

Disc 3/1767
The Great Book Conspiracy

Senator Thurmond of South Carolina thinks it no accident that hardly any bookstores in Washington carry the recent novel by his friend, the syndicated columnist Holmes Alexander. The Senator believes in conspiracies much as an Irishman believes in leprechauns, a handy general explanation of all that goes wrong in this sad world. As for Mr. Alexander, he is inclined, he says, to blame the bookburners of the liberal establishment.

Without realizing it, the Senator has plunged himself recklessly into the savage triangular warfare waged incessantly among writers, publishers and vendors. One local store, Brentano's, does indeed carry Mr. Alexander's book. But by now, no doubt, the Senator will have begun to hear from those authors whose works are carried by even fewer. The mark of the experienced writer is the deep and abiding conviction that his publishers have deliberately printed too few copies of his book, mainly to prevent him from becoming rich and famous, and that the publishers are keeping most of the copies hidden in their warehouses to avoid the expense of a second printing. As for the stores, it is difficult to enter any without encountering wrathful dim figures searching the shelves; they are, of course, authors looking for the places that their books would occupy if they were in stock.

Conservative authors blame the liberal establishment; liberal authors blame the conservative establishment. The avant garde blames the traditionalist establishment, traditionalists blame the monied swingers. Southerners blame the North; Westerners blame New York. Senator Thurmond has threatened congressional investigation. It promises to be a very long one.