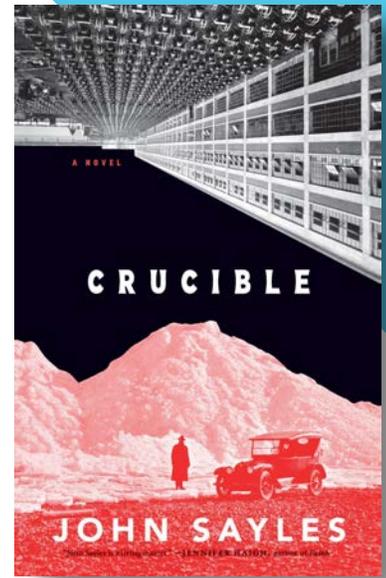


CRUCIBLE

John Sayles

Hardcover 9781685892272

eBook 9781685892289



“... an ambitious, polyphonic tale that captures America’s industrial history through the panoramic lens of a social historian and the moral scrutiny of a dramatist.”

— **Booklist**

“... Sayles offers a propulsive view into the era’s rapacious capitalism and rapid social changes. This textured tale will resonate with readers concerned about worker’s right and corporate greed.” —

Publishers Weekly

“An epic tale focused on the legendary automobile tycoon Henry Ford.” — **The Times (UK)**

Introduction

Already the gateway for illegal Canadian liquor during Prohibition, the Motor City becomes a crucible for American class conflict during the Great Depression, with an army of laid off Ford workers drifting into the ranks of the burgeoning union movement — Henry Ford’s worst nightmare. To keep the hundreds of thousands still employed by him in thrall, the man who was formerly ‘America’s favorite tycoon’ recruits black laborers migrating from the deep South to serve as ‘strike insurance’, and gives Harry Bennett, pugnacious as he is diminutive, free reign over the legion of barroom brawlers and ex-cons who make up the company’s ‘Security Department’.

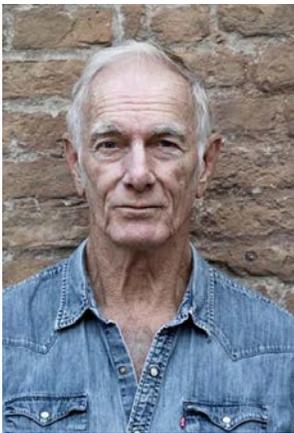
The novel’s cast — Ford workers black and white and their families, young radicals, cynical newsmen, gangsters, Brazilian rubber tappers, cameos from boxer Joe Louis and muralist Diego Rivera — create the tapestry of differing points of view that John Sayles has become famous for, the events portrayed fundamental to the country we live in today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A ‘crucible’ can refer to a container for melting substances at high temperatures, a severe test or trial, or a place where concentrated forces interact to cause change. How does this apply to the novel and to the city of Detroit in the era depicted?
2. How does this metaphor differ from our usually benign reference to America as a ‘melting pot’?
3. Though set in the past, the novel is written almost entirely in the present tense. How does this affect the feel and rhythm of the story?

Crucible

4. We spend time with characters both famous (or famous in their time and place, like Harry Bennett and Jerry Buckley) and fictional in the course of the book. How do the actions of those with power affect those just trying to get along in life?
5. The novel takes place over a fifteen-year period. How do the ads for new Ford cars help denote the passage of time?
6. We are constantly shifted from one character's point of view to another's. How is this done without ever drifting into 'first person' narrative?
7. How do the references to the entertainment of the day (boxing, baseball, movies, songs) help us understand both the times and the characters?
8. Henry Ford's empire stretches all the way to the Amazon. How do the 'model communities' of Fordlandia and Bellterra become crucibles in their own way?
9. What do you find admirable and just plain awful about Henry Ford as portrayed?
10. Race and ethnicity are major factors in the lives of the novel's characters. How does this book reflect on the America we live in today?
11. Which characters do you find yourself rooting for the most?
12. Two of the major female characters, Kerry and Rosa, start out very hopeful about the future. How do you think they fared in the years after the novel ends?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Sayles is an American independent film director, screenwriter, actor, and novelist. He has twice been nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and once for the National Book Award. He has written eight novels, the most recent being *Jamie MacGillvray* and *To Save the Man*.

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