

The Miseducation of Obi Ifeanyi

Chinedu Achebe

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In the novel The Miseducation of Obi Ifeanyi, a Nigerian American couple confronts the underlying tensions in their marriage.

In Chinedu Achebe's winding domestic novel *The Miseducation of Obi Ifeanyi*, a man's wife and his ex-lover work together on a political campaign, uncovering secrets.

In 2012, Obi, a lawyer in his midthirties, lives in Houston with his wife, Nkechi, and their eighteen-month-old son, Ike. He struggles to find more remunerative work as he copes with the demands of new parenthood; via text, he engages in an emotional affair with an ex-girlfriend. Meanwhile, Nkechi, who is on the brink of graduating with her master's degree, feels pulled between parenting and her dreams. As the novel progresses, the couple's inward longings begin to grate against their shared outward reality.

Then, on New Year's Eve, Obi and Nkechi visit his parents' home. There, the good-natured conversations flow in a stage-play format, revealing clashes between their family traditions and contemporary values, including feminism. The family members discuss politics, too, if in a loose way; they express their doubts and some optimism, and they feel empathy toward Barack Obama, who faces charged confrontations with Republicans as a Black man. Obi and Nkechi's differing expectations are revealed: they have opposing takes on marriage, on what media they should consume, and on how they should spend their time together.

Then Nkechi meets Sade, a candidate for city council, and decides to volunteer with her campaign. Obi neglects to mention that he and Sade once dated, fearing Nkechi's reaction. But this complication is set aside as the book's chapters meander through coverage of generational perspectives and through discursive events like Obi's friend's bachelor party. The book's second half sacrifices its momentum to cover drama in the lives of secondary characters; their true impact on Obi's family is limited.

Further, the world around the family is fleshed out in minimal terms. Beyond people's opinions about the world, the book's characterizations are limited. Nkechi is sketched as a discontented wife with sometimes cutting opinions; she makes sweeping assessments of the world around her, including of her husband's Igbo roots, which she deems to be the cause of his arrogance. And Obi is both hapless and self-defeating; a passive hero, he fails to read people's subtle cues. As they volley with one another and express occasional affection toward each other, a theme emerges—a sense that relationships require patience as well as mutual maintenance.

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KAREN RIGBY (March 8, 2023)

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