



FLATIRON
BOOKS

My Government Means to Kill Me

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *My Government Means to Kill Me*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *My Government Means to Kill Me*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

- 1) In the opening paragraph, Trey reveals that he's turning his back on a six-figure trust fund to live independently in New York City. He wants to "lay sole claim to my successes and failures." Is his goal truly possible? For better or worse, are we always indebted to our upbringing and the people that shaped us when we were young?
- 2) The first friend that Trey makes in New York City is Gregory, and their friendship evolves throughout the novel. Why do you think they were drawn to one another? In what ways did Trey outgrow Gregory? And who was ultimately the better friend to whom?
- 3) Trey frequents the Mt. Morris Baths and finds community in the venerable gay bathhouse. Why do you think the older men, including Bayard Rustin, chose to look after and educate Trey? What did Trey receive from the other Black gay men at Mt. Morris Baths that his biological family failed to give him?
- 4) Over the course of the novel, Trey gains confidence in his sensuality and his sexual identity. How did Trey's sexuality inform his personality and worldview? To what degree are we all defined by our sensuality and sexual identity?
- 5) Trey's first endeavor as community organizer comes about when he leads a rent strike against his building's owner, Fred Trump. On the road to victory, Trey tells several lies and breaks a few laws. Under what circumstances is it permissible for people to break the law when battling corruption or oppression? How far can the practice of civil disobedience extend?
- 6) Shortly after meeting Peter and Angie in the illegal home hospice she runs for men dying of AIDS, Trey helps them by carrying a dead body from the premises and leaving it in a park. It's a bold act—one of many that Trey undertakes throughout the novel. Would you deem Trey's behavior as courageous or reckless? Where is the line between courageousness and recklessness?
- 7) Trey shares with Peter his darkest shame: as child, Trey lied about the circumstances of his younger brother's disappearance. Trey's lies foiled the search for his brother, who was never found and is presumed dead. To what extent are adults responsible for the wrongs they committed as children?

- 8) Trey is afraid that when his younger sister, Jackie, learns how he contributed to the loss of their brother, she will hate him. Does Trey have an obligation to tell Jackie the truth, and if so, when and how?
- 9) Trey describes his parents—particularly his mother—as controlling and emotionally withholding. In what ways is Trey motivated throughout the book by his fraught relationship with his parents? To what degree is Trey responsible for the rift between him and his parents?
- 10) Despite Angie’s short temper and verbally abusive outbursts, Trey becomes her most devoted volunteer. He admires and loves her. Why do you think Trey was so drawn to Angie? What did Angie see in Trey?
- 11) During the height of the AIDS crisis, Trey is volunteering with men dying from the disease, and as a release, he still routinely engages in casual and anonymous sex at a bathhouse. To what do you attribute this dichotomy? How do you think people who face death on a regular basis should seek release?
- 12) As a response to the AIDS crisis, Trey becomes a volunteer worker at Angie’s home hospice. Why do you think Trey is later driven to join the formation and early years of ACT UP?
- 13) Trey finds himself torn between three different activists: Bayard Rustin, Angie McBroom, and Larry Kramer. Bayard argues for working within the approved channels of government to gain incremental improvements. Angie has no faith in the government and believes the LGBTQA+ community must create and support their own solitons. And Larry is part of a confrontational effort to pressure the government into addressing dire needs. Which of those three political approaches do you feel is most effective and explain why?
- 14) Trey clashes with Bayard over the political realities that Bayard’s generation mostly accepted – political realities that Trey finds intolerable. How should we contend with people who felt they were powerless to fight racist, sexist or homophobic norms that are no longer accepted? Is saying, *“That’s just the way it was,”* valid or a cop out? How do we answer for the bad behavior or systematic discrimination that we might have accepted in the past?
- 15) Trey and his mother finally have a candid conversation about the disappearance and death of Martin. How do you think hearing his mother’s perspective on the traumatic event will change Trey going forward?
- 16) Trey discovers the Angie has euthanized hospice patients that she deems have suffered too much. Are these acts of mercy or murder? Why do you think Trey supports and protects Angie after this revelation puts her in legal jeopardy?
- 17) Trey betrays Gregory in order to save Angie. Why do you think Trey was willing to make this choice? What does this choice say about Trey’s ethics and political calculations?
- 18) In the first chapter, one of things Trey wishes he’d brought with him when he moved to New York City was “the ability to sense when I was being hustled.” Throughout the novel, Trey becomes politically astute and hustles a number of people to achieve his goals. In what ways is Trey’s evolution positive? In what ways is it troubling?