ReadingGroupGuides
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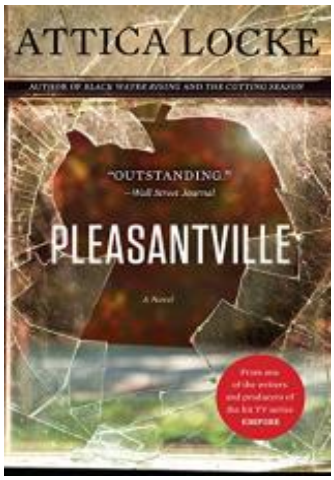
Pleasantville

by Attica Locke



About the Book

In this sophisticated thriller, lawyer Jay Porter, hero of Attica Locke?s bestseller BLACK WATER RISING, returns to fight one last case, only to become embroiled once again in a dangerous game of shadowy politics and a witness to how far those in power are willing to go to win.

Fifteen years after the events of BLACK WATER RISING, Jay Porter is struggling to cope with catastrophic changes in his personal life and the disintegration of his environmental law practice. His victory against Cole Oil is still the crown jewel of his career, even if he hasn?t yet seen a dime thanks to appeals. But time has taken its toll. Tired and restless, he?s ready to quit.

When a girl goes missing on Election Night, 1996, in the neighborhood of Pleasantville --- a hamlet for upwardly mobile blacks on the north side of Houston --- Jay, a single father, is deeply disturbed. He?s been representing Pleasantville in the wake of a chemical fire, and the case is dragging on, raising doubts about his ability.

The missing girl was a volunteer for one of the local mayoral candidates, and her disappearance complicates an already heated campaign. When the nephew of one of the candidates, a Pleasantville local, is arrested, Jay reluctantly finds himself serving as a defense attorney. With a man?s life and his own reputation on the line, Jay is about to try his first murder in a case that will also put an electoral process on trial, exposing the dark side of power and those determined to keep it.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think about Jay?s decision to stop practicing law? Why do you think he came to this conclusion?

2. What are the advantages of living in a tightknit community like Pleasantville? What are the drawbacks?

3. Why do you think Reese Parker chooses to base a smear campaign around the Buffalo Bayou Development? In what ways might this be a commentary on America?s broader debate over urban revitalization/gentrification? Have you been personally impacted by a similar project?

4. Jay comes to Neal?s aid *before* Sam Hathorne gets a chance to ask him for help. Why do you think Jay does this?

5. Most Pleasantville citizens have known the Hathorne family for a long time, but when Neal is accused of murder they don?t know whether or not to believe his protests of innocence. How do you think you would react in the same situation? Have you ever known someone accused of a serious crime?

6. One of Pleasantville?s oldest residents reasons that ?when folks get scared, they act out, make bad choices.? What examples of this can you find in the novel? How do the different characters cope with fear? Have you ever done something you later regretted because you were scared?

7. Sworn to secrecy, Jay?s daughter Ellie compromises herself to help a friend in difficulty. Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation --- or in the same situation as Jay? How well, or poorly, do you feel Jay handled the Lori and Ellie situation?

8. Have you ever been active in local politics (as a candidate, a staffer/volunteer or a voter)? What matters to you when it comes to choosing a candidate to support?

9. Were you surprised to find out who killed Deanne, Tina and Alicia? What clues point you toward the truth --- or away from it?

10. Pleasantville was founded in 1949, a time when most black families couldn't own homes in white neighborhoods. What do you think of the socio-political climate that created a place like Pleasantville? And how has integration changed neighborhoods like it across the country?

Author Bio

Attica Locke is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose sixth novel, GUIDE ME HOME, is the finale to her Edgar Award-winning *Highway 59* trilogy, which also includes BLUEBIRD, BLUEBIRD and HEAVEN, MY HOME. She is also the author of PLEASANTVILLE, winner of the Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction and longlisted for the Bailey?s Prize for Women?s Fiction; THE CUTTING SEASON, winner of the Ernest Gaines Award for Literary Excellence; and her debut, BLACK WATER RISING, which was nominated for an Edgar Award and an NAACP Image Award, as well as a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and was shortlisted for the Women?s Prize for Fiction.

A former fellow at the Sundance Institute?s Feature Filmmaker?s Lab, Locke is also a screenwriter and TV producer, with credits that include "Empire," "When They See Us" and the Emmy-nominated "Little Fires Everywhere," for which she won an NAACP Image award for television writing. She co-created and executive produced an adaptation of her

sister Tembi Locke?s memoir, FROM SCRATCH, for Netflix. She is currently in a multi-year development deal with Universal Television, working on adaptation of her *Highway 59* series, among other shows.

A native of Houston, Texas, Attica lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband and daughter.

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