

Sample 4 Study Group Cont.

High

Dr. Tucker

IDS 120

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What does the book seem to say about the state of African-Americans, how is this obvious in the lives of people like Burma Jones, and what does the book seem to say about people like Lana Lee, Ignatius, Mr. and Mrs. Levy, and Myrna Minkoff's responses to the racism of the time?

The book, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, is set in 1960s New Orleans, a place where racial discrimination was very much prevalent. The Civil Rights movement was on the rise, but discrimination against black people was nowhere near gone. Burma Jones, a black man who is hired at the "Night of Joy" club, is the main African-American character in the book. Jones plays a large role in the story in order to show the state of African-Americans of the time. Although slavery was abolished, Jones character is used to illustrate how black men were still treated as lesser beings. For example, Jones says, about how Lana Lee, "She ain't exactly hire me, She kinda buying me off a auction block" (Toole 34). Lana does not treat Jones very well and, later in the story, she even forces him to dress as a slave for one of her shows. The purpose of this is to show how discrimination was still very present in their society.

The book also incorporates the issue of race in the lives of some of the white characters. For example, it is explained that Myrna Minkoff is involved in Civil Rights activism because she deeply desires to make a difference and save somebody's life. Ignatius, on the other hand, simply wants to "one up" Myrna; therefore, he plans to organize some kind of racial demonstration at Levy Pants, the factory in which he works. In chapter five, Ignatius even compares himself to African-Americans by saying "I have always felt something of a kinship with the colored race, because its position is the same as mine: we both exist outside the inner realm of American society" (144). Although Ignatius does acknowledge that his situation is somewhat "voluntary", he still likens himself to the minority race because he feels like an outsider.