Doubles

Japan and America's Intercultural Children

PRODUCED BY REGGE LIFE

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Doubles: Japan and America's Intercultural Children is filmmaker Regge Life's second work to examine the concept of "other" in contemporary Japanese society. Inspired by his experiences while filming *Struggle and Success: the African American Experience in Japan,* Life returned to the topic of intercultural communication in *Doubles.* The film attempts to evaluate the life experiences of Japanese and American intercultural children, and how these experiences have changed over the fifty years. The film goes beyond Japanese society to look at complex issues of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity in the U. S. as well.

Opening with archival footage of General Douglas MacArthur accepting the Japanese surrender from Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu aboard the U. S. S. Missouri on September 2, 1945, the film refers to Occupation orders forbidding relationships between U. S. soldiers and Japanese women. Family photographs of young couples—U. S. servicemen and their Japanese wives, often with children—are interspersed with footage of children who were left behind in Japan by their American fathers, while the now-adult children of such relationships speak frankly of their parents' and their own experiences. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu's fond memories of acceptance by his Japanese grandparents are juxtaposed with very painful memories of adults whose American fathers, both Caucasian and African American, left them behind in Japan. The film notes the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of World War II and poses the question the film attempts to answer, "What has changed for the children of Japanese and Americans and what remains the same?"

Regge Life uses personal narratives, archival footage, and family photographs to explore the experiences of several groups of Japan and America's intercultural children.

Approximately half of those featured in *Doubles* live in Japan, and half in the U. S. There are roughly equal numbers of men and women, as well as equal numbers of African American/Japanese and Caucasian American/Japanese. One informant, Tino Ramirez, who now lives in Hawaii, is the son of a Mexican American father and a Japanese mother. The films looks at children from three different periods in Japanese-Western relations. Children of the Occupation and the years immediately following the Occupation form the largest single group interviewed. Two intercultural families which predate the war are included and provide an interesting historical perspective. The final group, those born after the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, includes such personalities as NHK Anchorwoman Maya Moore, as well as a half-dozen children and teenagers.

Doubles focuses upon the Occupation as the beginning of the period in which the phenomenon of intercultural Japanese/American children became widespread. Archival footage from the Occupation depicts the devastation and poverty in Japan at the time, while both Japanese and Americans who were a part of the Occupation relate their memories of the period. For those who study modern Japanese history, or U. S.-Japan relations, there is little new in this segment, but it sets the tone for audiences who do not have the historical background. Donald Richie recalls military directives which stated "No fraternization with the indigenous personnel," and Father Neal Lawrence discusses the problems of illegitimate intercultural children abandoned by their American fathers and their Japanese mothers, who could not survive society's harsh judgment of them. Father Lawrence briefly discusses the lack of cultural understanding on the part of many American servicemen in Japan at the time. Here, the film returns to the painful personal memories, previewed in the introduction, of two Japanese/Americans who have lived their lives in Japan. Toshikazu Kiyonaga, an African American/Japanese man, and Hitomi Ishiyama, the daughter of a U. S. serviceman, tell of their experiences of growing up in Japan, speaking Japanese, but of always being considered "outsiders." Here the film misses an opportunity to examine both Japanese and American ethnocentrism in greater depth, and at this point, may leave viewers wondering what made it necessary for some women to abandon their offspring, why these two individuals were called *gaijin* (foreigner) by other children, and what American servicemen didn't understand about Japanese society. The film does not identify the forty-some individuals interviewed except by name and city, and the viewer is thus left wondering, "Who are those four men (Ray Downs, Donald Ritchie, Kasumi Kitabatake, and Father Neal Lawrence) discussing the Occupation period, and are they among the intercultural children featured? In spite of the variety of experiences of these children of the Occupation, many have very fond memories of their childhood in Japan, and most describe mixed reactions in both Japan and the U. S. Velina Houston, an African American/Japanese playwright, remembers her mother's description of her father the first time they met. "It was the first time I'd seen a man the color of *shoyu* (soy sauce)." Curtis Rooks, an African American/Japanese man, describes the difficulty his mother experienced in preserving some elements of Japanese culture within the mix of African American and Anglo American culture. Rooks recalls "getting into a fight in the morning because someone called me 'nigger,' and getting into a fight in the afternoon because someone called me 'jap.'

Particularly powerful is the experience in the U. S. during World War II of Henry Mittwer, who had come to the U. S. as a

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young man to seek his father. Mittwer, a U. S. citizen raised in Japan by his Japanese mother, was stranded in the U. S. by the outbreak of the Pacific War and found himself interned at Manzanar. When asked to join the U. S. Army to fight in Europe, Mittwer experienced profound disillusionment with what it meant to be an American citizen and gave up his U. S. citizenship.

The film makes a brief historical reference to the fact that there have been intercultural children in Japan since the turn of the century and illustrates this point with the case of the descendants of Edmund Stuken, who had come to Japan in 1870, and Atsushi Tsunemochi of Kobe, Japan. The descendents appear completely Caucasian.

The final group, those born after the 1964 Olympics, provides the most optimistic view of the future, and it is from this group that the title of the film is drawn. Maya Moore recalls coming home from school in tears after being called *hafu* (half-breed), only to have her mother tell her she was "double, not half!" Now a successful anchorwoman in Japan, she says, "We cannot think in terms of color and race—it doesn't mean anything anymore!" All of the children and teenagers interviewed in this segment presented positive perspectives on their intercultural identities, and many referred to themselves as "double." Without exception, those interviewed were optimistic, and felt that they were, in the words of Tino Ramirez, "on the cutting edge of where the world is headed."

Unlike his first film, *Struggle and Success,* in which Life interviews scholars and other experts on the concept of race and racism in Japanese society, with an analysis of the meaning of "other" in Japanese society, *Doubles* relies almost exclusively upon the very personal recollections of those interviewed. This is both the film's strength and weakness. With some forty interviews, the film can become tedious, as there is little other footage to break up the narratives, and while the personal memories, family stories, and experiences are all exceedingly powerful, they do not make a comprehensive whole. The audience is left to extrapolate from these narratives—some very negative, some very positive—the meaning of race, ethnicity, concepts of self and other, family cultural identity, and regionalism, in both Japanese and American society. The film does little to analyze the various reasons its subjects had such different experiences, apart from the time period in which they happened to be born. Whether their parents married, where they ultimately lived, the educational backgrounds of the parents, and the family income are variables which are only indirectly considered.

In spite of these weaknesses, the film provides in these extraordinary personal narratives a rich source of raw, albeit anecdotal, data on the experiences of intercultural children. The film is a useful companion to *Struggle and Success,* and can be used with relative ease in classes covering modern Japanese history, U. S.-Japan relations, modern Japanese society, modern American society, race relations, and multicultural studies.

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