

Slavery Resistance and Historical Context in Octavia Butler's Kindred

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Jacob and Harriet's portrayal of the power that slave masters had helps me come to understand the fact that black people in Butler's *Kindred* were mere economic tools. These two authors point to an example where Alice in Butler's *Kindred* attempted to commit suicide. Quoting directly from this particular piece of writing, Alice intended to bring about "a final end to Rufus upsetting power". Rufus was the son of slave owner Tom Weylin, and so he had powers similar to those of his father. He took advantage of this power to exploit women (Jacob, 1861).

When Jacob and Harriet explain that only black individuals were subjected to slavery, I come to understand that white folks in Butler's *Kindred* considered themselves superior. As explained in this commentary, for instance, "Tom Weylin was a white individual who owned slaves". To put it in a different way, Tom Weylin was a slave master. To justify my point, there is nowhere in the book that it is said that white folks were slaves at some point. The whites saw that they were a little bit superior to do such odd jobs as digging in the gardens (Jacob, 1861).

Jacob and Harriet's depiction of the many rape cases enables me to comprehend the fact that black women in Butler's *Kindred* yearned for liberation from this evil act. As stated in this editorial, "Alice's intention to escape her suffering through death was aimed at liberating her". What this implies is that Alice found life to be useless if she was going to constantly be intimidated by Rufus. She wanted to go to a place where no one would ever cause her suffering. Death was the only way to that place, as her movements were restricted in a way by Rufus (Jacob, 1861).

When Jacob and Harriet describe slavery as a distressing experience, I come to realize that black people in Butler's *Kindred* experienced trauma. As explained in this piece of writing, "slaves would sometimes attempt to escape". Common sense has it that the only circumstance that an individual may be tempted to escape is when he or she is subjected to hardship. It is not easy to find a case where an individual is trying to escape from a place that he or she is enjoying. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that the ultimate goal of existence in life is happiness (Jacob, 1861).

Yetman and Norman's intention to critique American history makes me think that the early way of life depicted in Butler's *Kindred* was harsh. The question that I find asking myself is this: why would the slaves' movements be restricted? As far as I can tell, this perhaps could have been due to the fact that their slave masters knew that the life that they had subjected the blacks was very harsh. They, perhaps, were very sure that if given freedom of movement, the slaves would escape. A good example of the harshness is evidenced by the many incidents of rape cases (Yetman, 1930).

The portrayal of the status of women in Yetman and Norman's piece of writing makes me imagine

that the modern woman would not have survived such a life. Which modern woman would endure doing such odd jobs as digging in the garden to plant vegetables or any other agricultural products? Most modern women, especially those living in urban centres, know little about farm work. As a matter of fact, they hate this kind of job, which is why they even tend to live far away from where it is carried. The same case applies to modern men (Yetman, 1930).

When Yetman and Norman reveal the efforts of slave masters to prevent blacks from accessing education, it becomes clear to me that white folks in Butler's *Kindred* intended to carry out slavery for a very long time. In their words, "the white man knew for a fact that education would promote resistance". According to my way of thinking, white folks, especially those who owned slaves, knew that by educating themselves, black folks would begin to fight for their inherent rights. This, of course, refers to the rights that every human being is born with. Constitutions at that time supported slavery. What this means is that slaves would automatically lose cases of slavery if they went to court (Yetman, 1930).

Yetman and Norman's examples of many attempts by blacks to escape slavery reveal to me the fact that black folks in Butler's *Kindred* resisted slavery. Other than trying to escape, it is reported that slaves would intentionally damage the machines that were supposed to be used in carrying out their daily activities. In some cases, slaves would engage in strikes when they were required to report to their work. During such times, they would remain in their house on the day of work. The main reason for doing all these was to, of course, resist slavery. These events began to happen immediately, and the slaves began to be united. Unity enabled them to form organizations that then communicated one voice (Yetman, 1930).

Work Cited

Jacobs, Harriet Ann. Excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Yetman, Norman R., editor. *Selections from the Slavery Narrative Collection* (recorded 1930s)