McDonald, *Stars*, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> O. E. Klapp, *Heroes, villains, and fools*, (Englewood cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> Klapp, *Heroes, villains, and fools*, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Generation Gap and the 2012 Election," *Pew Research Center*, November 3, 2011.

guides the audience through why they need to work with, and trust Swiss America. Boone is then more than a spokesperson, but rather a celebrity endorser. But what is a celebrity endorser?

For this study, I will use the definition of celebrity endorser put forward by Grant McCracken. A celebrity endorser, McCracken argues, is “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement.”<sup>15</sup> While broad, the definition covers the wide array of arrangements in which product marketing can appear. Three models are often referenced to explain the unique arrangement of the celebrity endorser.

The source credibility model argues that traits such as credibility, expertise, or personal experience are crucial to the celebrity endorser and the success of the advertisement is dependent on high levels of these attributes.<sup>16</sup> The source attractiveness model argues that it is the physical attractiveness and likeability of a celebrity endorser that dictates the success of the advertisement.<sup>17</sup> Both source models speak to some factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of an endorser in an ad. But both fail to recognize the importance of the company behind the ad and the products they are selling as an important aspect of the success of an ad.

The meaning transfer model acknowledges this missing link and fills it in by focusing on the relationship between the endorser and the company or product, rather than the endorser. In his widely cited paper explaining the movement of cultural meaning, McCracken says,

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<sup>15</sup> Grant McCracken, "Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process." *Journal of consumer research* 16, no. 3 (1989): 310-321.

<sup>16</sup> Zafer B. Erdogan, "Celebrity endorsement: A literature review," *Journal of Marketing Management* 15, no 4 (1999).

<sup>17</sup> Erdogan, "Celebrity endorsement: A literature review."

“Advertising works as a potential method of meaning transfer by bringing the consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement.<sup>18</sup>

While the endorser is not the whole story in the meaning transfer process, the endorser plays a vital role in the ‘representation of the culturally constituted world.’ McCracken explains how the director of the advertisement must construct the world in which the advertisement is taking place, making decisions such as how the message will be delivered and how that world will be constructed. The advertiser’s message can be delivered to an audience through an endorser, regardless of their fame and popularity. Many companies opt to have a celebrity endorser speak on behalf of their product. Others have non-celebrities as their spokespeople, turning them into celebrities in the process (*e.g.*, Flo from Progressive, Jake from State Farm).

To understand how celebrities transition through various periods of fame, Ruth Deller proposes a fame cycle.<sup>19</sup> Celebrities, including Boone, can be tracked through this cycle. A celebrities’ fame is important to understanding what makes them a successful endorser. Deller’s fame cycle was created with celebrity reality television in mind, and thus creates an incomplete picture of a star’s changing fame over their lifetime. Still, tracking a star through Deller’s steps of: pre-celebrity, proto-celebrity, promotional celebrity, ‘proper’ celebrity, (re)-purposed celebrity, and post-celebrity provides a model for how celebrity can be tracked. Deller’s fame cycle also speaks to the importance of recognizing a star’s changing fame. Rather

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<sup>18</sup> Grant McCracken, "Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods." *Journal of consumer research* 13, no. 1 (1986): 71-84.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth A. Deller, "Star image, celebrity reality television and the fame cycle." *Celebrity studies* 7, no. 3 (2016): 373-389.

than being a static phenomenon, fame can change and as a star's fame changes, as does their meaning as a celebrity.

### **Methodology and Document Structure**

This study is concerned with how a star's meaning changes over their lifetime. I will be conducting an analysis of Boone's television appearances, including in commercials for a portable audio Bible company, Wonder Bible, commercials for a gold and silver company, Swiss America, and on the show *Shark Tank*. This analysis will be informed by works in the field of celebrity studies. In my research I discovered that the area of celebrity studies is a new field that is still understudied. Yet, when possible, I utilize research in this area to build on previous research in the area.

The case study on Boone begins in chapter two with a dive into Boone's career. The first part of Boone's biography follows his path from unknown teenager to star. In this section, I describe how Boone was discovered and what led to his meteoric rise as a singer. The research for this section comes from biographies and journalistic pieces about Boone. During this tracking of Boone's rise to fame, I describe Boone's roots as a Christian, entrepreneur, and conservative, foreshadowing Boone's eventual rise as a prominent figure in these areas. In this section, I also take time to describe the state of cover music at the time. This leads to a brief discourse analysis on appropriation in music. Informed by research from music historians, I analyze interviews with artists like Richard Penniman (Little Richard) and Boone, as well as a podcast by Malcom Gladwell focused on Boone's music.



Chapter two continues with a more specific focus on two aspects of Boone's biography: his history in politics and as an endorser. I work through Boone's political history chronologically with information from news stories and contextualize Boone's political involvement using research from books on the politics of Hollywood, celebrities, and the politics of the time. While there has been no published research regarding Boone's role as an endorser that can be found, there is mention of Boone in numerous law publications regarding his run-in with the Federal Trade Commission. There are also some news stories on Boone's work as an investor and entrepreneur. I use these works, in addition to ads in which Boone appears, to understand Boone's rise as an endorser.

In chapter three, the case study moves onto a close reading of Boone's television appearances for Wonder Bible, Shark Tank, and Swiss America. The chapter is organized to focus on one appearance at a time. I argue that the products Boone endorses are relevant to his celebrity he has built over the course of his career. To understand the products Boone endorses, I begin each section explaining the history behind the product and how it came to be. The history behind each product is supported by research from the company's websites, news stories about the products, and books on the topics. Further research on the relevance of the products today comes from online discourse on the items. I obtained this discourse through Amazon.com reviews, blog posts, and Reddit posts. In one case, to better understand the customer base for the Wonder Bible, I interviewed the creator of another portable audio Bible that preceded the Wonder Bible. After gaining an understanding of what the products themselves mean, I shift focus to analyzing Boone's appearances for the products. This involves a close reading of the appearances, during which I analyze exactly what is happening in each of

the instances. This close reading focuses on Boone's meaning in the appearances to extract what they say about Boone as a star. My analyses of Boone in his appearances for the three companies draws from research in celebrity studies, such as the meaning transfer model outlined by McCracken.<sup>20</sup> In the model, objects, persons, and context transfers meaning to the celebrity endorser before the endorser transfers meaning onto the product, which then transfers meaning onto the consumer. I use this model to interrogate what meaning Boone brings to each product and how that meaning is transferred to the product and ultimately the viewer.

I begin chapter four by drawing a line between Boone's actions as a celebrity and his eventual appearances on behalf of companies, arguing that despite a decline in relevance as a performer, Boone maintained meaning as a celebrity for certain audiences. Then, I provide my final example of Boone's meaning making coming to fruition as I describe the release of his song "Can't We Get Along" in 2020. I use this song release to illustrate how Boone continues to draw on his fame as an Evangelical Christian, conservative, and entrepreneur to reach large audiences. While I have found Boone to be an excellent example of celebrity meaning making over a lifetime, Boone is not the only celebrity who has changed their meaning. I continue chapter four by providing two additional examples of celebrities who changed their meanings to reach new audiences. Using news stories and their websites, I follow the paths of actor Kirk Cameron and NFL star Michael Strahan as they pivoted their fame to new areas. By highlighting these two other stars, I show that meaning change as a celebrity is not a phenomenon specific to Boone. I argue that meaning change is a tool that stars can use to maintain power and

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<sup>20</sup> Grant McCracken, "Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process," 310-321.

influence over society. Finally, I discuss how, given celebrities influence over American culture, this research is important to society and contributes to the field of celebrity studies.

## Chapter 2: From Crooner to Endorser

### **BOONE THE PERSON AND THE ENTERTAINER**

Pat Boone was born in 1934 in Jacksonville, Florida. When Boone was two, the family moved to Nashville, Tennessee where Boone would be raised. The story of Boone's family and how Boone's family thinks of themselves is closely entwined with their belief that they are related to American Pioneer Daniel Boone. Boone repeats this belief frequently in news interviews, his biographies, and in his NewsMax profile.<sup>21</sup> Some doubt has been cast on the Boone family's connection with Daniel Boone the explorer beyond sharing a last name.<sup>22</sup> Boone's authorized biography begins by telling the story of Boone's birth. Boone's father, Archie Boone was at a Jacksonville barbershop the day before Boone was expected to be born.<sup>23</sup> Archie Boone apparently told the barbers of his "close kinship" with Daniel Boone. As the story goes, the barber asked, "are ya gonna call the little fella Daniel Boone?" Archie responded, "No, John, we think our first's gonna be a baby gal. Through whether it's a boy or a girl, one thing's for sure: the young 'un's gonna be the great-great-great-great-grandchild of ol' Daniel!" When Boone was born, they were surprised he was a boy, so without a name chosen, they quickly named him Charles Eugene. When Boone's mother Margaret said she was really looking forward to the name Pat, they agreed to just call him Pat anyway.

For Boone's parents, their local Church of Christ, was important for raising their children. Church of Christ is a conservative protestant church with no organization beyond the

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<sup>21</sup> Pat Boone, *A New Song* (Carol Stream: Creation House, 1972), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Randy Seaver, "Was Daniel Boone an Ancestor of Pat Boone," *Genea-Musings* (blog), August 31, 2007, <https://www.geneamusings.com/2007/08/was-daniel-boone-ancestor-of-pat-boone.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Davis, *Pat Boone* (London: HarperCollins, 2001).

local church.<sup>24</sup> Because of their local organizational structure, the churches vary in their beliefs. However, there are some defining characteristics of Church of Christ churches such as their tradition of acapella singing, baptism of adults, and their focus on Jesus Christ and the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice.

Boone's biography says the church instilled in him a passion for music. He would whistle along with the hymns and eventually sing with the rest of the church. Religion played a central role in Boone's life from a young age. His biographer tells one story of an apparent miracle Boone experienced when he was 11.<sup>25</sup> Boone was playing with a baseball when it was thrown too far, getting lost in the long grass of a pasture. He was searching and searching knowing how important it was that he found the new baseball. As the story goes, he was almost in tears when he began to pray, asking Jesus to help him find the ball. When he opened his eyes, "the ball virtually shone white in the moonlight." He says this experience made a deep and lasting impression on him. Boone was brought even closer to the church when he was baptized at age 13. Soon after, he was asked to begin singing formally for the church.

At age 15, it was time for Boone to begin thinking more seriously about what he wanted to do for a career. He considered joining the family business, a construction company, owned by his great uncle but he hated the laborious work and favored what he was doing in school. He decided to become a teacher and continue on that path to college. (Boone eventually went to David Lipscomb College to pursue a degree in English, Math and Bible Studies.) While he was interested in his passion of singing, he thought of it as preposterous to think that he could make

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<sup>24</sup> Editors of Encyclopedia "Church of Christ," (Encyclopædia Britannica, November 11, 2011). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Church-of-Christ>.

<sup>25</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*.

a career out of his hobby. Yet, as opportunities came up, Boone kept joining talent shows, church events, and other performances to continue singing. Building from his awards and press he received from shows, at 17, he got his own radio show. He hosted and sang for his show called *Youth on Parade*. Boone's first large-scale live performance was an invitation for him to perform as the "discovery of the week" at a concert in Centennial Park in Nashville. The show was hosted by (his eventual wife's father) country music star Red Foley and country comedian Minnie Pearl.

Soon after meeting Foley, Boone became interested in Foley's daughter Shirley. They began to date and soon after married. Shirley Boone was supportive of Boone's singing career and using her father's influence, helped Boone get an interview with country star Eddy Arnold. Arnold set Boone up to meet with Bill Beasley of Republic Records and Boone recorded his first song, introducing Boone to the world of record labels and singing as a business. Meanwhile, Boone continued to enter singing contests and through a Nashville high school contest, won a trip to New York to audition for Ted Mack's nationally televised *Amateur Hour*. Boone did well in his audition and was welcomed onto the show. Boone attributes much of his initial success to the opportunity to appear on the show. In 1954, Boone auditioned for the much larger Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts. Boone won first place on the show, leading to his national rise. Yet, Boone still hadn't had a record or any songs that gained traction. This began to change when Boone got a call from Randy Wood, the owner of *Dot Records*, an independent record label in Gallatin, Tennessee. Wood was an acquaintance of Boone who took interest in him but didn't think Boone had the right songs to record. This problem was solved in February 1955 when Wood called Boone with an idea, he wanted to take the popular rhythm and blues hit, "Two

Hearts, Two Kisses (Make One Love)” and record it in the new rock ‘n’ roll style. The song was written by Otis Williams and Henry Stone in 1954. Before Boone covered it, the song was already recorded by Doris Day, the Ames Brothers, and Frank Sinatra. Still, Boone’s version entered the “American Top 20” in April 1955. In the months to follow, and for the next 13 years, Wood would continue to bring Boone songs written by Black artists for him to record. In May 1955, Boone recorded what would become one of his most popular songs, “Ain’t That a Shame” by Fats Domino. According to Davis, Boone took issue with having to use the grammatically incorrect “ain’t” and wanted to change the word to “isn’t.” Yet, he “put his pride in his pocket” and kept “ain’t” as “isn’t” didn’t sound right in the song.

In *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, George Plasketes tracks the history of cover songs in America. Plasketes writes that from 1933 to 1952, only a handful of recorded songs received covers.<sup>26</sup> Then, from 1953 to 1957, a significant change occurred in the music industry that brought on an increased number of cover songs. Plasketes attributes this increase to the emergence of new independent record companies, singers moving from regional to nationwide promotion, increased radio airplay and TV exposure, and the broadening of music venues.<sup>27</sup> Dot Records, the label where Boone got his start follows this general timeline, forming in 1950 and shifting its focus to cover songs in 1955.<sup>28</sup>

The covering of black artists by white musicians, is criticized by many today, but fiercely defended by others. Reebee Garofalo, longtime historian of the music industry, writes that,

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<sup>26</sup> George Plasketes, *Play It Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2016), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Plasketes, *Play It Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Callahan and David Edwards, “Randy Wood: The Dot Records Story,” Both Sides Now Publications, May 6, 2003.

<http://www.bsnpubs.com/dot/dotstory.html>.

“the history of popular music in this country—at least, in the twentieth century—can be described in terms of a pattern of black innovation and white popularization.”<sup>29</sup> Garofalo refers to this pattern as “black roots, white fruits.” When it comes to rhythm and blues hits in the 1950s, Garofalo says that cover versions of black hits served to limit the crossover potential of black artists.<sup>30</sup> During this time, black artists were signed to independent labels with small distribution channels for their music. When white artists covered their songs, they would use their much larger labels and distribution networks to overpower the popularity of the original version. While not the first to cover a black rhythm and blues hit, (Garofalo credits Perry Como’s cover of “Kokomo” by Gene and Eunice as the first), Garofalo says Boone, more than any other artist, built his reputation as a rock and roll singer by covering black rhythm and blues songs.<sup>31</sup> The original songwriters and artists would be entitled to royalties for their song, however, Garofalo says they often never received them. Beyond the royalties from the songs, the more glaring difference between black and white artists are the disparities in the other industry opportunities they received. For example, while Otis Blackwell wrote songs for Presley and performed music himself, it was Presley that in 1955 was offered a record-breaking contract from RCA-Victor.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Boone’s biggest hits were covers of songs by Antoine Domino (Fats Domino) and Richard Pennimen (Little Richard), yet, in 1957, Boone received his own show while Domino and Pennimen missed out on this type of industry opportunity.

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<sup>29</sup> Reebee Garofalo, “Crossing Over: From Black Rhythm Blues to White Rock ‘n’ Roll,” in *R & B, Rhythm and Business: the Political Economy of Black Music*, ed. Norman Kelley (New York: Akashic, 2005), 112-137.

<sup>30</sup> Garofalo, “Crossing Over: From Black Rhythm Blues to White Rock ‘n’ Roll,” 124.

<sup>31</sup> Garofalo, “Crossing Over: From Black Rhythm Blues to White Rock ‘n’ Roll,” 125.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Mastropolo, “When Elvis Presley Left Sun Records for RCA,” *Ultimate Classic Rock*, November 21, 2015, <https://ultimateclassicrock.com/elvis-presley-leaves-sun-records/>.



Boone sees his appropriation of black music as a progressive act. Davis calls Boone's musical crossover from black to white "somewhat revolutionary in a south which was still socially segregated." Beyond being a progressive act, Boone sees his singing of black songs as a way to help the black musicians whose music wouldn't be played on mainstream radio stations. As Boone explains it, his covers opened up the path for rhythm and blues songs that wouldn't have otherwise been heard by white listeners.<sup>33</sup> When listeners heard the covers, he says, they would seek out the originals and eventually the stations would have no choice but to play the originals.

One of Boone's biggest songs was a cover of Tutti Frutti by Penniman. Like his other covers, Boone sings the song in his own style. Penniman has had said mixed things about Boone covering his songs. In the 1987 movie about Chuck Berry and rock 'n' roll, when asked about Boone, Penniman said "I was real mad. I wanted to get him because he was stopping my progress."<sup>34</sup> But in a 1984 interview with the Washington Post, Penniman describes how he saw a white audience dealing with multiple versions of rock 'n' roll.

"I felt I was pushed into a rhythm and blues corner to keep out of the rockers' way, because that's where the money is. When 'Tutti Frutti' came out, Elvis was immediately put on me, dancing and singing my songs on television. They needed a rock star to block me out of white homes because I was a hero to white kids. The white kids would have Pat Boone up on the dresser and me in the drawer 'cause they liked my version better, but the families didn't want me because of the image that I was projecting. Later on, I

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<sup>33</sup> TeachRock "Pat Boone: Boone in the USA," April 14, 2017, <https://teachrock.org/article/pat-boone-boone-in-the-usa/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, directed by Taylor Hackman (Universal, 1987), 2:00:00.

looked back, and I thanked Elvis and Pat for doing my stuff because they really opened the door for me into the pop market."<sup>35</sup>

In interviews, Boone frequently emphasizes how Penniman was grateful for Boone and his singing of Tutti Frutti. Boone says that both Penniman and Domino said they made more money because of his version crossing over into the mainstream. Boone quotes Penniman as saying, "I was washing dishes at the Greyhound Bus Station in Macon, GA and when I heard Pat Boone doing my song, I threw down my towel and knew my time had come."<sup>36</sup>

Despite the complicated issue of white musicians covering black artists, Boone and Davis see Boone's work as wholly beneficial to black artists. Without acknowledging the root problem of lack of acceptance for black music, they say that Boone was perceived as the "acceptable voice of rock 'n' roll." Their telling of the story goes that his singing and acceptance of black music increased the popularity of the genre and helped others accept the original artists, eventually opening up doors for the artists to mainstream music. As proof of this, they point to the credit we give black music today for their role in rock 'n' roll. After all, they say, "ask anyone today who sang 'Tutti Frutti,' and they will tell you 'Little Richard' – few remember that it was Pat Boone who effectively paved the way."<sup>37</sup>

In 2019, journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell offered his opinion to Boone's appropriation of R&B music on his podcast Revisionist History, renewing attention on Boone's music online.<sup>38</sup> In the podcast, Gladwell assembles a small group of music aficionados with

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Harrington, "'A Wopbopalooobop'," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Gaydos, "Pat Boone Reflects on Elvis, Little Richard and the Early Days of Rock and Roll," *Variety*, July 22, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, "In a Metal Mood," Revisionist History, podcast audio, August 8, 2019, <https://www.pushkin.fm/episode/in-a-metal-mood/>.

diverse backgrounds to hold what they call a cultural appropriation summit. Their goal is to discuss appropriation in music and to determine when it's appropriate and when it's not. The group listens to original versions and appropriated versions of rock 'n' roll songs from the 50s. They decide that Elvis Presley completely stole not only Blackwell's lyrics, but also his sound. When it comes to comparing Penniman's and Boone's versions of 'Tutti Frutti,' Gladwell says, "Boone did not copy Tutti Frutti; he made a smoothie out of Tutti Frutti." Gladwell notes that while Presley imitates Blackwell's sound, Boone made the music he covered his own. It is important to note, that from the listener's perspective, it is challenging to hear the difference that Gladwell and the rest of the hosts see between Presley's and Boone's appropriation. When playing the songs, the podcast hosts portray Presley's cover as being indiscernible from the Blackwell version of the song, while acting as if Boone's version is a completely reimagined version of Tutti Frutti. As a listener, Boone's version sounds much more similar to Penniman's version than the hosts make it out to be.

Gladwell and music journalist Bruce Headlam, who joined Boone at the summit, argue that while much of the rock 'n' roll hall of fame is focused on Elvis, it is Boone who should get more credit. Gladwell even goes as far as interviewing the former head of the Hall of Fame, asking him why Boone has never been inducted. The former head, Terry Stewart, says it was because of the overwhelming feeling that Boone stole the music he covered. Stewart said that the majority of people involved in the selection process didn't think it would be appropriate to have Boone in the Hall of Fame. Undeterred, at the end of the podcast, Gladwell calls on his fans to contact the Hall of Fame and ask them to nominate Boone to be honored.

In 1956, at 22-years old, Boone was one of the biggest pop music stars in America.

Boone was not shy about his religious and family values. In a time when many older people and more conservative folks thought that rock n' roll was socially unacceptable, Boone was the safe alternative. From 1955 to 1962, Boone was a force in pop music. He was the second best-selling artist of the late 1950s, behind only Presley.<sup>39</sup> In a 1956 *Collier's Magazine* article entitled, "Rock 'n' Roll Battle BOONE vs PRESLEY" the two singers were pitted against each other as rivals.<sup>40</sup> The article lists Presley as selling 7 million records in 1956, with Pat Boone gaining on him with 6 million sales since 1954.

Despite their mutual popularity, the author of the piece, Thomas Ryan, says the two stars couldn't be more different. Presley was a single rocker opposed to marriage and Boone was married at 19 with three children by age 22. While Presley dropped out of high school, Boone graduated college in 1958.

In 1957, riding his sudden fame, Boone turned to Hollywood for his next act. He first starred in *Bernardine*, a musical film that gathered some attention with the public excited to see Boone in a movie for the first time.<sup>41</sup> Later in 1957, Boone starred in *April Love*, another Hollywood musical that was again met with good reception. In 1959, Boone starred in what would be his biggest film, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The movie was his first that wasn't a musical and would be his only foray into science fiction. The movie grossed \$10,000,000 at

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<sup>39</sup> Colin Larkin, "Pat Boone," in *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (London: Music Sales, 2011), 756-757.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Ryan, "Pat Boone vs. Elvis Presley," *Collier's Weekly*, October 26, 1956, 109-113.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Vagg, "The Surprisingly Interesting Cinema of Pat Boone," *Diabolique Magazine*, September 10, 2019, <https://diaboliquemagazine.com/the-surprisingly-interesting-cinema-of-pat-boone/>.

the box office.<sup>42</sup> While Boone went onto act in several more movies, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* remains the biggest hit he appeared in.<sup>43</sup>

At the height of his fame, while he starred in movies and continued to top the charts with his music, in 1957, Boone released his first of many Christian music albums, *Hymns We Love*. The album wasn't a smash hit like his first albums, but did well, hitting 21 on the Billboard charts<sup>44</sup> Boone's last hit would come in 1958 with his album *Star Dust* hitting number two on the Billboard charts.<sup>45</sup> That same year, Boone released his first book, *Twixt Twelve and Twenty*, a book offering lifestyle advice to young people.<sup>46</sup>

Over the next few years, Boone would stay busy touring, acting in films, and recording. Yet, as time went on, Boone became less and less popular. As his biographer Davis describes, by the late sixties the popularity of the Boone sound had started to dwindle. Davis attributes some of this change in taste to the Vietnam war and a rapidly changing American culture. In the mid-sixties, The Beatles began their unprecedented fame in the U.S., diminishing the Boone's already lagging fame. As a sign of how desperate things became for Boone, according to Davis, Boone actually began selling Beatles art with a great deal of success.<sup>47</sup> Boone hired Dutch painter Leo Jansen to paint individual and group pictures of the British supergroup and apparently sold thousands to Beatles fans. According to his biographer, Boone's philosophy was, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em." In 1968, Boone recorded his last album with Dot, his

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<sup>42</sup> "Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959) - Financial Information," The Numbers, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Journey-to-the-Center-of-the-Earth#tab=summary>.

<sup>43</sup> Vagg, "The Surprisingly Interesting Cinema of Pat Boone."

<sup>44</sup> Larkin, "Pat Boone," 756.

<sup>45</sup> Larkin, "Pat Boone," 757.

<sup>46</sup> Pat Boone, *Twixt Twelve and Twenty*. Prentice Hall, 1958.

<sup>47</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 137.

longtime record label, deciding to change producers to join a group of Christian music producers at a record label called Tetragrammation. In doing this, he fully embraced his persona as something of a Christian endorser.

In the 1970s, American Christianity experienced a spur of energy, with growing numbers of people joining charismatic denominations and taking on new beliefs and worship styles.<sup>48</sup> These styles included spirited worship services, a heightened attention to the teachings of the Bible, and speaking in tongues. In 1976, Newsweek published a cover story calling 1976 the “year of the Evangelical.”<sup>49</sup> And according to a 1978 Gallup survey quoted by Christian Today, 28% of Americans considered themselves to be evangelicals. The survey defined evangelicals as having had a born-again conversion, acceptance of Jesus as their savior, a belief that the scriptures are the authority on all doctrine, and the feeling that one must spread their faith.<sup>50</sup> With this backdrop, Boone, who considers himself an evangelical protestant, rode the wave of this movement through his music and leadership as a Christian celebrity. Beginning in the 1970s, Boone made his religion the sole focus of his music. He attributes his singular focus on religious music to an awakening he had with God where he felt as if God had intervened to save his struggling relationship, career, and family.<sup>51</sup> Following this moment, he decided to commit himself to spreading God’s word. In 1971, Boone formed the Lamb and Lion record label to produce the music of Christian artists. Boone released an impressive 15 albums in the 1970s,

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<sup>48</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 92-96.

<sup>49</sup> Jon Meacham, “The Editor’s Desk,” *Newsweek*, March 13, 2010, <https://www.newsweek.com/editors-desk-106637>.

<sup>50</sup> Albert J Menendez, “Who Are the Evangelicals?,” *Christianity Today*, January 27, 1978, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1978/january-27/who-are-evangelicals.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 154.

nearly all religious with titles like *Songs for Jesus Folk*, *Family Who Prays*, and *Pat Boone S-A-V-E-D*. At this point, in the 1970s, Boone's popularity as a mainstream artist had waned, but he remained prevalent as a religious icon.

From 1973-1975, Boone joined popular Christian artists from the time Jimmy and Carol Owens on a tour for their Christian musicals *Come Together* and *If My People*. The musical-experience toured through the UK, drawing big crowds to this unique, charismatic religious event. Carol Owens described the events as "an interactive musical prayer meeting."<sup>52</sup>

Later in the decade, while still releasing religious music, Boone would experiment with country music releasing the album *Texas Woman* and *The Country Side of Pat Boone*. In the late 1970s, into the 1980s, Boone built on his popularity as a Conservative Christian celebrity. This included tours to churches and church events. Boone also performed shows with his family appearing as the Pat Boone Family Show. In 1994, Boone acted as co-chair for a church tour in California, singing at 200 churches throughout 25 denominations.<sup>53</sup>

In 1997, Boone came under scrutiny following the release of his album, *In a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy*. The album consists of 12 heavy metal songs covered by Boone. The songs range from Crazy Train by Ozzy Osbourne to Enter Sandman by Metallica. Later that year, Boone appeared on the American Music Awards with Alice Cooper to present a music award. According to Boone, Dick Clark had contacted the two singers before the show and asked them to dress as each other. So, Boone wore all black leather (with nothing underneath), a spiked choker around his neck, and fake tattoos. Whether it was a miscommunication or

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<sup>52</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 184.

<sup>53</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 206.

having second thoughts, Cooper appeared with his usual, heavy metal star look. This caused whatever joke there was to begin with to fall through and Boone was assumed to be dressed to make a statement. Based on the idea that Boone had a new persona, advertisers and his religious connections fear that he had taken a left turn. He was fired by Trinity Broadcasting Network, losing his show *Gospel America*.<sup>54</sup> The network's decision to cancel Boone's show prompted backlash. To respond to critics of the decision, the network held something of a town hall, allowing Boone to answer to fans and critics on the network's Praise the Lord Telecast on April 15, 1997.<sup>55</sup> The fate of Boone's program was put into viewer's hands as they were asked to vote whether the network should continue the show. The viewers voted that the show should be continued and so it was reinstated<sup>56</sup>

Boone's most recent project is his record label called Gold Label. Started in 1999, Boone partnered with record producer Jim Long to create the label and develop the music. Boone said the goal of the label is to, "establish itself as the principal source of multimedia entertainment products for the age-50-plus-market."<sup>57</sup> The original artists who recorded under the label when it began included Glen Campbell, Jack Jones, Connie Francis, Jerry Vale, Patti Page, as well as Boone. The Gold Label continues today selling merchandise, albums, and videos featuring the artists on the label.

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<sup>54</sup> Stephanie Nolasco, "Pat Boone Recalls Shocking the Christian Community with Heavy Metal Album: 'It Was a Big Overreaction'," *Fox News*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/pat-boone-recalls-shocking-the-christian-community-with-heavy-metal-album-it-was-a-big-overreaction>.

<sup>55</sup> M.H. Reynolds, "Pat Boone Answers His Metal Mood Critics," *Fundamental Evangelistic Association*, March-April 1997, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080301233440/http://www.feasite.org/Foundation/fbcpatbo.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 200.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 200.



Throughout Boone's career, he pivoted to serve the audience that would best support the content he was releasing. As a young man, he enjoyed mainstream success, capitalizing on his young audience through his album releases with music popular among youth, book releases targeting teenagers, and his television show featuring the celebrities of the time. As the popularity of Boone's mainstream music faded, as did his mainstream celebrity status. So, he quickly transitioned to religious music where he regained celebrity status among that subculture. Then, as he aged, perhaps realizing his audience was aging too, he formed the Gold Label to best serve and capitalize from this older audience. In hindsight, the career transitions Boone undertook appear well-planned and successful. Today, rather than appearing as a relic of the past, Boone is instead seen as a former teenage sensation, Christian icon, and something of an influencer for aging members of the silent generation. The success of Boone's celebrity transitions speaks to the power of catering to an audience apt to embrace a person as a celebrity within their group.

### **Boone the Political Actor**

During his rise to fame, Boone wasn't overtly involved in politics, staying away from political conversations in public. But, as time went on, Boone became more and more politically outspoken, incorporating his politics in his appearances and music.

Boone's first political action I can find is his appearance at an anticommunist rally at the Hollywood Bowl in 1961.<sup>58</sup> Historian Donald Critchlow called this rally the last great grasp of the

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<sup>58</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *When Hollywood Was Right: How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics*, (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2013), 142.

Hollywood anticommunists. Boone appeared at the event with more than forty TV stars aligned with the GOP.

In 1964, Boone supported and helped campaign for Reagan during his gubernatorial race in California.<sup>59</sup> Boone also supported Barry Goldwater's presidential candidacy that year.<sup>60</sup> Goldwater advocated for positions unpopular even among Republicans at the time, supporting an escalation of the war in Vietnam, elimination of popular government programs, and opposing the Civil Rights Act.<sup>61</sup> With his support of Reagan and Goldwater, Boone solidified his position as not just a Conservative, but a member of the New Right, a political network of like-minded organizations aimed at uniting Conservatives.<sup>62</sup>

In 1966, Boone wrote his first politically motivated song, "Wish You Were Here, Buddy!" The song is a ballad from the perspective of a soldier in Vietnam responding to the protests of the war back in the states. He said he wrote the song as "an anthem of support for those in the mud dodging the bullets, rather than as a jingoistic pro-war song."<sup>63</sup> Boone says the song stood in contrast to "dreamers like Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, Barry McGuire and others."<sup>64</sup> Boone says he was distressed by the war in Vietnam, and that he felt like Americans should show support for the soldiers fighting there. Yet, the lyrics to the song plant him firmly on the pro-war side of the debate as the song criticizes Muhammad Ali and campus demonstrators.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Critchlow, *When Hollywood Was Right: How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics*, 192.

<sup>60</sup> Critchlow, *When Hollywood Was Right: How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics*, 172.

<sup>61</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, 196.

<sup>62</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, 195.

<sup>63</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 136-137.

<sup>64</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 137.

<sup>65</sup> LyricsMode.com "Wish You Were Here, Buddy Lyrics by Pat Boone," June 5, 2009, [https://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/pat\\_boone/wish\\_you\\_were\\_here\\_buddy.html](https://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/pat_boone/wish_you_were_here_buddy.html).

Boone frequently mentions the importance of Israel to him both religiously and politically. Boone first visited Israel in 1972 and said that the trip made a big impact on him.<sup>66</sup> He says he feels a strong empathy for Israel as a nation and says that his trips there have also deepened his religious faith. In 1979, Boone received the Israel Cultural Award from the Israeli government and was later named the Christian Ambassador to Israel.<sup>67</sup> His support for Israel continues today. In 2018, Boone hosted a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary Gala in Jerusalem. Boone calls himself a Zionist, saying that he believes that God created Israel for the Jewish people.<sup>68</sup>

From when Boone first supported Reagan for governor in 1964, to the 1980s, Boone was friends with Reagan and would often show his public support for him. During Reagan's 1980 campaign for president, Reagan made a concerted effort to reach out to evangelical Christians. Schulman writes that Reagan took advantage of a shared antipathy to the IRS, The Department of Education, the ERA, and legalized abortion that both he and conservative evangelical Christians held.<sup>69</sup> Alongside his embrace of Christians, Reagan took advantage of the organization of the New Right network, including their huge direct mail program and fundraising ability.

In 1978, Boone sat on the policy board of Christian Voice, a conglomeration of several California anti-gay, anti-pornography, and pro-family groups.<sup>70</sup> With two New Right political operatives in leadership positions, Christian Voice would take on political issues, advocating for

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<sup>66</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 174.

<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 175.

<sup>68</sup> Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "Pat Boone's Gift to Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/omg/pat-boones-gift-to-israel-556574>.

<sup>69</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, 216.

<sup>70</sup> Robert C. Liebman and James L. Guth, *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine, 1983).

Conservative values. The group issued a congressional report card rating the score of congresspeople on their positions on issues the group cared about such as opposition to school busing, unionization of teachers, and funding of the National Science Foundation. The scorecard was distributed to thousands, including many church leaders across the country.

In 1980, Boone appeared at the Republican convention support of Reagan and occasionally appeared on the campaign trail with Reagan.<sup>71</sup> Reagan's famous 1983 evil empire speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, he even quoted an anonymous entertainer who Boone later claimed to be. Reagan said the entertainer told him, "I love my little girls more than anything and I would rather see my little girls die now still believing in god, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in god." Boone clarified this quote, changing some details, but furthering his point, saying in a 2010 interview, "I pray it will never happen — but if it comes to it, I'd rather see my four daughters blown into heaven in a nuclear blast than taught into hell in a communist United States."

Boone has a long history of supporting conservative candidates for office, but in the 2000s, Boone's conservatism took a turn away from mainstream conservative beliefs. From 2009 to May 2020, Boone wrote articles for the conservative website NewsMax. Over the course of 11 years, Boone wrote more than 100 pieces for the site. The articles showcase Boone at his most controversial, with headlines such as, "The ACLU: America's Taliban," "Roy Moore Targeted by Media – Is There a Perfect Candidate Alive?" and "Kaepernick Should

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<sup>71</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 203.

Apologize to Martin Luther King.”<sup>72</sup> In the articles, Boone writes with a distinct, stream-of-consciousness voice. He often refers to the reader as “friend” and starts some articles with a phrase like, “can we calm down and just talk good common sense for a few good minutes?” before jumping into his view of hot-button topics like the death of Trayvon Martin, Brett Kavanaugh’s accusations of sexual misconduct, and immigration.

In 2007, Boone began to receive widespread attention for his homophobic views when he made robocalls to Kentucky voters advocating for the Republican candidate for governor. In the calls he said that the Democratic candidate would work for “every homosexual cause.”<sup>73</sup> He asked the recipients of the calls, “do you want a governor who’d like Kentucky to be another San Francisco?” In 2009, the year after Barack Obama was elected president, Boone penned an article where he wrote at length about the similarities between liberalism and cancer.<sup>74</sup> In the piece, he compares liberalism to “black filthy cells.” Boone’s political commentary continued to receive attention when he repeatedly made false claims about President Obama.<sup>75</sup> At one event in 2011, Boone said he believes Obama was born in Kenya, that Obama’s records were photoshopped, and that Obama has not celebrated any Christian holidays at the White House

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<sup>72</sup> Newsmax “Pat Boone Archives June 2021,” Newsmax, <https://www.newsmax.com/archives/boone/50/2021/6/>.

<sup>73</sup> CBS Los Angeles, “Entertainer Pat Boone Now Making A Name For Himself As Right Wing Political Activist,” *CBS Los Angeles*, August 14, 2011, <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2011/08/14/entertainer-pat-boone-now-making-a-name-for-himself-as-right-wing-political-activist/>.

<sup>74</sup> Pat Boone, “Liberalism Afflicting Country Like a Disease,” *Newsmax*, August 31, 2009, <https://www.newsmax.com/boone/liberalism-bible/2009/08/31/id/334716/>.

<sup>75</sup> Carla Marinucci, “50’s Heartthrob Pat Boone Revives Golden Oldie: Obama Born in Kenya, a ‘Photoshopping Fraud’,” *SF Gate*, September 17, 2011, <https://blog.sfgate.com/politics/2011/09/16/pat-boones-blast-past-obamas-kenyan/>.

but celebrates Ramadan.<sup>76</sup> That same year, Boone received the lifetime achievement award from the Conservative Political Action Conference.<sup>77</sup>

Leading up to the 2016 presidential election, Boone supported Donald Trump for president. Boone campaigned for Trump through appearances on various Fox shows and in robocalls to potential voters.<sup>78</sup> Boone's most recent article for NewsMax was published May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and was titled, "A Possible Ultimate Vaccine Called Holy Communion."<sup>79</sup> Using Bible verses, Boone explained how the communion was the vaccine that we've always had and that more than ever, we should've used it to fight COVID.

### **Boone the Pitchman**

Early in Boone's rise to stardom he began profiting from his image. Yet according to his biographer, Boone would only work with companies that matched with his morals. In 1957, at the height of his fame, he was offered a "lavish proposal" to star in a series of TV shows sponsored by Chesterfield Cigarettes.<sup>80</sup> Much to the surprise of his agent, Boone refused to accept the offer. Although he didn't have to smoke himself, the connection to smoking alone was apparently enough to turn Boone away. According to Davis, Boone then got yet another offer to have his own show, this time sponsored by a "drinks company." Again, Boone turned it down. Finally, much to the excitement of his agent, he accepted an offer to host a show

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<sup>76</sup> Marinucci, "50's Heartthrob Pat Boone Revives Golden Oldie: Obama Born in Kenya, a 'Photoshopping Fraud'."

<sup>77</sup> Don Gonyea, "Mitch Daniels, While Hard On Obama, Stresses Compromise At CPAC," *NPR*, February 12, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2011/02/12/133701353/mitch-daniels-while-hard-on-obama-stresses-compromise-at-cpac>.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Bond, "How Conservative Hollywood Worked to Elect Donald Trump," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/how-conservative-hollywood-worked-elect-donald-trump-946874/>.

<sup>79</sup> Pat Boone, "A Possible Ultimate Vaccine Called Holy Communion," *Newsmax*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.newsmax.com/boone/hebrews-luke-mark/2020/05/27/id/969218/>.

<sup>80</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 76.

sponsored by Chevrolet. The show, *The Pat Boone Chevy Showroom*, made Boone the youngest singer to have his own show.<sup>81</sup> This was just the beginning of Boone's long career in advertising for various companies. Boone maintained a persona that he was happy to provide to advertisers, and in turn, they were happy to capitalize on him.

Growing in fame at nearly the same time, Boone and Elvis are often compared both in news stories and academia, providing insight into each of their stardoms. Elvis was a complex figure with a dual image of hedonistic rocker and charitable southern boy.<sup>82</sup> However, the media produced and disseminated an image of Elvis as a controversial sexual icon, sometimes even fearing for his impact on teens.<sup>83</sup> Boone found Elvis' public reputation to be different from his Elvis' true character. Boone said he respected Elvis for his service in the military, for his singing of gospel songs, and his general courtesy to everyone around him.<sup>84</sup> Boone and Elvis also shared southern roots, with Elvis having been born in Mississippi. Commenting on the media's common comparison of him to Elvis, Boone said "we appealed to the public in a complementary way; you might say the negative and positive aspects of human nature (...) it seemed that I wanted to keep the rules and win, and he wanted to break the rules and win!"<sup>85</sup> Despite covering some of the same Rhythm and Blues songs, Boone and Elvis took different approaches to their covers musically. In concerts, Elvis performed in an energetic, provocative way that stood in contrast to Boone's mild demeanor.<sup>86</sup> This difference in approach widened

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<sup>81</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Susan M. Doll, *Understanding Elvis: Southern Roots vs. Star Image* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 90-93

<sup>83</sup> Doll, *Understanding Elvis: Southern Roots vs. Star Image*, 76-79.

<sup>84</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 102.

<sup>85</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Glen Jeansonne, David Lührssen, and Dan Sokolovic, *Elvis Presley, Reluctant Rebel: His Life and Our Times* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 120-122.

the gap between Elvis and Boone and, despite their similarities in their personal lives, led the media and the public to generalize the singers as complete opposites. In *Elvis Presley, Reluctant Rebel: His Life and Our Times*, Jeansonne, Lührssen, and Sokolovic said that the difference between Elvis and Boone's personas are, "new authenticity versus the old respectability." The authors write that while Boone presented himself as the kind of gentleman that would respectfully pick up a date and get to know their parents, Elvis was "a wild card, polite but primal, an uncertain element in an increasingly suburbanized America." During a time when advertisers targeted this increasingly suburbanized America, it can be seen why they would favor Boone as an endorser over Elvis. Boone was seen as a reliable representation of the suburban family consumerism that advertisers targeted, while Elvis' persona was seen as less reliable, and less aligned, with this suburban image.

Despite Boone's perceived consistency in persona, according to Davis, Boone struggled with his image in the 1960s as Boone "was captivated by the prospect of a high-flying Hollywood career, lured by the spell of the bright lights."<sup>87</sup> Davis writes of Boone's infidelity and his struggling marriage with his longtime wife during this time. As their issues were coming to a head, Boone says he worried about the word getting out about his marriage issues. "I knew that my fans and the general public would be shocked to discover the plain truth about our marriage, and my successful career would suffer."<sup>88</sup> This honest admission from Boone shows his care for how he appeared to the public. While during this time he didn't make great efforts

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<sup>87</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 149.



to clean up his actions to be the clean star the public thought he was, he still had the insight to know that his clean image would be important to his success.

In the decade following the height of Boone's stardom, his fame began to lose momentum. At the height of his fame, Boone was sponsored by Chevrolet, but by 1977 Boone no longer attracted this caliber of advertiser. Despite his inability to attract top-level advertisers, Boone continued to appear in commercials and speak on behalf of companies.

In May 1977, Boone and his daughter Debby, appeared together in commercials for a product called Acne-Statin. In the TV ad, Boone appeared first saying that acne is a painful experience both physically and emotionally.<sup>89</sup> He goes on to say that "while I have never had much of a skin problem, I do have four daughters." Boone says that no acne cleansers or medications seemed to work for his daughters. Debby Boone appears next, agreeing that no acne products have seemed to work, "no, not until my sister and I met a Beverly Hills doctor and got some real help through a product she developed called Acne Statin." Boone and Debby Boone go onto explain how the product works, highlighting its ability to target "C-Acne" and ability to "get to the root of the problem." Using photos as evidence, they show how Acne-Statin works to attack bacteria. This ad, as well as a print version with a similar message, wound up as evidence in a FTC ruling against Boone and the maker of Acne-Statin, Karr Preventative Medical Products. As a result of the case, in 1978, Boone was charged with making false advertising assertions on behalf of the medical company. This was the first time a celebrity

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<sup>89</sup> Federal Trade Commission, "COMPLAINT IN THE MATTER OF KARR PREVENTATIVE MEDICAL PRODUCTS, INC., ET AL.," October 29, 1970, [https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/commission\\_decision\\_volumes/volume-94/ftc\\_volume\\_decision\\_94\\_july\\_-\\_december\\_1979pages\\_1080-1173.pdf](https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/commission_decision_volumes/volume-94/ftc_volume_decision_94_july_-_december_1979pages_1080-1173.pdf).

endorser was held liable for the claims they made in an ad.<sup>90</sup> The Federal Trade Commission ruled that Boone failed to disclose his relationship with the advertiser while also making claims of product effectiveness with neglect of the truth. In a successful petition to the commission, Boone was not required to divulge his financial interest in the product.<sup>91</sup> However, in compliance with the FTC ruling, Boone agreed to disclose his relationship with the companies he would advertise for in the future. The FTC also ordered Boone to personally refund buyers 25 cents per unit sold.<sup>92</sup>

As Boone aged and his career prospects changed, the types of products he sold changed too. Today, at age 85, Boone no longer advertises acne lotion products, now endorsing products aimed more squarely at his own age group. Also, as Boone fell from household name status, he began advertising on behalf of lesser-known products. Boone is repeatedly seen pushing products more commonly used by older people, using language and stereotypes targeting an older audience. The later part of Boone's career as an endorser, and the advertisements in which he appears, cannot be separated from their distinct targeting of older adults.

In the last several years, Boone has made many television appearances, both in ads and in shows to advertise products. Most of the products he endorses are targeting older adults, with few, he attempts to reach a younger audience. The advertising website ispot.tv identifies Pat Boone as appearing in 80 television ad spots, airing 10,244 times. Of these spots, 35 are for

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<sup>90</sup> Michael E. Jones, "Celebrity Endorsements: A Case for Alarm and Concern for the Future," *New England Law Review* 15, no. 3 (1980): 521-544.

<sup>91</sup> Lynn Rosellini, "Special Case at the F.T.C.," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/29/us/special-case-at-the-ftc.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Rosellini, "Special Case at the F.T.C."

Swiss America, 30 are for Relief Factor, nine are for Safe Step, three for Wonder Bible, One for Security 1 Lending, one for the movie *God is Not Dead 2*, and one for a book written by founder of Swiss America, Craig Smith.<sup>93</sup> While this isn't an exhaustive list of Boone's television appearances, it is representative of the products and companies he has endorsed.

Boone has long thought of himself as an entrepreneur.<sup>94</sup> Davis says Boone was burned on several investments he made in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Davis, Boone invested in a direct mail film business that closed, an automated restaurant chain that closed, and the now defunct Oakland Oaks basketball team. Davis writes that Boone lost over \$20 million from failed investments in those years. In Boone's autobiography from 1972, about his life and religion, he writes that he turned to God when he was getting desperate. "When it appeared that my career was going down the drain, my marriage was on the rocks, and the bank was demanding \$1,300,000 overnight."<sup>95</sup> Boone's business trouble continued into the 1980s as his record label Lamb and Lion went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1989.<sup>96</sup> In 1995, Boone avoided charges in a fraud case where, according to the Associated Press, he was used by a scam investor to get other investors to hand over their money.<sup>97</sup> From 1982 to 2006, Boone was part-owner and president of Los Angeles station KDOC TV.<sup>98</sup> Boone says he is always looking for the next big

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<sup>93</sup> "Pat Boone TV Commercials," iSpot.TV, <https://www.ispot.tv/topic/musician/oX/pat-boone>.

<sup>94</sup> Brad Auerbach, "Pat Boone: What You Don't Know About This Entrepreneur, Recording Artist and Friend of Fats Domino," *Forbes*, January 11, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Boone, *A New Song*, 31.

<sup>96</sup> Davis, *Pat Boone*, 194.

<sup>97</sup> Adam Yeomans, "Pat Boone, Other Celebrities Used In Rip Off Scheme, Authorities Say," *AP News*, October 17, 1995, <https://apnews.com/article/047523e03966a6fbf2d8876947d876bb>.

<sup>98</sup> KDOC "History page," <http://kdoc.tv/history/>.

idea. In 2015, Boone appeared on the TV show *Shark Tank* to pitch a car that runs on air.<sup>99</sup> On the show, the company received the largest investment ever made on *Shark Tank*.<sup>100</sup> The deal fell through after the show aired. As an impassioned entrepreneur, Boone tried out many business ventures, but experienced a number of failures. While Boone's investments continue today, it seems that Boone found his sweet spot, combining his interest in business with generating income, as an endorser. Where it's challenging to find success in Boone's history of business investments, success can easily be found in his record as an endorser for several companies. Speaking on behalf of a company, Boone is able to experience a connection with business that may satisfy his entrepreneurial itch, without risking the failure he has experienced in his own pursuit of business investments.

Celebrity net worth websites are notoriously inaccurate and despite a desire to know how much a celebrity, like Boone, is worth today, it is publicly unknown.<sup>101</sup> It isn't clear what Boone's financial arrangements are with the companies he invests in and whether he is financially involved in any of the companies. What can be said is that appearing in TV ads as a endorser is a potentially lucrative career path for a celebrity past the height of their fame. Using his long-running influencer power as a lasting celebrity, Boone brings a valuable endorsement to a company he advertises for. As long as Boone's meaning as a cultural figure continues to

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<sup>99</sup> "Pat Boone to Pitch Eco-Friendly Car on Shark Tank: Shark Tank," *ABC*, April 27, 2015, <https://abc.com/shows/shark-tank/news/updates/pat-boone-pitches-shark-tank-20150501>.

<sup>100</sup> Emily Canal, "'Shark Tank' Officially Offers to Invest \$100 Million. Here Are Its 8 Biggest On-Air Deals," *Inc.com*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.inc.com/emily-canal/shark-tank-officially-offers-to-invest-100-million-here-are-its-8-biggest-on-ai.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Malcolm Harris, "The Big Secret of CELEBRITY WEALTH (Is That No One Knows Anything)," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/style/richest-celebrities-in-hollywood.html>.

resonate with an audience, Boone will remain valuable as a representative of companies targeting those groups.

## Chapter 3

### **Wonder Bible, Shark Tank, and Swiss America**

In this chapter I will be discussing three products that Boone has served as the promotional face for in recent years: the Wonder Bible, AIRpod, and Swiss America. Each brand capitalizes on a different facet of Boone's celebrity, making each a case study of celebrity and its lasting value. I'll begin each section by describing the product and the company behind it. Then, I will analyze the promotional texts in which Boone endorses these products.

#### **Wonder Bible**

The first MP3 player was released in 1997, the first iPod was released in 2001, and in 2006 the first portable audio Bible was released, called The Digital Talking Bible.<sup>102</sup> The Digital Talking Bible was inspired by Dr. Harvey Hoekstra and Lavina Hoekstra's experience as missionaries in Africa. According to their website, The Hoekstra's translated the New Testament into the Anuak language.<sup>103</sup> As they made more translations, they began to realize that many of the people they gave the translations to were illiterate. Hoekstra began making cassette tape recordings of the Bible translations to make the Bible available to those unable to read. As technology advanced, the Hoekstra's children, Mark and Paul Hoekstra created a digital version of these recordings, making the first digital portable Bible. Their company, Talking Bibles

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<sup>102</sup> The Digital Talking Bible "The Digital Talking Bible," November 20, 2006, <http://www.digitaltalkingbible.com/>.

<sup>103</sup> Talking Bibles International "The History of Talking Bibles," <https://www.talkingbibles.org/what-we-do/history/>.

International, boasts that their digital Bible has many benefits including allowing the blind, non-readers, and everyone else to enjoy the Bible in a new, portable way. The Bible looks like a book but has a speaker on the front and a small control area to play, forward, or rewind the readings. The Digital Talking Bible debuted at \$89.99 and included the complete Old Testament and New Testament.<sup>104</sup> Despite the groundbreaking release of The Digital Talking Bible, the device would soon be eclipsed by the GoBible. With a simpler name and an iPod-like look, the GoBible was released near the end of 2006.<sup>105</sup> The GoBible was brought to market by New York entrepreneur Andrew Block.<sup>106</sup> When the device was released, it was lauded by some as a way to bring the Bible up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>107</sup> Despite the innovations the GoBible made, the company eventually closed, allowing their trademark to be cancelled in February, 2018.<sup>108</sup> Just three months later, the trademark for the Wonder Bible was approved and there was a new portable digital bible on the market.<sup>109</sup>

At about the length and height of a dollar bill, the Wonder Bible is a super portable speaker with a small screen and control buttons. The standard version of the device is maroon, with a gold cross appearing on its front. The Wonder Bible website boasts seven versions of the device. At the time of this writing, only two versions are in-stock: “The complete Old & New

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<sup>104</sup> The Digital Talking Bible, “The Digital Talking Bible.”

<sup>105</sup> Nathan Black, “Jesus-Driven Teens to Spread Gospel with Hi-Tech Bibles,” *The Christian Post*, June 11, 2007, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/jesus-driven-teens-to-spread-gospel-with-hi-tech-bibles.html>.

<sup>106</sup> Tania Padgett, “The ‘Good Book’ Gets up to Speed,” *Gainesville Sun*, January 20, 2007, <https://www.gainesville.com/article/LK/20070120/News/604150615/GS>.

<sup>107</sup> “Salvation at Hand(Held),” *Network Computing*, December 8, 2006, <https://www.networkcomputing.com/careers-and-certifications/salvation-handheld>.

<sup>108</sup> USPTO, “Trademark Search,” [https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/bin/gate.exe?f=search&p\\_lang=english&p\\_d=trmk](https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/bin/gate.exe?f=search&p_lang=english&p_d=trmk).

<sup>109</sup> USPTO, “Trademark Search,” [https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/bin/gate.exe?f=search&p\\_lang=english&p\\_d=trmk](https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/bin/gate.exe?f=search&p_lang=english&p_d=trmk).

Testaments of the Bible in the King James Version” and “The complete, fully dramatized Old & New Testaments of the Bible in the New International Version.” The sold-out versions of the bible include Children’s Version, Reina-Valera Spanish Version, The Message Version, Breathe Version, Live!, and Stars Version. The standard NIV and KJV Wonder Bibles sell in some commercials for \$39.99, and sells on the Allstar Innovations website, [getwonderbible.com](http://getwonderbible.com), and Amazon for \$29.99.

The Wonder Bible is owned and sold by an arrangement between Allstar Innovations and As Seen On TV Wholesale. Allstar Innovations owns many brands with prominent television advertising such as the Snuggie (blanket with arms), Magic Mesh (hands-free screen door), and Sharper Image (electronics brand). Allstar Innovations was founded in 1999 and has since done over \$8 billion in sales.<sup>110</sup> According to their website, Allstar Innovations has launched over 300 products and spent over \$2 billion in advertising.<sup>111</sup> The company’s literature states that they take products and brands from concept to consumer. The Allstar Innovations website includes a submission form where people may submit their own product ideas for consideration by the company. Where Allstar Innovations’ website appears as a large, polished company, As Seen On TV Wholesale’s website appears slightly outdated. Yet, they boast launches of popular products like Perfect Cushion, Nutriblade Knives, and Wonder Bible. As Seen on TV Wholesale pitches themselves as an experienced two-person force in the industry with over 40 years of

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<sup>110</sup> PR Web, “Allstar Innovations Announces Brand Refresh With Over 20 Years’ Experience in Performance Marketing,” October 15, 2019, [https://www.prweb.com/releases/allstar\\_innovations\\_announces\\_brand\\_refresh\\_with\\_over\\_20\\_years\\_experience\\_in\\_performance\\_marketing/prweb16647981.htm](https://www.prweb.com/releases/allstar_innovations_announces_brand_refresh_with_over_20_years_experience_in_performance_marketing/prweb16647981.htm).

<sup>111</sup> Allstar Innovations “Home Page,” accessed July 2, 2021, <https://allstarmg.com/>.



experience. They say they work with investors, manufacturers, marketers, importers, and producers to bring products to TV and into stores.<sup>112</sup>

On the Wonder Bible's website, the only mention of any company behind the device is in the ADA Accessibility Statement where Allstar Innovations is mentioned as the company responsible for the website. On Amazon, the Wonder Bible is sold by Allstar Innovations and the company is also listed as the devices' manufacturer. While it would appear as if Allstar Innovations created and sells the Wonder Bible, As Seen On TV Wholesale lists the Wonder Bible on their own website as one of their products. In addition, As Seen On TV Wholesale owns the trademark to the Wonder Bible name.

The Wonder Bible has multiple TV commercials available online. The commercials often include the same b-roll and voiceover. Of the several ads, there are two distinct versions: One including Boone and one without Boone. The version without Boone features people of different ages enjoying the device, while playing various Bible verses. This ad comes in different lengths including a one-minute version and a one minute and 30 second version. The version with Boone features some of the same b-roll, actors, and verses, but unlike the other ad, features a endorser.

The one-minute long commercial including Boone begins with a medium shot of Boone sitting in a chair.<sup>113</sup> Boone, 85 at the time of the ad's release, appears in a collared shirt, with a smile. He begins the ad by saying, "hello, friend. Pat Boone here." In conjunction with his

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<sup>112</sup> As Seen on TV Wholesale, "About us," accessed July 2, 2021, <http://aseenontvwholesale.com/aboutus.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Allstar Innovations "Wonder Bible - Official Pat Boone Commercial," *YouTube*, September 20, 2019, <https://youtu.be/D1uCbR7B8QQ>.

introduction, Boone's name appears on the screen with "singer & actor" beneath to remind viewers who this endorser is. The ad quickly moves to b-roll with Boone narrating as the Wonder Bible is introduced. "Now, you can hear the word of God anytime, anywhere, with Wonder Bible," Boone said. "The incredible Bible that speaks!" Boone's stamp of approval on this product is important in helping potential customers feel comfortable using the Wonder Bible. Rather than calling the device a portable mp3 player, which is what it essentially is, Boone makes a point of calling it a Bible first. Instead of being a speaker that plays the Bible, Boone is conveying that the Wonder Bible is a Bible that you happen to listen to. The commercial then shows three different scenes of people enjoying the Wonder Bible. One middle-aged man is listening to the Wonder Bible while sitting on the couch, a younger woman is using the device while sitting in bed, a man in a suit turns on the device while sitting at a desk. During the b-roll, a different narrator takes over to describe how the Wonder Bible works and how it can be used. After, halfway through the commercial, Boone returns to the screen. "Now, there's an entire collection of Wonder Bible's for everyone," he said. Four different Wonder Bibles appear on the screen, the KJV, the NIV, the La Biblia Reina-Valera version, and the children's version. Then, the commercial shows each of the Bibles being used with a different actor in a different environment. Boone appears in the final scene of the ad with a closing message. "Every Wonder Bible provides inspiration, guidance, and comfort," he said.

Looking at the Wonder bible, it appears as a somewhat cheap, mass-produced device. Encased in plastic, with a small screen and simple controls, it appears in stark contrast with something that Christians hold as sacred as the Bible. As the user pointed out on the subreddit r/Christian, the device can feel like a commercialized version of the Bible. When Boone closes

the ad by saying that the device provides comfort, he is providing assurance that, despite how it may appear, the device indeed does provide the comfort that Christians may be able to expect from the Bible. The Wonder Bible uses Boone's ethos as a longtime Christian, specifically a Christian that believes in the importance of the Bible, to claim credibility as an acceptable substitute to the reading of a textual version of the Bible. To Protestants, such as Boone, the Bible is considered the sole guide to their faith, but they may ask themselves whether the Wonder Bible can be a substitute for the Bible. but it may be hard to know if the Wonder Bible can also provide these positive attributes. With Boone's endorsement as a Protestant, Allstar Innovations attempts to convince longtime Christian viewers that if the device is good enough for Boone, it's good enough for them.

While Boone only appears in one commercial for Wonder Bible, Allstar Innovations shows the value of Boone's endorsement of the device by highlighting the endorsement elsewhere. The title of both the Amazon listing and the Walmart.com listing for the KJV of the device includes "endorsed by Pat Boone." In addition to the title, an image of Boone with his endorsement is featured as the second product picture for both listings of the device.

Boone's endorsement of the Wonder Bible also seems to be important to purchasers of the product, as seen by their reviews of the product. On Amazon, reviewer Billie Ozment noted that when they looked for the product on Amazon, they found the Wonder Bible endorsed by Pat Boone.<sup>114</sup> Another reviewer gave four stars saying, "I was hoping it would have Pat Boone's voice."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Billie Ozment, Review of The Wonder Bible, Amazon, March 27, 2021, [https://www.amazon.com/Wonder-Talking-Player-Version-Endorsed/dp/B0756P9VRS/ref=sr\\_1\\_2\\_sspa](https://www.amazon.com/Wonder-Talking-Player-Version-Endorsed/dp/B0756P9VRS/ref=sr_1_2_sspa).

<sup>115</sup> Terry Wonell, Review of The Wonder Bible, Amazon, June 26, 2021,

Although the Wonder Bible has only been around for three years, the amount of advertising behind the product has given it visibility outside the intended audience. Online, the Wonder Bible has been a target for parody and analysis. In 2020, contributing editor of Hackaday, a blog that hacks into everyday objects, wrote a post breaking down the Wonder Bible.<sup>116</sup> Nardi begins by discussing the Wonder Bible TV ad:

“The commercial for the Wonder Bible shows people all (sic) of all ages using the device, but it’s not very difficult to read between the lines and see who the gadget is really aimed for. We catch a glimpse of a young businessman tucking a Wonder Bible into the center console of his expensive sports car, but in reality, the scenes of a retiree sitting pensively in her living room are far closer to the mark”

Nardi says that everything the Wonder Bible does could easily be replicated, and even improved, by a smartphone application. Yet, he acknowledges that many people don’t have smartphones or are unable to learn how to use an app. When Nardi opens the Wonder bible’s plastic casing, he finds that the device is a simple MP3 player with the Bible verses loaded onto an SD card. As Nardi analyzes each component on the inside of the product, he is impressed by how well-built the device is. Nardi assumes that readability was a major focus when designing the Wonder Bible screen and notes that the display appears custom manufactured for the product. In the end, Nardi concludes by saying that a couple decades ago the product would have been a huge deal, but in 2020, the product is “little more than a superfluous gadget.”

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[https://www.amazon.com/Wonder-Talking-Player-Version-Endorsed/dp/B0756P9VRS/ref=sr\\_1\\_2\\_sspa](https://www.amazon.com/Wonder-Talking-Player-Version-Endorsed/dp/B0756P9VRS/ref=sr_1_2_sspa).

<sup>116</sup> Tom Nardi, “Teardown: Wonder Bible,” Hackaday, June 23, 2020, <https://hackaday.com/2020/06/22/teardown-wonder-bible/>.

In 2018, popular electronic music producer Joel Zimmerman, known as Deadmau5, posted a link to the Wonder Bible commercial on Twitter, saying that he “can’t wait till someone circuit bends one of these bad boys!”<sup>117</sup> Circuit bending is the process of taking apart battery products and messing with the inner components to have them produce new or altered sounds.<sup>118</sup> Popular YouTuber Sam Battl, known as “Look Mum No Computer” on YouTube, took Zimmerman up on his idea, producing a video where he breaks into the Wonder Bible and shows the sounds it can make. In the video, Battl says “this is no dig against Christianity or anything, this is merely just to make the Bible accessible for people who want to listen to it in a more avant-garde way.”<sup>119</sup> With the Wonder Bible modified to include dials, switches, and cables, Battl makes the Wonder Bible play Bible verses at various speeds while electronic music plays behind it. The video posted by Battl has over 600,000 views on YouTube. Several other videos on Youtube parody the Wonder Bible, whether it’s by creating a new version of an original Wonder Bible commercial or creating a comedy sketch including the device.

Beyond parody, the Wonder Bible is also a target of criticism across the internet. A blog post, and comments to the post, on agnostic.com criticize the product, asking, “do Holy Rollers actually buy these contraptions?”<sup>120</sup> A post on the Reddit subreddit, r/Christian provides for a more nuanced discussion of the product. The original poster said, “What do you all think of the

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<sup>117</sup> Joel Zimmerman, (@deadmau5), “Deadmau5 Twitter Post.” Twitter, August 3, 2018 5:31 a.m.

<https://twitter.com/deadmau5/status/1025328242474057730?s=20>.

<sup>118</sup> Dani Deahl, “Circuit Bending: Hacking a Furby in the Name of Music,” *The Verge*, September 14, 2018,

<https://www.theverge.com/2018/9/14/17844906/circuit-bending-hacking-a-furby-in-the-name-of-music>.

<sup>119</sup> Sam Battl, *deadmau5 Dared Me to Circuit Bend a Bible*, Youtube, 2018,

<https://youtu.be/fyc-OTa9xpY>.

<sup>120</sup> sassygirl3869, “Agnostic.com,” *Agnostic.com* (blog), January 7, 2018,

<https://agnostic.com/discussion/13484/has-anyone-seen-the-commercial-for-the-wonder-bible-an-audio-version-of-the-bible-for-believers-ar>.

Wonder Bible? I think that it's just another way to commercialize the Bible."<sup>121</sup> The top comment on the post says that they think the Wonder Bible is great. "I think the more ways we have to get into God's word, the better," Troutfarms wrote. "This seems to be aimed at an older crowd that may not have the technical know-how to take full advantage of a smart phone or tablet." They go on to write that this product would be perfect for their mother who has a hard time reading the Bible due to her eyesight.

In the Wonder Bible ad, Boone is pulling on his ethos as a longtime Christian influencer, but more specifically, Boone is also speaking as an elderly Christian. Founder of one of the first audio Bibles, Andrew Block, told me that they began targeting young people, but pivoted when they realized that older people could be a great market.<sup>122</sup> Block said that older people with vision issues were especially interested in the device. Like as a Christian, Boone can speak to the religious aspect of the product, as an older person, Boone can speak to the usefulness of the product to the older audience the product may be targeting. In this way, the Wonder Bible joins Boone's collection of products he has endorsed targeting older adults such as a pain relief pill Relief Factor, a walk-in bath tub Safe Step Tub, and a device for the hard of hearing to hear the television TV Ears.

### **SHARK TANK**

Boone appeared on *Shark Tank* in 2015 alongside Ethan Tucker to pitch the company Zero Pollution Motors.<sup>123</sup> The product they pitched from Zero Pollution Motors is the AIRPod

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<sup>121</sup> DaKoolDood, "What do you all think of the Wonder Bible?" Reddit, December 23, 2017, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Christian/comments/7lpbov/what\\_do\\_you\\_all\\_think\\_of\\_the\\_wonder\\_bible/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Christian/comments/7lpbov/what_do_you_all_think_of_the_wonder_bible/).

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Block, email message to the author, July 17, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> "Shark Tank," *Shark Tank*, ABC, March 21, 2015.

2.0. The AIRPod 2.0 is a small vehicle that is powered by compressed air.<sup>124</sup> It has two seats and weighs just 617 pounds. It can travel up to 45 MPH and can reach distances of up to 92 miles before needing to refill with air. Zero Pollution Motors pitches the vehicle as the future of travel, saying that it is “the solution to urban pollution and urban mobility.”<sup>125</sup>

The AIRPod was developed by MDI, a Luxembourg based company that develops compressed air technology.<sup>126</sup> The text on the Zero Pollution Motors website is out-of-date with the purchasing page still saying that “production in Europe is schedule (sic) for first quarter 2019. For US buyers, estimated delivery for those who paid their deposits, is the second half of 2019.” Zero Pollution Motors did not invent the AIRPod but were able to make their pitch on *Shark Tank* because they are one of the U.S. licensees for MDI. This means that Zero Pollution Motors owns the rights to build a production plant in the U.S. to produce the AIRPod.<sup>127</sup> In a 2020 story Tucker wrote about his entrepreneurship for starterstory.com, Tucker said that the company is not currently fully funded, and they are awaiting a factory prototype from MDI due by 2022.<sup>128</sup>

The management page of Zero Pollution Motors’ website says the CEO is Shiva Vencat. According to that page, Vencat has been MDI’s representative to the U.S. for over ten years.

The website also lists Tucker as management for the company. Despite Vencat’s leadership as

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<sup>124</sup> Zero Pollution Motors,  
<https://zeropollutionmotors.us/>.

<sup>125</sup> Zero Pollution Motors,  
<https://zeropollutionmotors.us/>.

<sup>126</sup> “MDI: Compressed Air Engine: Luxembourg,” MDI Nouveau,  
<https://www.mdi.lu/>.

<sup>127</sup> Zero Pollution Motors,  
<https://zeropollutionmotors.us/>.

<sup>128</sup> Ethan Tucker, “Ethan Tucker On Inventing A Car Powered By Compressed Air - Starter Story,” *Starter Story*, May 13, 2021,  
<https://www.starterstory.com/compressed-air-car>.

the CEO, Tucker often appears as the face of the company. Tucker is a screenwriter working in the entertainment industry for over 30 years.<sup>129</sup> Tucker said he was working on a screenplay about inventor Nikola Tesla when his brother-in-law told him about a company that invented a car that runs on air. Tucker was so interested in the product that he contacted the company and told them that he wanted help bring the car to the U.S. Tucker began working with the company to bring the product to the U.S. market but hit roadblocks throughout the process. The issues included MDI not wanting to release one of few prototypes to the U.S., and production delays. Through these issues, Tucker sought a \$5 million investment to build a production plant in the U.S. to produce the cars.

According to Tucker, Boone had been working with Vencat from early in the company's history to help get funding for the AIRPod. Tucker said Boone "had a breakthrough when he met *Shark Tank* producer Mark Burnett and convinced him to give ZPM an audition for the show." In another interview, when asked about being on *Shark Tank*, Boone told the Daily Signal that he knows Burnett and Roma Downey, who is married to Burnett.<sup>130</sup> Potentially giving a clue as to how Boone knows Burnett and Downey, Boone mentions Downey was on the show *Touched by an Angel*, and that the couple does the *A.D. Series*, a biblical drama.

In 2001, the Japanese show (translated to) *The Tigers of Money* or *Money Tigers* first aired, setting off what would become a worldwide craze for television shows where entrepreneurs seek money from investors on TV.<sup>131</sup> Since the launch of *Money Tigers*, the show

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<sup>129</sup> Tucker, "Ethan Tucker On Inventing A Car Powered By Compressed Air - Starter Story."

<sup>130</sup> Genevieve Wood, "Pat Boone Intros Car on 'Shark Tank'," *The Daily Signal*, July 19, 2015, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2015/07/18/even-obama-would-love-this-pat-boone-intros-car-on-shark-tank/>.

<sup>131</sup> "Money Tigers," TVmaze, 2001, <https://www.tvmaze.com/shows/52384/money-tigers>.



has been adapted 40 times in different countries around the world.<sup>132</sup> The first popular iteration of *Money Tigers* was its United Kingdom release as *Dragon's Den* in 2005. The show gained popularity in the UK and quickly spread to other countries. Versions of the show appeared in Canada, Israel, and New Zealand by the end of 2006. In 2008, TV producer Mark Burnett signed a deal to bring the *Dragon's Den* format to the U.S., through ABC which ordered a pilot for the show.<sup>133</sup> Burnett had previously struck gold with the show *Survivor* (2000), and *The Apprentice* (2004).<sup>134</sup>

The premise of *Shark Tank* is that entrepreneurs present their businesses to five investors, called “sharks,” in an attempt to get an investment in their company. The pitches always begin with a presentation by the business owners. Then, the “sharks” begin questioning the investors to learn more. The “sharks” each have different personalities and approaches to the negotiation taking place, with some quick to criticize and outright make fun of the business, and others offering helpful advice. The negotiation can go in any number of directions. Sometimes, the “sharks” bid against each other to offer the entrepreneur the best deal, other times, the business owner will make an emotional plea in an attempt to convince the “sharks” to take a chance on their idea. *Shark Tank* has aired over 250 episodes, with over 1,000 business pitches.<sup>135</sup> *Shark Tank* is a popular show for ABC, drawing a large audience, especially

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<sup>132</sup> “Dragons' Den Reaches Milestone 40th Adaptation,” *Nippon TV*, January 14, 2020, <https://www.ntv.co.jp/english/pressrelease/20200114.html>.

<sup>133</sup> Alan Frutkin, “ABC to Swim With Burnett’s ‘Shark’.” *MEDIAWEEK*, September 4, 2008, [https://web.archive.org/web/20080920034556/http://www.mediaweek.com/mw/content\\_display/news/national-broadcast/e3ic8fa818f78acd5771b78a713903b24db](https://web.archive.org/web/20080920034556/http://www.mediaweek.com/mw/content_display/news/national-broadcast/e3ic8fa818f78acd5771b78a713903b24db).

<sup>134</sup> Ben Smith, “Donald Trump Is Losing His Touch. So Is the TV Producer Who Shaped His Image.” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/18/business/media/burnett-trump-apprentice.html>.

<sup>135</sup> “The Complete List of Shark Tank Episodes,” *Shark Tank Tales: Life After Shark Tank Updates*, October 28, 2021, <https://sharktanta.com/shark-tank-episodes/>.

in the 18-49 demographic.<sup>136</sup> In 2015, *Shark Tank* averaged about 7 million viewers per episode.<sup>137</sup> With the program's strong viewership, there is an incentive for businesses to go on the show, even if they aren't interested in a deal. Whether the business owners agree to a deal or not, appearing on the show can cause a massive spike in sales.<sup>138</sup> In his book, *Entertaining Entrepreneurs: Reality TV's Shark Tank and the American Dream in Uncertain Times*, historian Daniel Horowitz writes about *Shark Tank*, arguing that the show provides an inaccurate picture of the American Dream and entrepreneurship in America.<sup>139</sup> Horowitz says that it's important to place *Shark Tank* in the context of its release during the Great Recession. During a time of structural injustice and social inequities, Horowitz writes that the show emphasizes individual ambition and rags-to-riches stories. Continuing since the Great Recession, the show has changed little, and income inequality is at the highest it has been in the U.S. since it has been tracked.<sup>140</sup> The impact of growing income disparities is that while *Shark Tank* presents a steady stream of entrepreneurs with oftentimes lucrative ventures, the ability to achieve such a position is becoming more and more improbable for viewers.

Boone's appearance on *Shark Tank* speaks to Boone's enduring fame, largely constructed of nostalgic value. Throughout his appearance, investor Robert Herjavec provides

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<sup>136</sup> "Shark Tank: Season Six Ratings," *TV Series Finale*, May 18, 2015, <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/shark-tank-season-six-ratings-34089/>.

<sup>137</sup> TV Series Finale, "Shark Tank: Season Six Ratings." <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/shark-tank-season-six-ratings-34089/>.

<sup>138</sup> Mark Cohen, "A Small Company's Reality Is Altered by ABC's 'Shark Tank'," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/13/business/smallbusiness/tech-start-up-benefits-from-abcs-shark-tank.html?searchResultPosition=13>.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *Entertaining Entrepreneurs: Reality TV's Shark Tank and the American Dream in Uncertain Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

<sup>140</sup> Taylor Telford, "Income Inequality in America Is the Highest It's Been since Census Bureau Started Tracking It, Data Shows," *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/09/26/income-inequality-america-highest-its-been-since-census-started-tracking-it-data-show/>.

Boone with continuous affirmation of his fame. The response to Boone's appearance by fans online and publications show that Boone's appearance on the show was significant and noteworthy.

"First up is a revolutionary new way to power transportation," the announcer said as Zero Pollution Motors appeared as the first business in front of the "sharks" on season six episode 27 of *Shark Tank*. As soon as Boone and Tucker come into the "sharks" line of vision, Herjavec said, "oh!" in recognition of Boone. A smile came across Herjavec's face and Boone responded by saying, "ho, ho!" This interaction between Herjavec and Boone sets up a narrative that persisted throughout the appearance that Herjavec has a special appreciation for Boone. The camera cuts to Lori Greiner and then Mark Cuban who are also smiling, appearing to show recognition of Boone. Tucker introduced himself first, then Boone introduced himself as an "aging singer, and like you, a lifelong entrepreneur." By introducing himself as an "aging singer," Boone showed that he still considered himself a singer, but also might be compensating for the fact that the height of his fame is behind him. In Boone's mind, calling himself an "aging singer" might be a way of acknowledging why some younger people may not have heard of him, while signaling that older people who are also "aging," would know who he is. Boone called himself a "lifelong entrepreneur" in recognition of his long history investing in a wide range of products. While Boone's financial interest Zero Pollution Motors, if any, is not known, by presenting himself as a seasoned investor, Boone brought credibility to his appearance and endorsement of the product.

Following their introductions, Tucker unveiled a cutout image of the "air car." Boone and Tucker explained what the car is and the investment opportunity they were offering. Boone

concluded their initial presentation of the product by saying, “so, how many want to join us for a dazzling ride into the future?” Herjavec was the first to respond, “Look, Pat, I know you’ve sold over 40 million records.” Herjavec’s acknowledgment of Boone’s success contains multiple meanings in this context. First, the comment works to further acknowledge Boone’s success and continue present him as a successful recording artist. By doing this, Herjavec is gaining Boone’s favor as a potential business partner, explaining Boone’s fame to audience members who may not know who he is, and recognizing Boone as a mainstream celebrity that deserves his spot on the popular show. Herjavec’s comment is also a way for him to insinuate that Boone could be funding the company himself. Herjavec points out how successful Boone has been, surely with that success, his logic goes, Boone would be able to invest in the business. Following Herjavec’s comment, the camera cut to Boone. “They say,” Boone retorted. “I didn’t get paid that many, but yes.” In Boone’s response he accepts the accolade of selling over 40 million records, while rejecting the idea that this means he would have been paid for that many sales. Boone may also be insinuating that he doesn’t have the wealth to support the AIRpod business himself.

Showing interest in Boone and his stardom, Herjavec asked, “what was your biggest hit? I’m curious.” “Love Letters in the Sand,” Boone responded. As the potential investors ask questions about the product, Boone showed his knowledge of the car and its technology by answering the first three questions without intervention from Tucker. As the “sharks” probed Boone and Tucker about the deal, the offer became clearer, but more limited than first presented at the beginning of the appearance. The company, Zero Pollution Motors, has a license from MDI to build a plant in Hawaii. They have the exclusive opportunity to produce

cars in Hawaii, for use in Hawaii. However, this means that others would be able to open plants elsewhere in the U.S. for use in different regions. Cuban said that as an investor, it would make more sense to wait and see how successful the plant is in Hawaii and elsewhere before investing. Herjavec called the licensing strategy, “almost ludicrous.” Four of the “sharks” dropped out of the deal, leaving Herjavec, known for his interest in automotive ventures, as the lone potential investor. The show cut to commercial and when it comes back, the camera is on Boone. “I’ve invested in a lot of things,” Boone said. “And I’m willing to invest in this, too.” First, Boone restated that he has a history of investments and entrepreneurship. Then, Boone used his investment experience as credibility when offering to invest his own money into the business. By saying he would offer his own money, Boone showed not only that he believed in the company, but also that he in fact does have the money to invest in the company. Earlier in the pitch, Boone denied selling enough records to be able to support the company himself, but then, he attempted to sweeten the deal for the “sharks” by offering his own potential investment.

Without further questioning, Herjavec started his offer saying that he will give them \$5 million for 50%, contingent on being able to negotiate an American-wide deal for the cars. Boone and Tucker accepted the deal and Herjavec shook Boone’s hand saying, “what an honor to meet you, Pat.” From Herjavec’s initial reaction to seeing Boone walk into the room to his closing compliment, Herjavec continually recognizes Boone’s lasting celebrity status to Boone and viewers of the show. Herjavec’s recognition of Boone’s stardom, paired with his investment in the company, shows how Boone’s celebrity converts into credibility as an entrepreneur. Boone’s success as a singer doesn’t necessarily speak to any skills he might hold as a

businessperson, yet his endorsement of this investment is valued. The Zero Pollution Motors pitch ended after appearing for about 10 minutes of the 40-minute show, not accounting for commercials.

The conversation between the “sharks” and the companies on *Shark Tank*, and any deal they make is not a contractually binding agreement. Greiner describes it as a “handshake deal” that happens on the show.<sup>141</sup> Following the show, the investors and businesses meet to discuss the deal, provide proof that the company represented themselves accurately and to decide whether they’d like to proceed with the investment. In September 2015, Zero Pollution Motors announced on Facebook that “Robert backed out of the deal made last year after waiting 9 months.”<sup>142</sup>

At the height of his fame, in the mid-1950s to early-1960s, Boone was a highly sought-after guest for TV shows, and his own show, *Pat Boone’s Chevy Showroom*, made him a familiar face on TV. Now, 55 years later, Boone’s appearance on *Shark Tank* was not a TV event, but a nostalgic viewing for those that remembered his fame, and an introduction of a past celebrity to those who weren’t familiar with him. As Herjavec recognizes Boone, rather than asking him what he is doing today, he asked him what his biggest musical hit was. Boone responds with “Love Letters in the Sand,” a song which debuted in 1957. Through this interaction, Boone is presented as a former teen idol rather than a celebrity of today.

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<sup>141</sup> Sarah Elizberger, “This Is What Happens after the Cameras Stop Rolling on ‘Shark Tank,’ According to the Sharks,” *CNBC*, February 19, 2019,

<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/15/shark-tanks-lori-greiner-kevin-oleary-what-happens-off-camera.html>.

<sup>142</sup> Jon LeSage, “Zero Pollution Motors and Its Compressed Air Car Lose Investor in Classic Tale for the Auto Industry,” *Green Auto Market*, September 7, 2015,

<http://greenautomarket.com/zero-pollution-motors-and-its-compressed-air-car-lose-investor-in-classic-tale-for-the-auto-industry/>.

It's noteworthy that Herjavec was the shark most interested in Boone as a celebrity and in the end was the only shark willing to make an offer for Boone's pitch. It is possible that the show orchestrated Herjavec's interest in Boone to make for a more compelling investment story. Regardless of the producer's intent, the impact of Herjavec's interest in Boone and subsequent investment, is that it appears to the viewer as if Boone's credibility as a lifelong entrepreneur and celebrity is so strong that Herjavec was swayed despite his concerns with the business.

### **SWISS AMERICA**

Swiss America is a gold and silver company, founded in 1982, by Craig Smith.<sup>143</sup> According to their website, the company sells gold coins, silver coins, and gold bullion. The company describes the sale of these products as an investment opportunity. Customers can setup a meeting with a sales consultant from the company to talk about what coin or bullion option they would like to purchase. Then, the company mails the customer the physical coinage or bullion for them to hold. After purchasing, customers can track their item's value through their Swiss America account. Swiss America claims to be the "one of the largest and most respected firms in the industry."<sup>144</sup> The company is active on YouTube, maintains an active blog, and makes regular Facebook posts. These posts highlight the various reasons they say you should invest in gold and silver coins.

A video featured on the front page of their site intends to explain their company and process of selling gold and silver. In the video, CEO Dean Heskin begins by saying that "over the

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<sup>143</sup> "Craig R. Smith, Chairman Emeritus," Swiss America, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.swissamerica.com/pres.php>.

<sup>144</sup> Swiss America, "Craig R. Smith, Chairman Emeritus."

last 30 years, our team of professionals has grown over ten-fold.” Below the video, the website says that the business has “50 experienced account executives to assist you.” The video begins playing b-roll, first showing a shot of what we can assume is the outside of the building. Located in Arizona, the building is non-descript, not even including a sign or logo on the building, much less the door. Inside, the camera pans across cubicles of employees with headsets working on their computers. The video walks the viewer through how a Swiss America order works. First you discuss with an investment advisor, then an order is sent to the trading department where pricing and availability is confirmed. Next, the order appears to be weighed and fulfilled from their office. In the description of their YouTube channel, they write that they have given advice to “tens of thousands of customers.”<sup>145</sup>

Swiss America’s YouTube channel, as well as some of their blog posts begin to give insight into their overall brand strategy, including their use of spokespeople to advertise their products. The Swiss America YouTube channel has a total of 190 videos posted, amassing a total of over 330,000 views. The channel includes Boone’s commercials, dozens of appearances on Fox Business, and other miscellaneous commercials released by Swiss America since 2007. The company joined YouTube early, forming their channel in 2007. Since then, they have gathered 805 subscribers. Their videos on YouTube, some amassing tens of thousands of views, provide insight into the political affiliation of Swiss America and the type of messaging they are using to target their audience.

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<sup>145</sup> “Swiss America,” YouTube, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/user/swissamerica/about>.



As Swiss America's most prominent celebrity endorser, Boone is featured in many of their ads, and is an important figurehead for Swiss America. Boone's first ad for Swiss America was in 2006, but his connection with Craig Smith, founder of Swiss America, goes back to at least 2001. In 2001, Boone wrote the forward for Smith's first book, *Rediscovering Gold in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The only hint as to when they first met is in a blog post by Smith posted onto the Swiss America website. In the post, Smith says that Swiss America has celebrity representation such as Pat Boone and Michael Savage. "These individuals decided to become spokesmen after first becoming clients of the firm," he writes.

The full list that Swiss America includes on their website under "endorsed by" are: Michael Savage, Pat Boone, Mark Levin, Steve Deace, and American Red Cross. Savage, Levin, and Deace are all prominent conservative political activists, authors, and media personalities. The connection between conservatives and gold is well-documented in the media, and less so in academia. Conservatives' interest in gold stems from their general belief that the government should have less power.<sup>146</sup> They favor the gold standard as they contend it would be a less regulated method of valuing the dollar. This connection between conservatives and gold explains Swiss America's choice of endorsers as well as the endorsers' interest in Swiss America.

In Boone's Swiss America ads he attempts to sell an idea to older adults instead of explicitly selling a product. This sales technique, different from other ads, puts an emphasis on the particular strategies and emotions commonly used in targeting older adults. In addition to

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<sup>146</sup> Gillian B White, "Why Are Republicans So Obsessed With the Gold Standard?," *The Atlantic*, November 13, 2015.

this, these ideas are coming from Boone himself; a person who an older audience knows as a star representing simpler, more conservative times.

Boone's ads for Swiss America are closely tied to Swiss America's conservatism and Boone's past as a political commentator. Swiss America's two most popular videos on YouTube are the most pointedly political that they have posted on their channel. The videos are a two-part commercial series, the first is called "'The Inflatocracy' Obama and Bernanke commercial." In the commercial, a cartoon caricature rendering of Barack Obama and Ben Bernanke are floating in a hot air balloon, throwing money off the sides. In the commercial, Bernanke says, "we'll convince Americans that paper money does grow on trees." Then, Obama talks about how taxing the wealthy is going to pay for his stimulus plan. The camera cuts to a caricature of Boone. He tells the viewer that this is a new form of government that is "deliberately devaluing our money, our life, and our future by turning our great nation into a welfare state."

The second commercial is called, "'Wizards of Oz' Obama and Bernanke commercial." The commercial is set in a strange, horror-like room with cloudy green and black walls. The camera circles Boone as he tells the audience that he remembers a time when "gold was standard behind every dollar." As the camera turns, a vault is shown on the wall with a sign saying, "FORT KNOX." Just as Boone complains about the government's ability to borrow beyond its means, a TV spins from the wall, showing the faces of Bernanke and Obama. "How dare you presume to criticize the great and powerful oz? Consider yourself lucky we raised the debt ceiling, potentially saving millions of jobs," the floating Obama head says.

In two one-minute commercials in 2016 and 2018, Boone draws on his celebrity as a conservative commentator to sell the idea of a failing U.S. dollar to promote buying gold and

silver from Swiss America. In the ads, Boone leads the viewer through supposed financial changes coming to America, speaking in the same authoritative way he has in the past on shows such as Fox Business or in his writing for Newsmax. The changes Boone presents all point to the supposed instability of traditional currency such as the dollar. The ad, “The Secret War on Cash: Weapons of Cash Destruction” begins with Boone saying, “you know for years I’ve been warning Americans about the secret war on cash by big government targeting your money and your privacy.” The ad continues to outline how cash is no longer a safe way to store your money saying that, “recent reports confirm that some banks are refusing to cash checks and cash is being confiscated from innocent people.” The ad closes by asking the viewer to call Swiss America to receive a free report detailing this “secret war on cash.” It’s notable that Boone doesn’t ask the viewer to purchase anything. Instead, in these ads, Boone is acting in his role as political commentator, advising viewers to get more information on the issues he presents.

Boone has been a political activist and commentator since the 1960s campaigning for conservative candidates and commentating for news outlets. His longtime, unwavering persona as an outspoken conservative lends him credibility as a endorser for Swiss America. Still today, Boone appears on news shows such as Fox Business, and wrote opinion pieces for websites like Newsmax. As recently as June 25, 2021, Boone appeared on Newsmax’s Spicer & Co show, gathering more than 10,000 views on their YouTube channel discussing issues such as family values, cancel culture, slavery, and more.<sup>147</sup> These appearances on popular news media outlets, works to build Boone’s image as a political insider.

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<sup>147</sup> “Pat Boone: Talent Was a Gift from God,” Newsmax, YouTube, June 25, 2021,

If Swiss America were to simply sell gold products in their commercials, Boone's credibility may not be used to its full potential as Boone would be leaning more so on his experience as an entrepreneur. Instead, Swiss America has Boone sell political ideas of rising inflation, sabotage by Democrats, and the dangers of big government to pull on Boone's role as a political insider. Utilizing Boone in this way, Swiss America is able to mimic Boone's role as a political commentator, heightening the impression to viewers that Boone really does believe, and may have inside knowledge, of the gold and silver markets.

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<https://youtu.be/YWV7Fn3XjHM>.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Through my countless number of internet searches for Boone, I've found him to be associated with an unusually wide range of different products, movements, and times. This one person who experienced just a couple years of widespread fame is still known today for a wide variety of reasons. It can be easy to think of Boone or other celebrities past the height of their fame as bygone or irrelevant. Yet, stars who have adapted to their changing fame as Boone has, remain ever relevant and can even thrive outside of mainstream fame while catering to their changing audience base. Boone's sustained relevance, even outside of mainstream attention, has made Boone a valuable endorser for brands.

Boone rose to fame in the mid-1950s as a mainstream celebrity. Boone's songs topped the charts, and he hosted the *Pat Boone Chevy Showroom* variety show on ABC from 1957-1960. Beginning in the early 1960s, Boone's mainstream appeal lessened. As Boone's mainstream fame faded, Boone embraced his popularity amongst Christians during the growing Charismatic Movement. Then, Boone would become more politically involved, positioning himself alongside prominent members of the New Right. He would spend the next fifty years catering to these audiences consistently releasing Christian music and contributing to political platforms. From the beginning of his fame, Boone considered himself an entrepreneur and took opportunities to start businesses or invest in businesses. Boone's propensity to work with new products and businesses, paired with his long development of his celebrity as a religious and conservative figure paid off and show through his appearances as an endorser for products.

In the summer of 2020, Boone grabbed the attention of millions as widespread demonstrations took place in the United States with protestors speaking out against police shootings of Black Americans, and racism in general within policing and society. In response to this movement, Boone pulled on his attributes as an entrepreneur, as well as a religious and conservative celebrity to release the song, "Can't We Get Along." Boone wrote the lyrics to the song following the Rodney King protests in 1992.<sup>148</sup> The song, sung by Black artist Wendy Moten, was released through Boone's Gold Label. Boone posted the music video on Facebook where it has accumulated more than 5 million views.<sup>149</sup> The release of this song kicked off a small media tour for Boone where he spoke with outlets such as Fox News, and local newspapers discussing the impact of the song, politics, Christianity, and racial issues past and present.

The release of this song, its huge viewership on Facebook, and Boone's subsequent media tour is the cumulation of Boone's life as a businessperson, religious leader and conservative commentator. As he has throughout his career, Boone finds business opportunities where his popularity brings him. In this case, Boone released "Can't We Get Along" on his Gold Label record label as a CD and DVD. The CD includes the song plus "10 songs of Americana by Pat Boone."<sup>150</sup> The DVD is 60 minutes of musical performances of each song. Catering to his religious audience, the song's lyrics contain Boone's religious beliefs saying, "Red

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<sup>148</sup> "Gold Label Artists," *Gold Label Artists*, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://www.goldlabelartists.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PAT-BOONE-CANT-WE-GET-ALONG-RELEASE.pdf>.

<sup>149</sup> Pat Boone, "Can't We Get Along," Facebook, June 22, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/PatBooneOfficial/videos/268143990926838/>; <https://www.facebook.com/PatBooneOfficial/videos/268143990926838/>.

<sup>150</sup> Gold Label Artists, "Gold Label Artists."

and yellow, black, and white, we're all so precious in His sight."<sup>151</sup> Boone's inclusion of religious language in the song reflects his longtime persona as a religious celebrity. Finally, the song promotes Boone's long held conservative political views. In the song's chorus, Boone says, "can't we just be friends? Can't we all get along?" The rest of the song follows the same theme of coming together rather than making change. Through this argument, Boone is standing by the message of many conservatives that reform is not needed. The video has gathered several thousand comments praising both the video and Boone for bringing people together during this time of racial tension.

This case study of Pat Boone tracks Boone's celebrity as it morphed throughout his career. While Boone's path does not apply to all stars, it is also not unique to Boone. Boone's career trajectory is emblematic of a star who must adapt to change their meaning as society loses interest with one aspect of their celebrity, and gains interest in another. To show another example of a star who has had a similar experience with their celebrity, I will briefly outline Kirk Cameron's career path and point out its similarities to Boone's path.

Cameron was a mainstream actor, turned Christian movie star, evangelist, and conservative influencer who got his start in his role as Mike Seaver in *Growing Pains*. Cameron appeared on the show from 1985-1992 and became well-known as a teenage heartthrob. Like Boone experienced 30 years before, Cameron enjoyed several years of mainstream fame. During this time, he appeared in a Pepsi halftime commercial,<sup>152</sup> was on the front of magazine

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<sup>151</sup> Pat Boone, "Can't We Get along - Gold Label Artists," Patboone.com, accessed December 12, 2021 <https://www.goldlabelartists.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/3.-PAT-BOONE-CANT-WE-GET-ALONG-LYRICS.pdf>.

<sup>152</sup> Times Staff, "Pepsi Taps Teen Stars: The 'Pepsi Generation,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-01-11-fi-376-story.html>.

covers,<sup>153</sup> and starred in box office hit *Like Father, Like Son*.<sup>154</sup> When *Growing Pains* came to an end in 1992, Cameron starred in the made for TV comedy remake, *The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes*.<sup>155</sup> Then, in 1995, he got his own show on The WB called *Kirk*.<sup>156</sup> The show was seen as a continuation of Cameron's character in *Growing Pains*. *Kirk* ran for two seasons before being cancelled. During this time, Cameron's celebrity still had value, he was still popular with a teenage audience, but after having his show based on his most famous character cancelled, Cameron chose to take a new path with his career.

Sometime in the late 1980s, during filming of *Growing Pains*, an unnamed actor on the set of the show took Cameron to church with him.<sup>157</sup> Cameron described this as a transformational moment where he realized that he needed to find God. In 1999, *Page Six* said that Cameron left stardom behind to find Jesus, get married, and start a family.<sup>158</sup> While Cameron left the mainstream stardom that would be under *Page Six's* purview, Cameron did transition his fame to become a star in the evangelical Christian community. Both Boone and Cameron were just past the height of their fame at the time of their transition to a different type of celebrity. With both stars coming off the fame associated with having their own shows, they would each embrace their Christian fans and focus future projects on that community.

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<sup>153</sup> Dan Ewald, "The Rebirth of Kirk Cameron," *Today's Christian*, March/April 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080711143843/http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2003/002/1.20.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Rod Daniel, "Like Father like Son," IMDb, October 2, 1987, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093418/>.

<sup>155</sup> David Zurawik, "Disney's ABC Deal Is a Grand Bit of Home Improvement," *Baltimore Sun*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1995-08-01-1995213150-story.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Robin Dougherty, "Cameron Has a New Sitcom on Warner Bros. Network," *Baltimore Sun*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1995-08-23-1995235068-story.html>.

<sup>157</sup> Ewald, "The Rebirth of Kirk Cameron."

<sup>158</sup> "Hollywood's Most Religious Celebs," *Page Six*, November 30, 1999, <https://pagesix.com/1999/11/30/hollywoods-most-religious-celebs/#1>.



In 2000, Cameron would take on his first role in a religious movie starring in *Left Behind: The Movie*.<sup>159</sup> The movie is a thriller that imagines what would happen if the rapture took all Christians to heaven, leaving the rest of the world behind. Even before its theatrical release, the movie sold, “2.8 million videocassettes, mostly in the Christian market.”<sup>160</sup> Since the initial box office success of *Left Behind: The Movie*, Cameron continued appearing in religious themed movies and shows such as *Touched by an Angel*, *Fireproof*, and *Kirk Cameron’s Saving Christmas*.

Cameron hasn’t played a significant role in a film since 2014. Since then, he has taken on other religious and politically conservative projects to cater to his base in a more direct way. Cameron’s newest project is *American Campfire Revival*, a live video series where Cameron leads a book club, class, and movement. The American Campfire Revival videos take place on Cameron’s social media where he has amassed over 3.5 million followers on Facebook. In the videos, Cameron sits in front of his backyard campfire and discusses a book called *The American Covenant*. Cameron says the book documents, “the Biblically based principles and personalities that formed the foundation for America’s economic, governmental, legal, educational, and spiritual institutions.”<sup>161</sup> Through this project, Cameron is speaking to his fans more directly than ever before. Fans can view and interact with Cameron directly on social media, and

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<sup>159</sup> Stephen Holden, “FILM REVIEW; A Biblically Inspired Tale About Dying and Surviving,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/02/movies/film-review-a-biblically-inspired-tale-about-dying-and-surviving.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Holden, “FILM REVIEW; A Biblically Inspired Tale About Dying and Surviving.”

<sup>161</sup> “American Covenant Book,” American Campfire Revival, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://store.americancampfirerevival.com/products/american-covenant-book>.

support Cameron through his website. The *American Campfire Revival* website offers a video training series, a video training kit, apparel, and other merchandise.

Like Boone, Cameron found that instead of having to confront the challenges of making it in mainstream Hollywood or music, they can cater to their own base directly. In both cases, they started their career in one mainstream area, found fame, and then found a more niche, but still strong, celebrity in Christian and conservative culture.

While both Boone and Cameron ended up with a similar type of celebrity, this phenomenon of a changing celebrity is not limited to conservative or Christian circles. Michael Strahan's celebrity provides an example of changing meaning in a totally different area. Without intervention, a star's celebrity can dissipate or free fall into obscurity. To avoid this, a celebrity must take action to revive their career and regain relevance. When facing retirement from one type of celebrity, Strahan changed the meaning of his celebrity to maintain relevance and gain even more fame.

Michael Strahan had a long, successful NFL career playing for the New York Giants from 1993 to 2007. Strahan played defensive end and was well-known for his strong work-ethic and effectiveness on the field. When Strahan broke the NFL single-year sack record in 2001, *The New York Times* wrote, "there was not a player who deserved it more."<sup>162</sup> Speaking to Strahan's prolific NFL career, *Sports Illustrated* called Strahan the fifth greatest Giants player of all time.<sup>163</sup> Strahan was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 2014.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Mike Freeman, "Cheap Sack Will Cost Favre and Strahan," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/07/sports/on-pro-football-cheap-sack-will-cost-favre-and-strahan.html>.

<sup>163</sup> Brian Lokker, "Top 10 New York Giants Players of All Time," *Sports Illustrated*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.si.com/nfl/Top-10-New-York-Giants-Players-of-All-Time>.

<sup>164</sup> "Pro Football Hall of Fame," *Pro Football Hall of Fame*, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.profootballhof.com/players/michael-strahan/>.

In 2008, Strahan took his first step toward a change in his celebrity as he joined the *Fox NFL Sunday* pregame show. By joining this show, he was staying in his orbit of fame, but from the new position as commentator. At this point, Strahan was still catering to a similar, but wider, fan base as he was as an NFL star. Then, in 2012, Strahan completed his transformation to a different type of celebrity when he joined Kelly Ripa to co-host *LIVE with Kelly and Michael*.<sup>165</sup> Now, Strahan pulled on his skills as an interviewer and entertainer to star in the most watched morning news program in America.<sup>166</sup> In 2016, Strahan joined *Good Morning America* as co-anchor alongside Robin Roberts and George Stephanopoulos.<sup>167</sup>

Where Boone and Cameron found a success that boomed quickly and then receded, Strahan experienced success that accumulated over several years in one area, the NFL, but then worked for him as he transitioned to an entirely different path of celebrity. Due to the nature of being an NFL star, if Strahan hadn't sought out a different path as an entertainer, his celebrity would have likely had a sudden drop-off. He could have still been well-known, but his transition to entertainer allowed him to be known to a new, wider audience.

In the cases of Boone, Cameron, and Strahan, without intervention, their celebrities would have eventually expired. Instead, they each transformed to embrace and target their niche audiences. This action they took might have saved their careers, providing new income streams and loyal fan bases. However, the power to change a star's meaning is not limited to

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<sup>165</sup> ABC NEWS, "Michael Strahan Biography," *ABC News*, September 22, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/News/michael-strahan-biography/story?id=74649146>.

<sup>166</sup> Brian Steinberg, "Michael Strahan Extends Contract with ABC News, 'Good Morning America' (Exclusive)," *Variety*, September 22, 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/tv/news/michael-strahan-good-morning-america-contract-renewal-abc-news-1235070764/>.

<sup>167</sup> Steinberg, "Michael Strahan Extends Contract with ABC News, 'Good Morning America' (Exclusive)."

stars themselves. Through the power of the internet, we all have some level of control over a star's meaning. This can be seen today in reviews, blog posts, and online news stories. In the case of Boone, the meaning of the Wonder Bible and his endorsement of the product, was taken hostage by hackers as discussed in Chapter 3. In this case, Boone's meaning transformed from religious endorser to something of a joke to be messed with.

Over the past 60 years, Americans have had a significant infatuation with celebrities. They influence our style, tastes, and interests, but they are also entwined in our political and social beliefs. We are influenced by them and spend time and energy following them. By closely tracking and analyzing the path of Boone's celebrity, we better understand how stars come into positions of power and maintain influence over society. It is important that we work to understand the mechanisms which create influence over culture because understanding what influences us allows us to better grapple with the effects of that influence.

The progression of Boone's celebrity from when he was first discovered in the mid-1950s to now, over 60 years later, tells us something new about how celebrity works. Some may assume that celebrity is something that people happen upon and sustain throughout their career without much effort. This study shows that celebrity is not a given, instead, there are decisions stars must make to reach specific audiences and maintain their celebrity. In addition, stars need not maintain one meaning over their lifespan. Stars can change direction and aim for different audiences, oftentimes elongating their fame.

As Boone's initial fame petered out, he made the switch from being one of the biggest names in music to serving a more niche audience. The course of Boone's celebrity highlights the importance of shared beliefs between a celebrity and their audience. Boone's fame faded as

fans of popular music became less interested in the brand of celebrity Boone had to offer. So, Boone pivoted to serve an audience that shared his beliefs. His new fans were receptive to his new focus on Christian music and his appearances on conservative platforms. Boone's new type of celebrity has been well-received by his audience and he has enjoyed this fame ever since.

This research presents new findings about how celebrity works, specifically exploring the phenomenon of a changing celebrity to target new audiences. These findings will contribute to celebrity studies by presenting a new way to think about the lifespan of celebrity. Rather than a static phenomenon, my research shows that celebrity can be changed, allowing stars to shapeshift their meaning to serve new audiences.

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