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Book Review - Kindred

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Off the SHELF

Kindred by Octavia E. Butler.

Beacon Press, 2003 (25th Anniversary Edition, original publication date, 1979). ISBN 0-8070-8369-0

Price: \$14.00

If you have never been to California, or Antebellum Maryland, Octavia E. Butler makes you feel as if you have been there before (San Francisco circa 1976 and Maryland as a slave state, circa 1819). Butler presents a well written novel that cannot be categorized into one particular genre.

Kindred is not only a work of fiction, science fiction, psychological fiction, or historical fiction; it is also great American Literature. When 26 year old writer Dana Franklin starts to feel sick and dizzy, she suddenly disappears from her home. She and her husband (Kevin Franklin) are bewildered at what happened, as well as the events to come.

Dana Franklin is one of many characters that are presented within this novel. Other characters include a little boy named Rufus (who happens to be Dana's great grandfather), Alice (a slave), and Hagar (the son of Rufus and Alice) and the precursor to Dana's branch of the family.

Dana mysteriously disappears from her home in San Francisco, and reappears in Maryland before the emancipation proclamation. Dana continues to disappear and reappear within these two settings and times in history, in order to guide Rufus out of trouble (ultimately to keep him alive) — all while trying to manage her own life in the present. Dana is transported by some greater force, in order to save Rufus and keep her lineage intact.

The characters in this novel are intertwined in the web of this magnificent story. Dana and Kevin make a seemingly happily married couple, and their relationship vaguely epitomizes what Rufus may have wanted with Alice. The culture of 1819 would not deem this interracial relationship socially acceptable.

Within this timeless piece, Butler is able to create a story that condenses two different times in history to create a truly cohesive novel. Every character plays a part in this story, and they also have their own individual stories to tell. Butler is able to capture the plausible essence of a plethora of characters; therefore, every character plays a noteworthy part in the plot. Butler is also able to humanize the slave, as well as the slave-owner, and everyone in between.

Kindred is truly a great read for teens/young adults, as well as mature adults. The novel embodies history, xenophobia, mysticism, forgiveness, understanding, love, and most importantly, family.

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