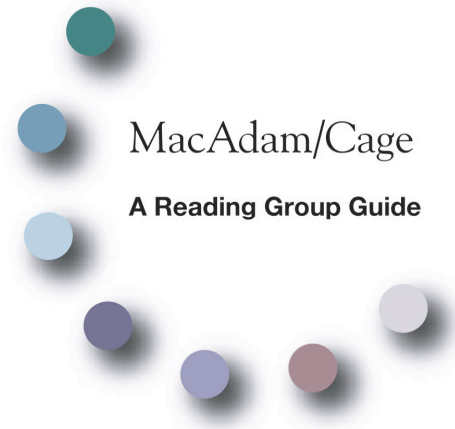


The View from Delphi
Jonathan Odell



1. What advantage does Odell gain by telling this story from multiple points of view? How would the story change if readers only heard one character's perspective?
2. Whose story do you think this is? Whose viewpoint could you not do without? What would the novel lose if this choice had to be made?_
3. Why do you suppose that Odell began with Hazel and Vida as children? Are their early years essential to our understanding of these women as adults?_
4. Discuss Hazel's inability to belong. What is achieved through the creation of Hazel's innate peculiarity according to the other women of her class and neighborhood?
5. From a feminist perspective, consider the ways Hazel finds freedom as well as the times she requires rescuing. What, if any, transformations does she undergo throughout the course of this novel?_
6. Consider the same questions for Vida._
7. How do the relationships (marriages, friendships, and employer-employee) reflect the setting of this novel?_
8. Ponder the perceptions of sanity and insanity portrayed through the characters of Hazel and Levi Snow. How is the label of crazy the same or different for each? _
9. Considering the questions of sanity, what role does Maud play in this story?
10. Odell seems to have mastered the dialects of the South. How are your impressions of characters affected by their distinct voices?_

11. This novel touches on many aspects of loss. How are the characters (Hazel, Johnny, Vida, Levi) changed by their losses? Is it for better or worse? Consider the same for the gains of others (Floyd, Billy Dean, Hazel). _
12. What do you imagine will become of young Johnny? What changes did his character undergo and what were the catalysts? Why do you suppose he was so nervous in the beginning?
13. What do you imagine for the future of Nate? Will he ever learn the truth and how might that change him if he did?
14. There is an old African American saying that goes, “When God gave out possessions, He gave the black man the hoe and the white man the pencil.” How does this illuminate Vida’s need to tell her own story?
15. Odell enables us to “see” and “hear” racial issues in fresh ways. What have you learned about pieces of the civil rights movement that were missed in your textbooks?
16. Consider these statements lifted from other writings of the author. What is your reaction?

John F. Kennedy, like Lincoln, had to be dragged kicking and screaming into a struggle African Americans had been fighting for centuries, but are now icons of the Official Race Story, while the names of Black heroes are getting lost, or consigned to the quarantine ward of the American story called Black History Month.

I recently viewed a play that “documented” the Freedom Summer in Mississippi, a summer when local black activists initiated a massive voter registration drive in 1964. During that year, hundreds of northern white college students came to help, but that is only a small part of that experience. But the way the play interpreted those events the white students came down to “save” the poor, ignorant, downtrodden black victims, to “give” them their freedom. The truth is the white students, as brave and idealistic as they were, did not save Blacks. What they added was this: in the eyes of the nation, the lives of the white students had value. So finally America paid attention. Blacks had been fighting back, being attacked, raped, and killed, ingeniously surviving a system of legislated evil for centuries and the nation was complicit. Not until white students were threatened did the country’s eyes turn to Mississippi and to them go the glory.

A white woman can have a black baby, but a black woman cannot have a white baby. Value travels in one direction and that is toward the white end of the Race/Color continuum.

Finally, dejected, looking up at yet another statue dedicated to the ideal of white southern womanhood, she asked, “So, where are the monuments to my (African-American) people?”

We were thrown into a world where racism already exists. The dynamics are set. But as soon as we are cognizant of that fact, we are responsible, because it is now our world too.

To deal with racism, we have to learn to speak of racism. We need to get good at seeing the nuances of racism in our society. Painting racism and racists with a broad stroke just leads to failed conversation, name-calling and tons and tons of denial, resentment and finally giving up on each other.

As a friend of mine says, “There is not a day goes by that I am not reminded that I am black.” Race is a central component to her narrative. Yet we as white people have the luxury of very seldom thinking about being white. Whatever allows us this privilege is indeed our own “race story.”