



In the mid-1940s, Lyndon Johnson got Parker a job as a postal worker and in return used Parker as a chauffeur and bodyguard. From there Parker became headwaiter and maître d' of the Senate dining room and its many branches—the Senators' hideaways, where they held private meetings to broker power and where they rendezvoused with their mistresses. Parker learned how the Capitol game is played from many mentors, some deliberate, some inadvertent.

From the inside, he saw the Civil Rights Act take shape and become law. His was a unique perspective indeed, at once an example of Ralph Ellison's ``The Invisible Man`` and a sometime friend and confidante of the mighty. The racism he observed is appalling and, as he tells it, little diminished to this day. The gossip in the book might have been shocking 20 years ago, but, for better or worse, it's not very shocking today. The most fascinating character in the book, besides the author himself, is LBJ, who again proves to be the most complex and paradoxical of men.