

## *Anger is a Gift* Transcript

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Benjamin: My name is Benjamin and my pronouns are he/him.

Amanda: And my name is Amanda my pronouns are she/her.

B: And we will be discussing the book *Anger is a Gift* by Mark Oshiro. In this book Moss Jeffries is many things—considerate student, devoted son, loyal friend and affectionate boyfriend, enthusiastic nerd. But sometimes Moss still wishes he could be someone else—someone without panic attacks, someone whose father was still alive, someone who hadn't become a rallying point for a community because of one horrible night. And most of all, he wishes he didn't feel so stuck. Moss can't even escape at school—he and his friends are subject to the lack of funds and crumbling infrastructure at West Oakland High, as well as constant intimidation by the resource officer stationed in their halls. That was even before the new regulations—now it seems sometimes that the students are treated more like criminals. Something will have to change—but who will listen to a group of teens? When tensions hit a fever pitch and tragedy strikes again, Moss must face a difficult choice: give in to fear and hate or realize that anger can actually be a gift.

A: And a little bit about the author so Mark Oshiro is a Hugo Award-nominated writer of the online Mark Does Stuff universe, Mark Reads and Mark Watches, where they analyzed book and TV series. They were the nonfiction editor of *Queers Destroy Science Fiction* and the co-editor of *Speculative Fiction 2015* and are the president of Con or Bust's board of directors. When not writing reviews or editing, Oshiro engages in social activism online and offline. *Anger is a Gift* is their debut young adult contemporary fiction novel.

B: Content warnings for this book include graphic descriptions of police brutality including killing by police and references to the death of a parent.

A: So let's get into the characters. We have quite a cast of characters, really rich relationships amongst them in this book. So what are some of the key characters?

B: So the main character as the description mentioned is a young man named Moss who's a gay teenager kind of navigating a coming-of-age moment in a really tense political climate. The main cast of characters include some of his best friends. So one of his longtime best friends is a girl named Esperanza. She's a Puerto Rican lesbian girl with wealthy white adoptive parents, and that kind of intersection between her racial identity and the class privilege provided by her parents is one of the sources of tension that comes up between her and Moss. There's also a young man named Javier who Moss meets by happenstance on the bus or the train?

A: Train.

B: On the train one day and they really hit it off and develop a little kind of teen romance which is really sweet.

A: Amongst this close-knit friend group in addition to his best friend Esperanza, we also have Bitz, a non-binary student who is kind of quiet but supportive especially in some key moments with Moss. We have Shawna who's a black trans student with epilepsy and that comes up. She's one of the people

targeted by the school resource officer. We have Rawiya, a Muslim student who's also part of that inner circle and others as well. So this really kind of rich friend group.

B: Yeah and along with that group of the teenagers there's this kind of secondary cast of adult characters who become involved in helpful ways and destructive ways depending on what side of the situation they fall. And the most prominent of those adult characters is Moss's mom, Wanda, who is very supportive, very loving, and ends up becoming really involved with the efforts that the students start making to kind of push back and fight back as things at their school become more intense. There's also Javier's mom named—

A: Eugenia.

B: Eugenia, who is equally just a very loving supportive parent. I don't want to give any spoilers and most of what I think about his mom comes from a lot of spoilers. So there's Javier's mom. Other characters of adults, Esperanza's parents become very significant to the plot and we remember her parents are two white folks who adopted her and so they come from a different background. They live in a different kind of part of the neighborhood. They send Esperanza to a more affluent school and so their perspective on what's going on at West Oakland High is an outside perspective looking in, which becomes important to how they respond to what's going on.

A: And there's also in addition to Moss's mom kind of these other key like chosen family adults in his life. So Shamika who is his mom's like best friend going back many, many years, and then Martin who's the local barber and yeah kind of like one of those people that's always there. And so, it's neat to see kind of in addition to having a really supportive mom, you know, these other adult characters in his life that are really kind of ride-or-die for him.

B: Totally. And along with his kind of personal community there's the community of adults at the school and you see kind of a range of adults at the school. There's the school resource officer, Officer Hull, who is a source of tension and has some problematic behaviors. And there's a few different teachers and administrative personnel at the school that you kind of meet, and some of the teachers are kind of on the kids' side of the issue, some are on the side of the administration. But you kind of see how, on both sides, the teachers are in a different kind of pressure as employees of the school and you get to see how they kind of navigate that and try to either support the students or support the system depending on their own beliefs and what's going on. So overall, I think one of the really strong things about this book is its wide and diverse cast of characters. You have characters from all across age ranges, different social backgrounds, different gender and sexual identities, different racial identities. And I think Oshiro does a really good job at being very empathetic as much as possible to all these different perspectives and all these different types of people in ways that make the characters feel very real and understandable.

A: Yeah and I feel like one of the powerful things too is that like each of the characters they're not any one thing, right? They're not just their sexuality, they're not just their gender identity even though like most of them are queer or trans in some way, but they're also their racial identities, you know, their abilities, you know, the nuances of like being adopted by white parents, right? And so it feels very integrated into the rest of their lives and yeah I really appreciated that about kind of how the whole cast is built.

B: Me too. Yeah especially as a queer reader, when you read queer books a lot of the times the queer characters unfortunately are a little bit one-dimensional because they just, the whole plot is about their queerness.

A: Right.

B: And so it was kind of refreshing and sweet in this book, especially like for example when Moss meets Javier, there's never like a big conversation about are you gay, what, how do we navigate this.

It's not about navigating the fact that they're gay or coming out to their parents or some of those things that we're used to seeing in queer stories. It just feels more like a very straightforward side plot about meeting someone that's sweet and developing feelings as some bigger things are happening in their lives, which is a lot more how it feels to be a queer person I think.

A: Right, in real life.

B: It's not the center of anything, it's just what's going on and you're also navigating everything else.

A: Yeah for sure. And I like too that like being queer or trans wasn't like tragic in this story.

B: Totally.

A: Like I mean it's very real in terms of the things, particularly some of the trans characters encountered, but like most of them had supportive parents and like it wasn't like, it wasn't a coming-out story like you said, like it wasn't a huge barrier. It was like this is part of their life, but kind of the bigger things are what they're navigating around like the police brutality in their community.

B: And I will say that was something that I appreciated also for the reason that, as a queer person, when I hear so much talk about queerness in media or in like just discussions, I often ask like aren't there bigger things to be thinking about? Like I feel like there are real urgent problems and like causes that people could be talking about instead of, the book kind of represented what I feel as a queer person, that like there are big real issues that we can all kind of unite behind, whether you're queer or not. We're all kind of facing similar things in the world outside of those aspects of our identity. And I think the book did a good job at showing how this cast of diverse characters had something big kind of pitted at them, and then they could either unite or not.

A: Yeah and I feel like part of why it was framed that way is like this book is written from the voice of like black and brown people, like specifically black people, right? And so, you know, they kind of don't have a choice, like you know I guess for the listeners, both Ben and I are white, but you know the characters in this book are primarily black and brown and they don't really have a choice but to engage with the racism and police brutality in their community. Whereas, you know, we as white people do have a choice in a lot of ways to engage or not engage. And so I think that's really how the story is framed, that they have to figure out what to do about what's happening in their communities and yeah and their queer and trans identities are part of who they are and part of how they navigate that, but that's not like the story.

B: Yeah that's such a good point. So what were your kind of first impressions and reactions to this book overall?

A: Yeah, so I really loved this book and really connected with it pretty deeply. I think one of the first things I noticed was just how embodied it felt, like you could feel what the characters were feeling like from the very first page, both like kind of emotionally but also like in kind of a visceral like body sense of things. And it was everything from you know what it feels like to have a panic attack, you know, how trauma responses show up, how grief shows up in these just very real ways. Like I feel like the author did such a good job of writing in a way that like I could literally feel what those characters were feeling like in their bodies, and also seeing this connection between like our emotions and our bodies are not two separate things, like they very much like interact with one another. And so I felt like from the very beginning I was just like drawn in by that like embodied like form of writing and like really connected with the characters because of that. And I also appreciate just how honest it was about like mental health and grief and trauma and all of these things that impact all of us in different ways on like a day-to-day basis and particularly folks that are marginalized and have experienced a lot of trauma around things like police brutality and losing loved ones. So yeah I really appreciate kind of just being honest about that. And especially for like the young adult readers being able to like be like, oh maybe that is similar to what I'm feeling, maybe it's like okay to feel like this

kind of thing. And I really loved that this story wasn't any one thing. So there are so many different threads the author ties together really beautifully I think. You know there's the thread of this like sweet teen romance, right, that kind of draws me in. It's just like lovely and awkward and beautiful as like that is, right? But then there's also you know this fierce love between Moss and his mom, his chosen family, his friends, like that really kind of grounds the whole story I think. And then of course there's the police brutality happening in their school and in their community and all of them you know trying to figure out what to do and how to organize in response to that. And also figuring out how do we take care of each other in like really tangible ways. Like how do you ground someone when they're going through a panic attack? How do you like be there for someone when they are just like grieving and sobbing? And, yeah, so I feel like all of these different strands were woven together so well and yeah and I liked that it wasn't, the story wasn't about any one thing. It was kind of all of those things together.

B: Yeah. Yeah, I admired that so much. In the same way that we talked about how effectively the author presents these intersectional identities in all the characters, I think this author just has a really strong way of holding a lot in their own mind as a writer but in the book as well, the plot. And it never feels over full. Like, as you're describing all these things I'm thinking, if I had never read this, I might be thinking like, whoa it sounds like there's just so much going on, but it never feels that way. It feels so true to life and it just feels so, I like the word you said, honest. I think Moss is such a—

A: Open?

B: Open, yeah he just feels so like accessible. He's written to be so accessible so you can as a reader you really get such a clear window into Moss's mind and his experience and his reactions to things and through Moss because Moss is just living a real life where there's several threads of things going on all at once because he's written to be so real feeling. The book can handle so many different things so honestly and so accurately that it never feels like the author's trying to do too much it just feels very true.

A: Right, it's very authentic. Because we as real queer people, right? We're navigating our, like, personal relationships and our friends and family and like, work or school and like, for me, like community organizing and like, projects in the community and like, yeah, it's just like, it's all of it. And it's like the joy, and the pain, and the really hard, heavy things, and the light fun things. That's one of the things I appreciated too, that like this book deals with a lot of really hard, really heavy things, but it doesn't necessarily feel that way all throughout. Like there are these light moments where like he's eating Pad Thai with his mom in the kitchen, or like hanging out with his friends, or like these sweet moments with Javier, and it's like, that's real life too. Like we're dealing with a lot of hard things in our real life and our realities right now, and also there's like beauty and joy and love.

B: Yes! Okay, this was a moment right at the beginning. So, the very beginning of the book is that moment that we've mentioned, where he meets Javier on the train as him and Esperanza are riding together. And they're just chatting about school and life and whatever, and then he sees Javier. When they get off the train there's a protest happening, right?

A: Yes.

B: There's a big group of people right off the train, and Moss becomes really overwhelmed because of some trauma from his past that you learn about pretty quickly after this happens. And it sends him, like you said, into this panic attack response that is so visceral. And so immediately you're like, wow this might be a really heavy book. But there's this moment right after this where somebody comes up to him and offers their phone, and they dial his mom's number, and then they hand Moss the phone and he says, "Hello, mama." And it goes on: "Moss, baby, are you okay?" Her voice wasn't pitched higher, wasn't full of terror, just smooth, interested. His heart rate began to slow down. "Yes mama. I promise it wasn't that bad. I just got flustered, that's all." In that moment, like immediately there's this, such a clear view of who Moss's mom is. The way that she knows how to respond to this. You get this

whole history of their relationship, the trust that he has in her, her care for what he's going through. And it's like a single little line of text. And I think that happens throughout the whole book, that there are just such quick, recognizable histories between these people that the author can signal so quickly, so you really feel like you get to know these people and their relationships, and like you said it offers so much. Like, in that moment, not only was Moss soothed in that moment, but I as a reader was also soothed, like at the same time. And I think the book does a good job at that. At, like you said, just having these really beautiful moments of healing and hope and calm in the midst of everything going on. Yeah, this, I was so impressed by the author, how they kind of structured everything.

A: And I think that's the epitome of like, showing not telling, right? Like they didn't have to be like, and this is how his relationship with his mom is, or his best friend. Like you see it through these scenes, like you're talking about, and feel it.

B: Yeah, and that I think leads to: there's something that I think this book can offer readers, is a lot of hope. There's really hard things in this book there are really, really heavy things that you have to think about and kind of go through with these characters, but I think the book does a good job at giving you hope and showing how these people maintain hope and encourage each other and engage with each other and with their circumstances. You want to talk about, for you, kind of how that came through?

A: Yeah, absolutely. This was, I think, one of the things I loved the most about this story. That in the midst of so much that was hard and heavy and violent and harmful, that there is still so much hope. And I think that's really important for many, many reasons. And yeah, and so in particular I saw this thread of like the characters throughout the story trying to figure out like, how do we engage with this violence and these injustices that are happening in our school, in our communities? And early on, Moss expresses a number of times kind of a hopelessness or like powerlessness. Like, he's talking to his friends one time after Shawna, the trans girl in the story, is assaulted by the school resource officer during a locker search. And Moss says: but we're powerless in this situation, aren't we? And then there's another time, he's talking with Javier soon after that, and Javier is like, so what are you gonna do? And Moss is like, well, what can I do, man? It's not like we have the power to change anything. And so, that's kind of, in the beginning, sort of where Moss and where some of his friends are at. But as the story moves on, they, you know, with the help of his mom and some other of the, like, kind of, elders in the community. You know, they're organizing a town hall, they're organizing a walkout at their school. And so, you see that shift. And Moss, for the first time, is like feeling hopeful that they can actually do something to change, you know, these terrible, oppressive, systemic things in their community that are harming people. And you can see he feels out of his body, he's like feeling activated, like physically, and he expresses hope for the first time, kind of, at that juncture of the story. And I also love how his mom, again, kind of plays a really important role in this. So she has been a longtime community organizer, and has a lot of connections in the community, can make stuff happen and just knows a lot about: how do we effectively pressure those in power to create the change that we want to see? So, she organizes this community meeting, makes these phone calls, kind of takes on a lot of the labor of that. But it's also modeling for the younger cast of characters: this is how we do this, these are effective organizing techniques, these are things we have to watch out for. But she also is listening to, and taking the lead from, Moss and like the younger folks. They're the folks who are being directly impacted by the violence that's happening at their school. So I really loved like that dynamic and that felt very real to me, as someone who's learned a lot from movement elders in my own organizing work, and just really values that. And the part— As kind of that work is building you can see kind of the hope building throughout, particularly, the younger characters who are like, oh we can actually do something, like these are tactics that we can use to pressure for change, and this could make a difference in our school and in our community. And so we see that towards the end, where Moss says to his mom, thank you for this, for making it possible for me to believe that I could actually do something. And I think that's really powerful.

B: Yeah, I love that. As I've spoken to you briefly about this book and your experience reading it, you mentioned how you're actively engaged in your own community and in some activist organizations. Can you just introduce that a little bit? Because I think your personal experience getting involved is

inspiring to me and also, kind of, I think, offers a really neat lens into the world of this book where young people are, for the first time, getting involved in ways that feel bigger than themselves and bigger than— When I was a teenager, I mean, I'm from this tiny town where we all grew up in the same place, went to the same high school as our parents, it's all so— I mean, it feels like olden days. And so none of this stuff was ever on my radar. So reading about these kids getting involved in things that really matter to them, and to the world, was really inspiring. And I'd be interested to hear a little bit about your kind of perspective, and the experiences that you've had.

A: Yeah, definitely. And that's why I wanted to read this book in the first place. Like it felt really connected to a lot of the things that I care about and that I try to put energy into in community with other people. So, for me, so I've been actively involved in abolitionist organizing since 2020, kind of part of the uprising. The Black Lives Matter uprising that happened that year across the country, including in Harrisburg, gave rise to some local community organizing efforts that I've been a part of. And really looking at, you know, how do we challenge and dismantle these violent, oppressive systems of policing, and prisons, and kind of the whole carceral system, while at the same time imagining and building together systems of community care, and community safety, that are not rooted in racism and, yeah, violence, or kind of this punishment mentality?

B: One of the characters, well two characters in this book that I think were such tragic characters were Esperanza's parents, her white parents, who, when they first hear about what's going on at the school, as you said, that the students and the parents are working together to organize a walkout, and just to organize together. They meet up, they talk about things they're trying to make change happen. And Esperanza wants to be involved. Because, as a person of color, she relates to the struggle that her friends are going through. As well as just the fact that they're her closest, closest friends, so she wants to be super supportive and be there with them through that. And her parents are really loving parents, so they're also supportive of this. They want her to be involved. The problem that ends up arising is that, as people in the kind of privileged position that they are in, the parents, they kind of, rather than listen and try to take direction and learn from and be led by people who know what's going on, they kind of think, oh well we can deal with this. Like, we can deal with it in our own way. And so they end up—

A: They make a phone call that really changes everything and has like this really, really harmful effect.

B: And they don't ask anyone about it, they don't run it by anybody, they just they see people struggling and then they think, oh there's no need to worry so much, we can just take care of it, and they make this phone call that results in so much damage to the efforts that the people were making, and just to the people themselves. I mean, there's so much harm done. It was so heartbreaking to see, because I think these people were not heartless people. I mean, they felt a level of compassion toward their daughter's friends, and families of those friends, and they wanted to help. But I think that's something that, I was educated by this book in helpful ways, by examples like this, of the white people who want to help but then they don't get involved in helpful ways. I mean they kind of try to do their own thing. They kind of think from their own perspective, and they don't trust the perspective of the people who they're trying to help, because they think that they understand based on their own experience. So that example was so devastating. I mean it was just a terrible thing that happened and led to such terrible things. And it was valuable for me because, as you said, the whole book is showing and not telling. So I've heard a lot about like, as white people, don't be part of the problem. Like, get involved, listen to people, be directable. And I've heard those principles, you know? And I think this book offered, this was, I think, the most dramatic example of this, but several of the white characters to varying degrees commit the same crime, you know? Where they say they want to help, and therefore they do whatever they want. And they don't actually become involved in the organized efforts. They don't know how to support, because they want to take control, I think.

A: Right. Yeah, and I feel like it illustrates really well just how dangerous well-meaning white people can be. And like I have been that person, I know sometimes I'm still that person, like it's definitely a

learning process. But where we think like, oh I have this relationship, or I have this connection, so let me just do this thing. But yeah, without checking in with anybody, without, you know, taking direction from the folks who are most impacted. And I think part of it is like, both wanting to kind of be the Savior, and wanting to like fix things, and make ourselves feel good, and part of it is, you know, making the phone call is kind of the easier thing than like the more confrontational protest, walk-out, the things that the black and brown folks in this story were planning. And so it's also, I think, sometimes about our own comfort and, you know, prioritizing the comfort of ourselves and other white people over the actual voices of folks who are most impacted. So...

B: Yeah, another example of a situation where this happens was a less extreme example, but there was a white guy who finally offered some help, but it was a little too—I mean it was too little too late.

A: Right.

B: But he offered some help. And the response from Moss and his friends and families was not a grateful response. They use the information, and it was some good information, but they weren't welcoming to this man, and they weren't expressing all this gratitude and like falling at his feet. And he seemed very confused by that, and hurt, and became angry.

A: Yeah.

B: And kind of expressed, like, I thought you'd be grateful, I thought, I was trying to help you. But it just came too late, and he had been part of the problem for so long, that now... So that was another example of another aspect of what you were just saying. That sometimes the efforts being made are not for the sake of improving conditions or situations, it's in order to aggrandize ourselves and to save face, when we realize, uh, to save ourselves from embarrassment or like, whatever.

A: Assuage our own guilt.

B: Yeah, totally. Rather than sincere efforts to just help, and to be supportive, and to work towards solutions, becomes kind of a backwards-facing, self-serving kind of effort. Yeah, I think going back to something you said earlier about the privilege of choice, you know, if you have the privilege to decide to care about certain things. I think when we were talking earlier it was about like, there are so many stories about queer people where that's the whole story, and I think, like you said, for these black and brown folks in the story, they don't have the choice to only concern themselves with their sexual identity, because there are so many other things happening that they, and they can't choose to like turn off their minds to those things and deal with one thing at a time. And, so throughout the story, you see the ways that the white folks have the privilege to decide to care, or not. Where, the rest of the characters just don't have that choice. And so, it's a harsh reality, you know? That they can't choose not to face.

A: Right. Yeah. But then also, like, they are choosing, kind of, how we're going to face this, and how we're going to engage. Which I think brings us to the title of the book, right?

B: Totally, yeah.

A: So, *Anger is a Gift*. Which I was also kind of intrigued when I decided to read this book. So, yeah, let's talk a little bit about that. Where did that kind of like come from?

B: Yeah. So early on in the book, Reg is one of Moss's friends. The tensions at their school escalate, okay? From being one resource office who is checking their lockers and not handling things well, to the installation of these metal detectors. And it kind of keeps escalating as the kids try to resist it. And there's a friend of Moss's who ends up being injured by one of the metal detectors. Because—

A: Well he has six pins in his, like metal pins in his knee from a previous injury, and sometimes uses a wheelchair, sometimes uses crutches.

B: And the metal detectors are not normal. Like, it explains later that these were like a different type of machine that nobody was aware was being installed. It was kind of like—

A: the students at least.

B: Yeah, the students and their families were not made aware that these machines were magnetic. And so, when Reg—Reg explains to the guard, I can't go through that, I have this situation, there's metal in my leg. And the guard just doesn't listen. I mean, just forces Reg to go through. And it ends up injuring his leg worse than it was before. Reg may never walk again. When he was, in physical therapy, he had been healing, things had been going pretty well, he was going to make a recovery. So, Moss is telling his mom about this situation, and says that Reg's girlfriend, Kaisha, is mad as hell—that's a quote-unquote, mad as hell.

A: Right.

B: And Wanda, Moss's mom Wanda, responds, and this is a quote as well. Wanda says, "Good. Anger is a gift, remember that. You gotta grasp onto it, hold it tight, and use it as ammunition. You use that anger to get things done, instead of just stewing in it. Trust me, ya'll." End quote.

A: Yeah, and I think that's so powerful. Because, throughout the book we see Moss's anger and rage kind of come to the surface at a number of different points, and that of his friends and his mom kind of this whole cast of chosen family, in response to this horrific violence that they're all experiencing. And with nowhere to channel that, it can consume you and become destructive, right? But Moss's mom, and the elders in his life, really show him like, how do we use this anger, use this very human response to the terrible things that are happening to us and the people that we care about, to organize, to connect with other people, to make plans, to really push for the change that we want to see in our community? And it's that anger that motivates Moss to chain him to the flagpole, towards the end of the story. You know, it's not all thought out, it's not like a perfect plan, or whatever, but it's effective. It works. And I think, even without realizing it, he was channeling some of that, like some of what he had been learning from his mom and from these others about like, you know, use this anger, do something to take a stand for, you know, what you believe in and what you are trying to change. And so his anger, in this case, moves him to action, not just to apathy, not just to like, we don't have any power in this situation, which is where he had been before.

B: I think when we respond to anger as if it's like, this bad emotion that we shouldn't be feeling, what inevitably happens is that we just stew in it. Because we can't just turn it off.

A: Right.

B: And so, I love this kind of reframing it as, it's just a useful thing to get things done, if you choose to make a positive action out of it.

A: Yeah.

B: You mentioned, at the end Moss, kind of without thinking so much, he is kind of boiling in this anger, and he chains himself to a flagpole, and he says I'm not moving until this happens.

A: Right.

B: And so, in the end, he has to act on this advice from his mom, and it's his own body that he employs to effect change. And I think that really just, coming full circle, just, how the book demonstrates how every aspect of a person is incorporated into the struggles they face, but also into

the hope that they feel and into the action they can take. That if you feel things, you can act on those things; if you think in certain ways, that can motivate you; if you are willing to show up with your whole self, the way that Moss does, and the way that several characters do

A: Yeah, and I think one of the things that I really appreciate too, because it's kind of this dual of like, we see Moss as a character, kind of internally struggling with these things, and kind of figuring out how that all integrates for him, like you're talking about. So, it's partially about him, and his internal journey. But then, it's also about this group of people and their collective journey, and what they're trying to do together. And one of the most powerful scenes for me, like there were many, but, since we're talking about the flagpole. You know, this starts out as kind of solitary, independent action for him. Like, he's really, really upset, he's biking, and then he just kind of decides to like do this thing, right? And, initially when he's just sitting there by himself, like chained at this flagpole, he's like, you know, I don't know what going to happen, like, we'll see. But then, as people see him, they join him. Like, people he doesn't even know. And at first, he's not sure what to do with that. He's like, well, you know, I don't need help, you guys don't need to stay, I'm just doing my own thing. But they do stay. And then more and more people come and it—well, I don't want to give too much away. But it becomes this very collective effort. Like, he kind of galvanizes it, but then so many other people join in. And there was a particular moment where he's like sitting on the sidewalk chained to the flagpole, and two of the elders in his life, Shamika and Martin, are sitting on either side of him. They've been there with him all night. He doesn't realize how many people have come, because he's sitting down, he can only see kind of who's just around him. But they're like, here let's help you up so you can kind of see. And they help him up, and then he sees it's like hundreds of people, it's like blocks long, people have come together and lined up. And that just gave me chills. Because it also reminded me of protests that I've been at, where like, you can only see who's in your immediate area, right? But then, if you step up a little bit higher, or turn a different way, you see it's just stretching on and on. And I think that that, like, that moment was so powerful, for me as a reader but then also I think for Moss, as the character, that like, this is not just about him. And he's not alone in this. I think that was one of the themes throughout this book too, that each character had these particular set of experiences, but they weren't alone in those experiences. And there's this incredible power when people come together, whether it's planned or spontaneous, and demand change, and stand in solidarity. And I think that's just an incredible moment and image of what collective liberation can look like, and that collective power, like, the power of the people, which is often one of the chants we use at marches and things. You know, one person alone can start something, but it's like, the people together that can really change the reality of what we're all facing.

B: Yeah.



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