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## Will Conservatives Make 'Atlas Shrugged' A Hit?



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A scene from "Atlas Shrugged Part I"

After more than 50 years, Ayn Rand's seminal novel and ode to free market capitalism "Atlas Shrugged" is finally hitting the big screen this weekend, in the first of a planned trilogy of movies. Independently produced and distributed by entrepreneur John Agjialoro, chairman of UM Holdings Inc, the film "Atlas Shrugged, Part 1" was budgeted under \$10 million and includes a cast of little-known actors (newcomer Taylor Schilling stars as the powerful female industrialist Dagny Taggart).

At one time, Algialoro, who optioned the book's rights 18 years ago, had struck up a partnership with Lionsgate Films to make a version of the movie, possibly as a TV miniseries for the new EPIX cable outfit. But when the project dragged on

without getting the green light, Algialoro turned to entertainment attorney and executive producer Harmon Kaslow to get the film made quickly before the rights to the book reverted back to the Ayn Rand estate. Shot in just 26 days and completed several months later, the entire film's creation, from green light to this week's release, took about a year, according to Kaslow.

Reaching out to conservative organizations such as the Cato Institute, FreedomWorks and Tea Party groups, the filmmakers are actively courting a target audience that they believe Hollywood would not so willingly endorse.

"We're lucky that the relevance of the book to what's going on today has steadily increased over time," says Kaslow, referring to some conservatives who believe that the Obama Administration has emphasized government solutions to economic problems. "So that's made the film more accessible and more embraced by the various political factions that prescribe to Ayn Rands' philosophy. And we haven't resisted their embracing it."

"That's a big distinction between our releasing the film and Hollywood," continues Kaslow. "What would a studio have done? Would they have premiered the trailer at the Conservative Political Action Conference? Would they have allowed the Cato Institute and Reason and FreedomWorks and Tea Party groups to directly email their members? Would they work closely with them? Or be afraid to because they think it would alienate other audiences?"

While advance interest in the film may be high among the film's conservative base, [reviews have been terrible](#). For example, Rotten Tomatoes lists more than 5,000 user ratings with a total of 86% saying they "like it," while the critics' average is a disastrous 7%. (Only two movies, "Big Mommas: Like Father, Like Son" and "The Roommate" rate lower.)

"We expected that the critics would have a fear of embracing this film," says Kaslow. "We knew that there was a substantial likelihood that they would not view the film as to whether we got the message right, but would look at it comparing it to what Hollywood would have done. I don't think our audience is persuaded at all by those reviews."

"It's somewhat analogous to the family-based film market," he continues. "Most family based films are not subject to

review, because they know that that audience is all about the message. And if the message is right, they'll give you a hall pass if the production values weren't as high. And if we get criticized for the dialogue, most of it has been taken right out of the book. So, in a sense, they're criticizing the literary nature of the work."

According to Kaslow, the second and third parts of the film are in the active planning stages, with the second part scheduled to go into production this June for release on April 15, 2012, and the third to follow the same timeline the following year. "The green light decision is ultimately John's," says Kaslow. "If we learn there is no commercial interest in the film, I doubt there will be a second or third one. But at this point, we're the third most ticketed film on Fandango, so I don't have any reason to believe that we won't be successful."

As conservatives working within a film industry that he believes tilts liberal, Kaslow says their peers may look them at a little askance. "Up until recently, they haven't given us any credibility, but I don't think they perceived as a threat," he says. "But in my inbox, I'm now getting requests from important and recognizable people to see this movie. I think we're now on their radar screens. And at the end of the day, they're capitalists and they want to make as much money as they can, and if they see us as a way to do that, they'll be our friend."

*What do you think? Leave your thoughts in the comments.*

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