

Transcription for Episode 95: Interview with Angela Maria Spring

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JENN: Hello, and welcome to the latest episode of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. This is Jenn, and for new and returning listeners, you may know you can find the podcast at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com or on Twitter at @minoritiesinpub. You can find the podcast on various platforms including iTunes, iHeartRadio, Google Play, Spotify, and TuneIn. I'm super, super happy to have, via Google hangouts, Angela Maria Spring, who is a poet—we haven't had poets on for a while—and the founder of Duende District Bookstore. Is it now located where you are, Angela, or are you still kind of doing stuff on the East Coast as well as central?

ANGELA: We are headquartered in DC, and we have three different locations. Part of our location is in D.C., but we also have a location in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I personally have relocated. It's my hometown, at Red Planet Books and Comics, which is an indigenous owned bookstore. And so that's going really well, so we're officially in New Mexico, as well as DC.

JENN: Yay! I haven't had a bookseller on since the first year since I had Aurora.

ANGELA: Oh my god, really?

JENN: I know. And I realized that when I had reached out to you because I wanted to try and get you on the podcast, and last year was horrible in good and bad ways. You all are crucial to the whole thing.

ANGELA: Yeah, we're in the cycle of the book. The book would go nowhere without us.

JENN: Seriously. And what's interesting with Duende District is you're a pop-up.

ANGELA: I'm kind of trying to redefine what a pop-up is for us, so I still do sort of like these pop-up events that are limited time with different organizations of maybe one day or two or three weeks, but then I have this other branch, which is the more permanent side that I call vendor boutique bookstores, and that's where I can basically open up a little tiny bookstore in any kind of business or organization that believes in our ambition and wants to help that. It'll be unique to each location.

JENN: So tell me how Duende District came about. As we mentioned you're a poet, and I don't know if you've been doing poetry for a really long time, or that kind of came up, or that was maybe the inspiration for you also pushing for bookstores.

ANGELA: I think of my poetry sort of driving myself into bookselling. All of us writers have our side gigs, right? I wrote my first poem when I was six or seven, so this is something that's been a part of my life. When I went to college I did journalism as well, so I was editor of the creative writing magazine and editor of my daily paper at the University of New Mexico, but I was also doing side gigs. One of those side gigs was the first bookstore job I got, which was at Walden Books at my hometown mall.

JENN: God rest Walden Books.

ANGELA: I know. They were such a great mall chain bookstore. They were really good, and I had a really great manager. He taught me a lot. I remember one thing he said was that everybody should do a retail Christmas season period. I didn't know what he was talking about at the time, but then I went through it. If you do it in the mall, then you just have that trauma, and you'll never be mean to anybody during the holidays.

JENN: Theoretically, right? I worked at a movie theater during the holidays, and that's a hell that I wish on nobody.

ANGELA: Oh, my god. Yeah. I just remember there was a children's choir, which was not a very good children's choir, outside the Macy's that would just go for days. It's like you couldn't turn them off, and so I'd be in the bookstore, and in the background there was this not very good children's choir just endlessly. And then all the noise-making books, the kid's books, were making stupid noises.

JENN: Yeah, the squeaky noise ones.

ANGELA: Yeah, Walden Books was so small that people would just come in, and, of course, all the kids or people would just press the buttons on the display of the noise-making kid books. It would be this background of just not-good children singing. (I'm sure they were lovely children, but they were not singing well.) And then these books, which were just these noise-making hellish things, so you have this cacophony of war. Anyway, so that was my first bookstore job. Then I had to support myself throughout college, so when I finished up my term as editor of *Lobo*, my second bookstore job was actually at Barnes and Noble for four years. I got kind of bored because obviously, I don't like to conform. So I was like, "well, let me do something else." I ended up at my first independent bookstore job, which was at Page One, one of the original, big independent bookstores in Albuquerque. I wanted to go to grad school and he had gotten a job in New York City, so we moved to New York City. Then I went over to McNally Jackson, which was really great. I loved my job there.

JENN: And that's where you met Brook.

ANGELA: That's where I met Brook. We used to open together on Mondays. It was the best. Actually when I think back on it, I have such fond memories of working at McNally Jackson for

so many reasons. But Brook was very much a part of it. We'd just shoot this shit. There was nobody in the store really. We'd just talk about everything, so yeah, I miss him. But that was great, and I learned a lot from Sarah McNally, the owner. I was her kid's books buyer, and that was a huge learning experience. She taught me a lot about merchandise display, about buying. I feel like that's where I got a big foundation about who I was as a bookseller. At the same time, I was working with Jessica Stockton Bagnulo, who was the events coordinator at the time. She was the first person I ever heard say the term "professional bookseller." When it came time for me to finish up grad school, I had to think about if this was something I wanted to do as a career and I was like, "I think it *is* something I want to do as a career." Bookselling has been the most consistent thing in my life, which makes sense because bookstores have been a huge part of my life for my mom and dad. They're big bookstore people, and so at family outings every week or so, we'd be going to a different store. When we moved to DC because my husband is a political consultant, and at the time, I worked at Politics and Prose, but it still took a lot of time to really understand just the other lack of real representation both within the bookstores themselves and the books that we were selling, which you think that coming from New Mexico, this was especially, being one of the only minority majority brown states. You just don't think about these things sometimes when you come from a background of privilege. You kind of have to be slapped in the face and think, "Oh, my god, what am I doing with my life? Why am I a bookseller? Why do I do what I do?"

JENN: And that all hit you when you were in DC?

ANGELA: I don't know what it was. I think I went back to Puerto Rico and New Mexico. Jasmin Hernandez was talking about this on Facebook, which was, because she's from Texas but she's Dominican, and there's this weird juxtaposition of being an "other other" within your hometown. So I'm like a Panamanian Puerto Rican in Albuquerque, that's majority Mexican American. Everyone's like, "Yeah, we know you're not white exactly, but we really don't know what you are." And I grew up in this Chicano culture that I appreciate and love and think is amazing, but I'm not really of it. I remember being disconnected. Most of my family is from Panama, and I didn't have a lot of connection to my Puerto Rican family, and I remember the most comfortable I ever felt was living in New York City, which makes sense because there's still a lot of Caribbean Latinx over there. My family, when they came from Puerto Rico, they were in Brooklyn. They're from Sheepshead Bay, like way out. My grandfather owned a liquor store in the Bronx. I remember being in New York and just walking around, and I looked very Puerto Rican, exactly like the Puerto Rican side of my family. I felt most comfortable in New York. It's funny because I was over there for a couple of days last summer with Noëlle in the Bronx helping with her store and just wandering around the Bronx going, "Yup, these are my people." It was just an extremely comfortable place to be. So I went back to Puerto Rico for a visit since I hadn't been back since my grandfather's funeral when I was 12. And everybody looks like me and I'm just like—you know when you go somewhere, and suddenly you're like, "Oh, this is where my people are." It sort of clicks, and you feel like you totally belong somewhere, and then you come back to a place that you didn't really belong, and then it just slaps you in the face. And then that was also the year that Trump was running."

JENN: Oh, it was that year? 2016?

ANGELA: I know, right? I'm so dense sometimes. There had been things that had happened over my career that I had fought against, or certain things, but I got back, and it was like everything rearranged itself in my head, and I was like, "What the hell am I doing with my life?" Politics and Prose was a fantastic store, but its main branch is in one of the richest parts of the country, a very privileged place and very white. I was kind of just like, "Is this actually what I want to be doing?" I spent a lot of time in my community organizing. My parents taught me to be much more conscious about who I am and what I'm doing, and I just was like, sometimes you think you just want to rise in the ranks and do something, and you just keep going and going and going, and you don't think about it, and one day it just all changes. It falls apart. And so there was a big low point where I realized just how bad things were in our entire industry for us and how little opportunity really existed for us. Besides me just not really being able to ascend past middle management, and we're looking at anybody who's in senior management and all of them were white or saying things and people just not believing you or not thinking about it. These are such minor things compared to other things. I'm white passing, so people would be surprised. I'd be sitting there, and it would be all white people and me. I'm like the person who comes out of nowhere and is like, "Haha, I'm not actually white. What you just said was super screwed up."

JENN: Gotcha, racist!

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ANGELA: It could be super frustrating, but at the same time, I can't tell if people sometimes will listen to me more because of that or sometimes they dismissed me more because of that. It may be both. But it's good. I needed to be slapped in the face really hard with my own privilege and my own sort of unawareness of what I was doing as a bookseller, and I was like, "Why am I thinking so small?" You know, there's a lot more good to be doing on a larger scale, and I always wanted to have a bookstore, but I didn't want to be a global store, if that makes any sense.

JENN: Just meaning a brick and mortar per say or...?

ANGELA: I never really wanted a straight-up bookstore. I thought about it for a long time. I wanted some kind of hybrid. I wanted to do something different. I don't do really well with normal things, and so I was like, I think I'm gonna open up my own thing and see what it is. No one was really sure what it was gonna be. Just a store where we center our voices and just have a space. I'm really good at creating really warm literary spaces. Just have a space where we walk in, and it's an awesome not second-hand, not charity-based, just awesome space. And you look at the books and you look around and see yourself reflected back at you. Duende District doesn't have a social justice section. That's not what we do. For me, I want to have the best writing by POC that's not necessarily told through the wounds of our oppression. I think that dehumanizes us in a lot of ways, just in publishing. There's some really amazing books out there by these really amazing writers and we should be able to walk into a space and go, "I see

myself in that book. I see myself in that book. I see myself in that book.” And it's all different stories. So I did that, the alternative model. I had a huge student loan, and I couldn't just walk into a bank and get a loan. A lot of people who open up stores, it's their second career. They use savings, or a lot of people retire from their first career, which they made money, and then they take their savings. So it's like I have this student loan debt, and I was like, “Well, I'll start off with the pop-up model because that was more affordable.”

JENN: Can you go into what that kind of entails because I've seen more, haha, popping up. (Oh, I didn't even mean to do that.) But especially more marginalized people, who were in the business, kind of carrying over to this pop-up model. It obviously seems a bit more feasible in a financial way.

ANGELA: Absolutely. And I am a huge advocate for that kind of model, for those of us who just don't have the means to access the kind of capital that we need to have to open up really mostly anything, considering I was coming from DC, which, of course, is one of those expensive cities. You have New York, DC, San Francisco, and you're like, these places are just really expensive to open up in. And there's some capital that's government assisted. I think San Francisco does some stuff, but DC has a little bit. For Duende District I was able to do the Kickstarter campaign and raise a little over \$10,000, just basically pay off all the debt I had accrued just to put these pop-up pieces together. I think crowdfunding is getting harder and harder.

JENN: Can you tell me a little bit about that because you said that there was seed money that you put into the pop-up, so while you're not paying rent, you're still paying people getting the books, renting spaces...

ANGELA: For me, and I think there's a lot of people doing things a little different, but for me, it was going on my credit cards basically.

JENN: Oh, I identify with that.

ANGELA: It was me opening an Ingram account, and that was the first account I had, and that's where I got my books. I'd go to these different consignment shops, but they're stores and they'll go refurbish furniture and stuff like that and resell it, like resale type stuff. So I just try to find some fun, unique pieces. I found a few things at Target. My whole thing was that they got to see the pop-up in live action during this campaign. It was being sponsored by this really big art festival called Artomatic every couple years. They get this huge building. Every floor has all these different art installations from different local artists, and they wanted to do a bookstore. So I had this little space. We got to do that, and I think that year in particular, this was early 2017, the idea of having a store that was by and for people of color—a lot of people were really traumatized after Trump had just been elected. Remember the early days? So this was kind of a feel good thing that especially non-POCs could get behind. So I really do feel like that's where a lot of success of my Kickstarter came from. But you gotta build momentum. Building a crowdfunding campaign is frickin' hard. It is like a full-time job.

JENN: Yeah, and it relies on the people you know because what I found doing it with We Need Diverse Books and I, Too Arts is that you really needed to know people up front. And then people had to be excited about it for it to gain momentum.

ANGELA: If you don't have the community already there— That's why Noëlle has been so successful, too, because she's talking about her community, pumping up her community. Her community is behind her, and because she is of that community, she's a genius.

JENN: The LitBar is gonna be very, very successful, I believe.

ANGELA: Oh my god, it's going to be so good, so beautiful already. I am just always in awe of Noëlle. Booksellers all around the world, if you're going to emulate anybody, emulate Noëlle. She is just the best. She knew her community, and she knew how to tap into her community. I remember talking about this when I was working with Margot over at Kickstarter. We need to gather the people for every launch to work. We need to have all that in place. I talked to a couple other people who have done it, and they said you need to have two or three big donors upfront who will automatically do it, so you have a lot going in in the beginning. I had no idea. This was a whole new world to me.

JENN: Oh, it's horrible. It's absolutely horrible to deal with that because you're constantly checking. Doing it for We Need Diverse Books with the whole "We're on email 24/7 with each other" and just being like, "What do we do now? Oh, we got this great donation. Oh, we have this perk. Oh, we have more perks!"

ANGELA: If I had to do it over again, which I don't think I'm ever going to do, I think I would have definitely put a lot more thought into the stretch goals. Because I guess I just went into it thinking that I'd be lucky if I meet my actual goal.

JENN: Yeah, no one thinks about the stretch goals. Yeah, it's just like a crawl.

ANGELA: Seriously, the stretch goal did really great for the Bronx Book Festival. She knows what she's doing, too. She's just a brilliant marketing machine. I think about these really successful amazing crowdfunding campaigns, but then I also think about how it's so good for us and in our communities because that's who they're for. It's astounding to think of how much nobody reached out to us when we weren't reaching out to ourselves for so long in these much larger ways. And now we're in 2019, and I think how far we've come just in two years within our own community, and the way that we support each other, and that's really heartening. The fact of the matter is that these institutions have never existed for us. They weren't made for us. They're struggling to even try to figure out how to fit us in and they're kind of like, "Keep away." So we really have to create our own spaces and support each other as we're creating those spaces. And that doesn't mean that we're saying that the other people can't come into those spaces, yeah, they definitely can, and there's enough room for everybody. But to have too much reliance on the institutions that have no place for us in a lot of ways, where they'll actively or purposely use us in different ways. I keep thinking about the *New York Times*, where they have

really uneven, bad racist coverage and views, but then they try to offset it in their opinion pages with these really talented POC writers, and I'm like, that's not how this works. And so in many ways, I just feel like we get used. "Oh, no, our really terrible news coverage is fine with Roxane Gay, you know." That's just liberal nonsense, and that's just not how it works. For me, I want to celebrate anybody who's made it in those spaces, but at the same time, we should have equal time, respect, and support in the spaces that we make ourselves. So I love seeing things like the Bronx Book Festival. Maybe when we do it, we could do it big and it would be so awesome and other people would want to go to it and be a part of it, and that's awesome. There are spaces, and we made them for ourselves, and we can rise up within them in ways that we're never going to rise up in these other places. And that's actually a big thing I talk about with other POC who want to open up a bookstore. A lot of us have the same financial issues, so much why we do these pop-ups or doing these online subscription boxes. I'm a big supporter of subscription boxes. I think sort of looking at it, it's a really good starting place. A really great example of a subscription box is in California. She has a children's Spanish language subscription box that she parlayed into a pop-up as well.

JENN: What's the name of it?

ANGELA: Booklandia. That's the name of her subscription box. She's great. You should follow her on Instagram. I remember she called, and she asked about my model last year, and for me, I was like, any POC prospective bookseller who wants to do this, I am 100 percent available to them to talk about my own experience, to help whether it's with Duende District, and just be the general bookseller because I've worked in almost any kind of store. I really want Duende District to be something they can take as a template and use that to help them in their own journey for whatever they're going to do. For me, that's our community, and that's what I want to get back, and then I really celebrate and love seeing other really fantastic bookstores that are popping up—literally popping up. I want these kinds of stories also in the heartland. I think about stories like DeAndra Beard, who is really fantastic. She has a store called Beyond Barcodes in Kokomo, Indiana, and she is amazing. She is black. She's an educator. She just does fantastic things in community. This is a super white conservative community, and she's just doing the work as the bookstore. She's an amazing human being. For me, I want to see that everywhere, not just in our cities, but everywhere. 'Cause we're everywhere.

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JENN: When we had talked to Aurora in about 2015, La Casa Azul was still around in East Harlem. She had mentioned the importance of mentorship and how she was doing those sorts of things at La Casa Azul and having apprenticeships for students to learn and they actually will come in and work on weekends and get a sense... they would curate a series or something like that. So they got some hands-on ideas that this is what creating this means, and you had said that Sarah McNally at McNally Jackson, that she had provided you with some help. And I worry that that's also been not just in publishing offices, but in bookstores, that's the impediment.

ANGELA: Yeah, it really depends on the store, and the size of the store. I think Sarah's very

involved with her store, and, of course, at the time, it was just the one store, you know. She offered me the children's buying position. It was a position I'd always wanted. She liked my ideas, and so we got to work together.

JENN: Buying means that you were in charge of the stock?

ANGELA: Yes, I was in charge of bringing in the frontlist and maintaining the backlist and also maintaining the section and also doing gift items, toys and stuff like that. I like to do things really fast, which is not necessarily everybody's jam. She embraces change a lot more, and I'm somebody who embraces change, so we worked really well together. I'd be like, "What if we tried this?" And she'd be like, "Cool! What if we tried this?" And I'd be like, "Yeah let's do that." So within a short amount of time, you're able to implement a lot of different changes that are fun and great. She has a good eye for people who come in and do really awesome things. I think the person who was children's buyer after me, Sarah Gerard, they moved the kids section downstairs. They made it even more whimsical and amazing.

JENN: Oh, like the author, Sarah Gerard?

ANGELA: Yeah, Sarah's got a great eye for really interesting people who are doing interesting things. It's hard because in New York, even if you're working in a bookstore, odds are you're a writer or you're trying to get into publishing. For me, I was writing, but I wasn't doing the same kind of hustle in that way, and I also wasn't interested in publishing. I was just one of those weird people who was like, "Yeah, bookstores! Let's do this." Which is one of the things Jess and I bonded about. It was really informative watching her open up Greenlight Bookstore. I learned a lot from her about community loans, things like that. Everything I do is accumulative, all the places I've been and all the different amazing people I've worked with, and that keeps me flexible. I think apprenticeship is a huge deal. I think also one of the things that I have recently started cracking on about at ABA, American Booksellers Association, is that people are really keen to diversify their hiring, but one of the things that I really want them to be thinking about it is that you need to do a deep gut check of your actual store culture before you bring people of color and other marginalized communities into these spaces thinking you're going to change it. Or even there just might be something going on within the culture of the store that makes people like us uncomfortable, or that you're accidentally without even knowing it, pushing us out. It ends up doing a huge disservice to everybody but especially the authors. When I think about the kid's books that the authors pulled them because there were some problematically—

JENN: Oh, the POC authors specifically.

ANGELA: That's one thing ARCs address. The book is not fully published yet, and that, especially amongst our communities, I think, like in the Latinx community, absolutely we have issues, prejudices, and we can bring that to our writing and unintentionally bring that to our writing. But if we don't have somebody who's able to ask the right questions or give them to the right person to look at, to actually parse through and see if this and say, "Hey, the way you're describing these people, it seems a little problematic. Let's go back and talk about it." To me, I

feel like it's awful that it's on the authors themselves to do the right thing and say, "You know what? There's something going on in my book that I didn't realize. Let's pull this back and work on it again." But that shouldn't have had to be up to them, especially not after the ARC is already floating around. That's really upsetting to me.

JENN: It's an awareness on both sides, and I mean, I hope not to be paralyzed by that in my own words, but it's also that I know my strengths and my weaknesses as a writer and as a person, I hope. But as a writer, there are certain things where you're like, "You know what? I'm so not ready to tackle that in an effective way. Let me not even try it. Let me just not." I've said I will probably never ever ever write someone who is trans in a book or a story because I really do not feel comfortable while I know people who are transgender, there have been people who identifies transgender on the podcast. That is so new to me, that recognition and that friendship that has been bonded with members of that community. I know that my privilege and my ignorance will just surface. It will, and I can't do that, whereas you know what people in Latinx and Asian communities and gay communities who identify as cis, I've grown up with them, so it really isn't like, "Oh, I have to think about this." And I have to acknowledge that. I have to acknowledge that my ignorance really keeps impeding my recognition of how I can represent that in an artistic way.

ANGELA: Yeah, I think as writers that is our number one responsibility, right? I don't write fiction, so it's a bit on a smaller scale, but at the same time, when I think about doing persona poems, I think when I was younger I was less cognizant of what that action meant. So I'm much more careful if I'm gonna write that type of poem.

JENN: You were saying you were dealing with all of this also during that year, going Puerto Rico. It's a continual growth, and it affects me as an editor, too. I wrote that piece for *Electric Lit* that says editors are responsible for this, and it won't be so easy to put it on the author because it's just easier, like you deal with that because you should have found it out, too.

ANGELA: The editor and the author are a team, and so you need to be able to catch each other. I think about it like – so I used to play softball, I'm going to use a sports metaphor. [laughter] It's like the pitcher and catcher, right? If something's going wrong with the pitcher, the catcher needs to be able to figure out what's going on with it. They see the field, and that's so much of how I see editor role. Now this is an institutional failing, and that's how we should be talking about it. And another thing is that they could have let drafts just go, and those books would have been published as was, which is also upsetting. But the authors themselves pulled back because they acknowledged that there was something going on. I think that takes a lot of courage. Hopefully it all works out for both of them. This is why I'm also constantly obsessed with having events where we have intercultural conversations. We don't have a lot of conversations with each other especially within the immigrant communities. We're so isolated in our own communities. We don't talk to each other. And so I'm big on cross-cultural conversation events. I really like taking people from different cultures and being like, "Okay, you wrote this awesome book, and you wrote this awesome book. Let's talk about themes that are affecting all of us in different ways." For example, gentrification. I had a really great event with Naima Coster

and Natalie Hopkinson, and they could have gone on for two more hours. I should have made it a longer event. But you know because Naima's book, *Halsey Street*, was so fantastic because Brooklyn was like a character. Gentrification is so much of a theme of that, and Natalie has written so much about gentrification in DC, from the journalistic point of view and a Latinx background, and Naima is coming from an African American background. Having those conversations with each other, I think, it's like the ballgame for us. It's not just white people having to have conversations with people of color. It's literally we need to actually be talking to each other about these things more as well.

JENN: Can you talk a little bit more as well about bookseller culture? Because I feel like we're very ignorant on that as a community. Booksellers know this life, and then people in publishing don't really know this life. They just know that we want to make booksellers happy because then they will put our books in stores. And I can't even speak to that from the published standpoint because I know indie bookstores were extremely and have been extremely supportive of the anthology. They were the more supportive than Barnes & Noble. But I was like how does that happen? How does Powell's and Politics and Prose and Duende District... How do you decide what kinds of books? I don't know how much publishers are catering to or trying to cater to indies. Because I *know* they bend over backwards for Barnes & Noble.

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ANGELA: This is a huge question. This is one where any time I have interactions with publishers, they're asking, "How can we get this book in front of the booksellers?" And I could tell you how I buy, and I actually do think that it's the way that a lot of other people. I buy what I think is fantastic. So it's individual buyers. If you think about how much power each individual has and what they happen to like and what they think that their customers will like. And I think a lot of it was a little narcissistic. You have to know who your audience is. The audience for booksellers is of course our customers. I think it's easier for people who have worked at Borders and have been there for a long time. They really know and they build up that trust with their customer base and community. I want excellent writing that I feel like I haven't read this before, and this simply comes from me having been a bookseller for 18 years and having read so many things. I wanna walk away feeling like I have never read that before. I think there's a handful of writers who do that really well, but again it comes down to its whole ecosystem to get that. When I think about Kali's book, *Sabrina & Corina*, it's such a fabulous short story collection. She's an amazing writer. I haven't read something like that before because people just don't publish those kinds of stories, and she does it really well. It was like a double hit: I feel like I haven't read this before, but also it's like really well-written. That's what's important. Very often it will be a woman of color. That's who I am, you know. I was a huge champion of Naima's book, that was my favorite book last year, *Halsey Street*. I felt like I'd never read it before, that specific story. Kali's book is it for me this year. Your anthology was great, but at the same time, I also know that sometimes things will do better or not, or sometimes I'll hope things will do better than not. For example, I'm hit or miss. I wish I had been able to sell way more copies of *The Incendiaries*, which is a brilliant book. I literally just gave it to my husband to read. This is an amazing book.

JENN: And it's short. So it's perfect for book clubs, you know what I mean?

ANGELA: It's tight, you could tell she spent a long time writing it. It's just such a great novel, but it's one of those books where there may be certain places I can sell it better, but I wasn't in those places last year. So for me, I just wanted to be able to push it as much as I could on my online platform. So there'll be books where I do that, where I'll put a lot of love vocally online for it so hopefully it will get people buzzing about it, and other places are picking it up and other stores, but I may not necessarily be able to sell it only because I'm in different places at the same time. There are other books that I like that sell like crazy, you would never know, in random places, and they're each different. Red Planet's doing really well. I thought it would do fine, but I didn't know it was gonna do as well as it did. So it's always a surprise what's going to sell. You know what book sells really well at Toli Moli in Union Market? *Cook Korean* by Robin Ha. I cannot keep that book in stock, which is a really fantastic cookbook in comic book form. It's super cool. Also *Convenience Store Woman*.

JENN: I've heard of that book.

ANGELA: *A is for Activists*, the board book. I move that like crazy in every single location. It doesn't matter where I put it. It moves off the shelf. There's books that will be coming out that I want to move, like copies of your anthology. But just where I happened to be at that time was kind of weird, and I wasn't able to move the types of books that I wanted to, but I think if you're the head buyer of Powell's, you have a ton of power. That's a huge store, you've got an online and a physical presence, but you're gonna know your community. If you really do pay attention to what those buyers like and send them similar things, I guess.

JENN: I also feel like this is where we all get lost, but also marginalized people get lost, and I've ranted and raved on Twitter about the lack of strategy and marketing for the anthology. I was talking to other people who were white and not marginalized as well, but especially marginalized identities. As I'm sure you've seen, the lead titles are stuffed down your throat. No matter who it is, this is the lead title, and we want you to get it. And then there are the ones that they should probably send to you because it's like the lead or they know you like literary or they know you like tight writing or they know you like POC stories that aren't embedded in trauma. And yet they just don't bother because they have that lead, you know. "So let me give you *The Hate U Give*." "Oh, do you have anything else?" "*The Hate U Give*." I worry about so many of those quote-unquote quieter stories that gets so lost because they're, again, quiet.

ANGELA: One hundred percent. That is my struggle because I feel like I am constantly looking for those quieter stories, and I have to search so hard for them.

JENN: And that's time.

ANGELA: I'm a one-woman shop for the most part. I have Nicole Capó Martínez is doing my ground-ops in DC. She's there and is able to help people, but it's basically me. If I have to do

that much work just to get to the things that I really do want to champion, it's unacceptable. That's where that breakdown occurs, and it occurs to a lot of different POC authors that I've talked to in the last couple years. They talk about even when they're with a larger publisher, they get lost, they get lost like with their publicists. They say they don't know how to reach out to their audiences, and we just kind of leave them hanging and they end up having to do their own things.

JENN: I can testify to that, and it doesn't make them bad people. It just it's bad matching. It's like dating. You know the marketer I had was phenomenal, and she had no budget, and the publicist had no strategy. I got a publicist after the original publicist, who was very excited about the book, had to go on medical leave. So it was like, damn, if you had switched places, I think the marketer could have done so much more on the publicity angle because she would have tried so much harder because that's within her framework. And the person who didn't try that hard, not to say again that she's a bad person or anything, would have already had limited resources, so she would've just worked within her resources anyway.

ANGELA: We think about the success of *The Hate U Give* or *The Poet X*, things like that. When I think about those books, I also think about Ebony and how hard she works in marketing. She got the stories, and she pushed them and did it in such a brilliant way. That's such a huge part of the game. It's not just acquiring the book, and then editing the book and actually publishing the book. Getting that book out to the right people and into the right hands, that's going to be what sells that book and what's going to get everybody paid, the publisher, the author, the bookseller. When you don't have actual representation within your ranks or different communities, then you don't know how to think outside your own community, which could be very insular. All these really fantastic authors get lost. Like Carmen, when she did *Her Body and Other Parties*, it was really lucky that it was picked up by Graywolf because they were gonna give her more attention. I love Graywolf, but I wonder if they even really knew exactly what they had. They liked it. It was weird. They championed it. They published it, and I got a galley of it, but I think they were even surprised by how well it did.

JENN: Or even Esmé this year with *The Collected Schizophrenias*. Also Graywolf is predominantly white. I don't know how many or if any POC they have on staff, but they consistently get those authors and they champion them well because they're very targeted at the work. I love them, too. I think they're doing great work.

ANGELA: They're very targeted at the work. They don't let themselves get caught up in like, "Oh, this is a POC author. Or Carmen is Latina, so how do we get to the Latina audience?" That would limit her work.

JENN: They're also concentrated, and that's the benefit of places like Cinco Puntos or ...

ANGELA: Yeah, Haymarket is really good with that, when I think about the people who don't make me have to search. City Lights is good, where I feel like they come to me, and they're like, "Here's this amazing book," and I haven't had to search for it, and I'm like, "Yes, this is an

amazing book that I can actually champion and do something with.” Sometimes it's like the smaller presses, but then often times not always.

JENN: Riverhead does good stuff, and they're very concentrated in print in a very big house, but they also have a huge publicity staff in comparison.

ANGELA: They do. You're not the only one asking this question. I feel like this is a question that's constantly asked between publishers and booksellers when they're in those spaces. This specific question, especially for those of us who are not white or straight or whatever, definitely get lost, and that's really frustrating, and I think we're missing some really great books. Then at the same time, sometimes I think there are a few books that get really championed that are by POC that I'm like, “That's not my jam, and that's not how I would have wanted to have that story told, and I'm not into it.” Then it becomes frustrating, and I just want to throw this book at the wall. But what are you going to do? It's a struggle we're all fighting, as an editor, a writer, a bookseller. I know other people are fighting it in other levels publishing, but it's just another reason why we should champion ourselves and our own spaces and things we're doing even more because we have such a great vocal community, especially online. When I think about our Twitter community especially. That's where you could really blow up somebody that would have never otherwise could have had that word of mouth. I feel like there have been authors that other authors know their work or they've been in workshops with them, and I discovered them via the Twitter community. And then I'm like, “Oh god, I love this book.” You know? There's a book that's out, it's from a really small press. It's by Gabino Iglesias called *Coyote Songs*. And I would have never known about this book if it hadn't been for the Twittterverse. It's going to do so well, especially in Albuquerque. It's a very fascinating different kind of book. You should check out. I don't even know how to describe it. Just remember *Coyote Songs*, Gabino Iglesias. Everybody go look at it. It's totally different. It's fantastic. But I never would have known about this book if Duende District hadn't had its specific POC writing community. And I feel like we talk amongst ourselves. I feel like there's the own voices community, like poetry and stuff like that has CantoMundo and Cave Canem. Like all these different, really great organizations where we all just talk to each other. Sometimes it can feel like a bit of an echo chamber, but at the same time, every once in a while like I think, I think I got Kali's book because of Ivelisse Rodriguez.

JENN: *I love Love War Stories*.

[00:40:58]

ANGELA: *Love War Stories* is so good! But I wonder if Kali would have slipped my notice if she hadn't personally sent me a galley of her book. This is my one bookseller super power is that I can tell when a book is going to blow up. I could tell *The Incendiaries* was going to blow up way before everybody, and I could tell Kali's book was gonna blow up. She's so sweet. She's super surprised by everything right now. This is absolutely the response that I thought this book would be getting.” I can see it. It's like the math of being in this business for as long as I have. So yeah, I know there are books out there that should blow up like that, but we're just not seeing them because they're getting lost, and I hate that. It's like one of the things that haunt me.

JENN: You're doing the work, you're doing the work. And so how can people reach out to you, find out more about Duende District and all that good stuff, and support *you* as you support us so heartily?

ANGELA: Go to duendedistrict.com. I'm on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @duendedistrict.

JENN: Go to your events!

ANGELA: Go to my events. I do sell some books online and try to have kind of the things that I really love that are coming out, and you know I focus more on frontlist books that have just come out or books that have been our favorite for the past couple of years. I don't do a lot of backlist, but every once in a while I might, but I just feel like one of those weird on-the-go stores, so let's just focus on the stuff that's coming up that's really awesome. I try to be very conscientious about what we're putting up there and what we're endorsing because I feel like that trust factor is very important. You can go to the website. You can dig around that. I try to update—just be patient because it's really mostly just me doing all the updating and stuff like that, but I try to get things on there, so you should go by season for the last couple years. Then also check out our different locations. If you're in Albuquerque, come to Red Planet. If you are in DC, you can go to Toli Moli in Union Market, you can go to Walls of Books, which is in Petworth. You can go to Dio Wine Bar, which is on H street. So I'll have little Duende Districts in them.

JENN: Yay, wine bars.

ANGELA: That's my newest one, and I really want it to be a success. It's a Latina-owned wine bar, and she does fantastic things. So next time you're in DC, you should definitely go to Dio.

JENN: Oh, definitely. Thank you so much for your time, Angela, and speaking to me over the computer, over different time zones and all that good stuff. This has been such an enlightening conversation, so I really appreciate your time.

ANGELA: I always have a great conversation with you, Jenn, every time we talk. But yeah, "We're all fighting the same fight." Thank you so much for having me on. This has been really fantastic.

JENN: And thank you for listening to the Minorities in Publishing podcast. Again, you can find it at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com or on Twitter at @minoritiesinpub.