

*CBS Mornings*

06/07/23

7:02:43 a.m. [TEASE]

22 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Poet Amanda Gorman]

GAYLE KING: And we've got a very exclusive guest for you today. Her name is Amanda Gorman. She will join us for her first TV interview since her inaugural poem was restricted by a Florida school following a parent's complaint. Now, this is part of a growing trend in parts of the country of limiting access to books that deal with racism and other issues. Amanda has some thoughts on that, we guess, and we'll talk to her a little bit later on.

NATE BURLESON: Can't wait for that.

(...)

8:00:33 a.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Poet Amanda Gorman]

KING: Poet Amanda Gorman is here. This will be her first TV interview since her inaugural poem was restricted by a Florida school. We'll talk about the rise of book banning in this country.

(...)

8:02:41 a.m.

8 minutes and 3 seconds

KING: We're going to begin this hour with poet and best-selling author, that's Amanda Gorman, who joins us for her first interview about banning books. Now you may remember, she captivated the country — and captivated is the word here — back in 2021 when she became the youngest poet at a presidential inauguration in US history. We remember this day. Here's a look.

AMANDA GORMAN [on 01/20/21]: The loss we carry. A sea we must wade. We've braved the belly of the beast. We've learned that quiet isn't always peace and the norms and notions of what just is isn't always just is.

KING: Still gives me goosebumps. Her poem, *The Hill We Climb* was later published as a book, and recently, a Florida elementary school restricted access to the book after one parent complained and filed a complaint. Access to three other books was also restricted including one that's no longer in print. In a statement to CBS News, Miami-Dade County Public School said this: "No literature has been banned or removed and that the school determined 'The Hill We

Climb’ was better suited for middle school students.” Well last night, Amanda Gorman donated 1,200 books for a banned book giveaway event hosted by a Florida bookstore including her own and the two other restricted titles that are still in print. We are very happy to say that Amanda Gorman joins us now — there she is — for her first interview on her book being restricted. Good morning to you, Amanda Gorman. We’re all glad you’re here. It’s good to see you.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Amanda Gorman’s Book Censored; Inaugural Poet & Bestselling Author on Restricting & Banning Books]

GORMAN: Good morning. Thank you so much for having me.

KING: So let’s talk about this case in Florida, and let’s put it in context. It was one parent in one school who filed — who brought this up, and it is our understanding that it was reported, Amanda, she didn’t even read the book. She reported that Oprah Winfrey had written a book. We also know that that isn’t true, and that she didn’t think it was suitable for elementary school students. What was your initial reaction when you heard? What are your thoughts?

GORMAN: My initial reaction was a mix of shock and sadness at the same time. One, because I couldn’t understand a reason for rendering this piece as inappropriate for elementary school students, and also because when I wrote *The Hill We Climb*, it was so important for me that young people would see themselves represented in a significant moment in our democratic history and that the reality of that in that moment would be erased for young people who deserve to see themselves at a place and situation like that. That was just really disappointing.

DOKOUPIL: But Amanda, let’s talk about the terminology a bit more, because this all comes under the rubric of banned books. People on the left use that term. You’re at a banned book event and I think people on the right say, look, these books are still available at every bookstore, your book, your words all over the internet. You can go to public libraries and get them and this is really — it’s just a modest concession to parents who want some control over the intellectual, religious, and political development of their kids. So, is “banned” really a word that you want to be using here?

GORMAN: Absolutely. I think — I’m so grateful that you brought up this question, because there’s a huge loophole that exists where we expect if a book isn’t being burned behind the school and thrown away, that’s not a ban, but what happens is removal and restriction, I guess, would be even more accurate terms. For example, in the case of my book, and the three other books that were banned from Bob Graham Education Center, you will be told that it hasn’t been banned, but it has been moved from elementary school shelves to a media center. Students now need to specifically request for those books in order to see them, and they can’t read them until they prove to a media specialist, that they have the correct reading level for those books and so, I think we have to broaden our understanding of the restriction and removal that’s going on and just because a book is still technically in circulation doesn’t necessarily mean that the access to that book has been preserved. If anything, we’re seeing a lot of rolling back of that access.

TONY DOKOUPIL: Amanda, what about the parents’ role in all this? Because that’s what’s

driving it on the right. A lot of parent anxiety that they've lost control of what's going in their child's brain at school every day. And what balance do you believe should be struck between a parent's right to guard and inform their child as they see fit and the school's duty to expose the child to all sorts of intellectual material?

GORMAN: What I think is important to really absorb is there are thousands of books that were banned last year, over 2,500. And according to *The Washington Post*, the majority of those filed complaints were by 11 people and what that underscores for me is with how the structure works in our schools and libraries with laws that have been passed, all it takes is one person, one quickly written complaint to render that book inaccessible for everyone else in that community and so I see less as an issue between parents and schools, because when you think about it, every parent has the right to make decisions about what their child can read. I'm fine with some parents not liking my poetry, that's completely in your right. But when we get to the situation where that one person's dislike of my work leads to everyone else not having access to that, that is a huge issue, I think because it encroaches on our freedom to really absorb and love and enjoy literature from where we are.

KING: And again, one person who allegedly didn't read the book, that's the thing that strikes me, too. She didn't even read the book.

GORMAN: Right. It shows how little goes into some of these complaints. Exactly.

VLADIMIR DUTHIERS: So Amanda, it's Vlad. Speaking of the exposure of ideas and concepts that perhaps young children will be exposed to, through your book, "The Hill We Climb" or "The ABCs of Black History," "Love to Langston," what is your understanding of what people find inappropriate in those books?

GORMAN: So if you look at the research, the majority of books that have been banned fall into two camps. Either they have characters of color or talk about race in some way, or they have characters that are of the LGBTQ community or touch upon those themes in some way and I have to think about what messaging that sends to young readers. It is as if you're saying, you are inappropriate if you are African-American. You are inappropriate if you are gay. You are inappropriate if you are an immigrant and there is this huge argument that it is about protecting and sheltering our children from themes that are just too advanced from them, but when you look at the majority of the books that have actually been banned, it's more about creating a bookshelf that doesn't represent the diverse facets of America.

BURLESON: Amanda, Nate here. I would like to end by reading some of your words, if you would allow me. To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of men, and so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide, because we know to put our country first, we must first put our differences aside. Amanda Gorman, thank you so much. We appreciate you joining us.

GORMAN: Thank you so much.

KING: That was beautifully done, Nate. I say, and the controversy with that is what? Come again?

DUTHIERS: Exactly.

KING: Amanda, we're so glad you took the time to join us this morning.

GORMAN: Thank you so much.

DOKOUPIL: Yes, we appreciate it, Amanda. Come back soon.