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To: Read, John
Cc: c
Subject: DOJ Agency Model Lawsuit - Public Comment

To Whom It May Concern:

I started my job at Left Bank Books when I was 29 years old – two days after interviewing with owners Kris Kleindienst and Barry Leibman in a borrowed shirt a size too big which I kept tucking in and untucking in the minutes before my interview, trying to decide which way made me look more attractive as a job candidate. Should I look more business-like? Tucked. Or should I look like the ubercool booksellers at the counter? Untucked.

My terror about the interview lessened as I talked to them about the store. It's history and traditions sang to me a siren song tuned specifically to my desires. We talked, planned and joked through the interview and I knew I was a goner.

Then my terror returned at the end of the interview when I was asked to take the "Bookstore Quiz" – a two page short answer test on titles, authors and the finer points of shelving books. I froze, and despite having completed an independent study of all of Virginia Woolf's writing the year before, I could not summon one single title she had written.

When I handed my test back to Kris, I mumbled something about how sorry I was to have wasted their time. I was hired before I left the building.

We are now ten years past my Left Bank beginning, and I own this dream with Kris.

In those years I have seen writers succeed and fail, publishers rise and fall, bookstores open and close. The book survives, though, because it is necessary to our democracy. Access to it is necessary to our democracy.

I tell you this story because I want you to know what my career means to me, and what the notion of independent bookselling means not just to me, but to many thousands of others.

Right now, the department of justice is proceeding with an antitrust lawsuit against several publishers and Apple over the e-books agency model. The lawsuit (encouraged in large part by Amazon) says that publishers shouldn't be able to set the prices on the e-books they publish. They say this is "price fixing."

Amazon wants to be able to continue their war against independent booksellers (and lots of other indie businesses) by selling e-books at a fraction of their cost as a loss leader so they can sell other products.

The publishers, hundreds of bookstores, and many, many authors and readers want the opportunity to offer these books too – something that becomes impossible when a massive giant sabotages the rest of the industry, creating its own largely tax-free monopoly.

Books – even e-books- aren't free to produce. The artist's work is worth something. The editor's work is worth something. The publicist's work is worth something. The bookseller's work is worth something. If publishers can't set a price on their own product to cover these costs, parasites like Amazon can devalue literature until no-one will be able to afford to produce it and no-one without the money to buy a Kindle will be able to access what is produced.

That is very dangerous.

The enemies of a fair marketplace are betting on public ignorance and apathy here. But there is a clear right and wrong. A free market depends on a healthy and vibrant marketplace with plenty of competitors to check and balance each other. If this lawsuit is successful, only one business will win the right to tell you what to read, and your choices will disappear.

You don't need to be a bookseller to care about this.

This lawsuit, if successful, will only benefit one corporate giant – which is the opposite of how it's intended.

Please consider this before condemning the book industry to the same fate as the music industry and clearing the way for the destruction of a fair, reasonable marketplace where bookstores can compete and have a chance of survival and authors, editors, publicists, booksellers and all the other moving parts of a vibrant and healthy economy are not cheated out of their livelihoods by a misguided lawsuit.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Jarek Steele, Co-Owner

Left Bank Books

Now Reading: [Winter of the World: Book Two of the Century Trilogy](#) by Ken Follett
(I have the advance reading copy. Be jealous!)

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