

Anaheim Beauties Discussion Group Questions

1. In the opening stanza of the book, Alma Martin, whom we later learn is a character in the novel, expresses regrets over Woodrow Wilson's vision to "make the world safe for democracy." In what ways was Woodrow Wilson a moral or immoral man? How does this foreshadow the theme?
2. In what ways does the Southern California of 1924 resemble Southern California today? In what ways are the 1924 settings different from today?
3. Why do you think the author chose to set this story in 1924 when there are plenty of extremist groups in existence today to write about?
4. What techniques do you see used to transport the reader to 1924?
5. How does your perception of Anaheim evolve as the story progresses?
6. Generally the Ku Klux Klan is not associated with hostility toward Catholics, but the Anaheim Ku Klux Klan did, in fact, attempt to burn down Saint Boniface Church in 1924. Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
7. A famous study of obedience in psychology was carried out at Yale by psychologist Stanley Milgram. In the Milgram experiments, subjects repeatedly chose obedience to authority over personal conscience. What do you think you would do if forced to choose between obeying your conscience versus obeying authority?
8. The author writes of validation rackets, where people in power leverage their ability to give or withhold praise to extract obedience from people seeking validation. In what ways do you think the Anaheim Ku Klux Klan might have been a validation racket?
9. Do you feel the 1920's Hollywood culture might have also been a validation racket?
10. What similarities and what differences do you see between the Anaheim Ku Klux Klan, and the 1920's Hollywood power structure?
11. In what ways do you see Dean being validated by others in Anaheim? In what ways does Anaheim fail to validate him as a member of the community?
12. In what ways do you see Helen being validated? In what ways do others fail to validate her?
13. Discuss the symbolism of elevation (up versus down) as it is used throughout the novel.
14. Discuss the symbolism of strings versus wings used throughout the novel.

15. What is the significance of the Shoeless Joe Jackson baseball glove? Do you think Shoeless Joe Jackson deserved to be banned from baseball for covering up the activities of his teammates who threw the 1919 "Black Sox" World Series? To what extent do you think Dean was guilty or innocent of withholding information about activities of the Ku Klux Klan?
16. How did you feel about the resolution of Helen and Dean's relationship?
17. When did you realize what Mr. Webber had done to Helen? Were you satisfied with his suicide? Why or why not?
18. Is Dean's mother a minor or major character in the book? In what ways does she impact Dean's life?
19. What does the author's handling of Dean's relationship with his father say about the role of fathers in their children's lives?
20. The author introduces three characters (Lucille LaSeuer, Florence Lowe Barnes, and Duke Morrison) who later became famous under other names. Was this too obvious or not obvious enough? How is your perception of someone affected by their name?
21. Do you think Dean redeems himself? To what extent do you think bringing in Crazy Florence at the end of the novel was a deus ex machina plot device? Did it work, and why or why not?
22. Why does the author end the novel with Dean as a pilot?
23. Discuss some of the validation rackets in existence today. Are they all bad? Do they every have redeeming qualities?
24. The author calls his book a Red Car Noir novel. Now that you have read and discussed the book, what do you think this means?