

Research paper on octavia butler



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Table of ContentsPage 1. A BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH OCTAVIA E.

BUTLERPage 2 – 4. BiographyPage 5 – 9. SynopsisPage 9 – 14. Analysis of

CriticismPage 14 15. Influences on SocietyPage 16. FootnotesPage 17.

BibliographyA BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH OCTAVIA E. BUTLER1. Who is

Octavia E. Butler? Where is she headed? Where has she been? Who am I? I'm a 51-year-old writer who can remember being a 10-year-old writer and who expects someday to be an 80-year-old writer. I'm also comfortably asocial – a hermit living in a city-a pessimist, a student, endlessly curious; a feminist; and African-American; a former Baptist; and an oil-and-water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty, and drive.

2. What have you written? Novels, short stories, and essays. I've had 10 novels published so far. They are PATTERNMASTER, MIND OF MY MIND, SURVIVOR, KINDRED, WILD SEED, CLAY'S ARK, DAWN, ADULTHOOD RITES, IMAGO, and PARABLE OF THE SOWER. Doubleday published the first five originally. Warner has reprinted WILD SEED, MIND OFMYMIND, CLAYS ARK, and PATTERNMASTER. KINDRED has been reprinted by Beacon Press. DAWN, ADULTHOOD RITES, IMAGO, and PARABLE OF THE SOWER are available from Warner. Four Walls Eight Windows first published PARABLE. In 1995, Four Walls also published my short story collection, BLOODCHILD AND OTHER STORIES. One story in this collection, " Speech Sounds," won a Hugo award as best short story of 1984. The title story, " Bloodchild," won both the 1985 Hugo and the 1984 Nebula awards as best novelette. And speaking of awards, in the summer of 1995, I received a MacArthur Fellowship from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Her most recent book now is Liliths Brood published in the year 2000.

3. What were your educational preparations for a writing career? I graduated from Pasadena City College in 1968 (Pasadena, California is my hometown). Then I attended California State University, Los Angeles. I also took a few extension classes at UCLA. But the most valuable help I received with my writing came from two workshops. The first was the Open Door Program of the screenwriters Guild of America, West (1969-70). The second was Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop (1970).

1BiographyOctavia Estelle Butler was born June 22, 1947 in Pasadena, California. She was the only child of Octavia Margaret (Guy) Butler and Laurice Butler. Shortly after Butler was born, her father died leaving Butler's mother and grandmother to raise her. Octavias mother used to read her bedtime stories until she was six years old. As soon as she got to like the stories, her mother said, Here's the book. Now you read. She didn't know what she was setting her both up for. Just at the age of ten Octaviabegan to write short stories of fiction.

Octavia lived most of her life in Pasadena. All through Junior High and High School, even college, Butler was a very shy person. She would not get up in front of class to do anything, her teachers thought this was because she didn't do the work and was unprepared. One time, she even went as far as to record her presentation on a tape and turn that in instead. During her years in school, there were three teachers who made a critical difference in Butler's development. The first was Butler's home economics teacher in seventh grade, Miss Peters. Peters took the time to read2Butler's stories and offer encouragement. The second teacher was Mr. Pfaff, an eighth grade science teacher who typed her first story, " typed it the way it was supposed to be, with no holes erased into the paper. He even corrected my terrible

spelling and punctuation. The third teacher was Butler's first Black teacher. Miss Buggs taught ninth grade English, social studies, and drama. Butler remembers her as the only teacher who truly understood how much presenting material orally terrified the young student. She graduated John Muir High School in 1965. She then started night classes at Pasadena City College, by second semester she had signed up for a full course load. She finished the two-year degree program in 1968 where she received an Associate of Arts degree. Then she started attending California State College, but was dissatisfied with the creative writing courses there so she withdrew from college. While working a number of odd jobs to support herself, then she took evening writing courses at UCLA and began attending writing workshops at the Screen Writers Guild of America West and Clarion Science Fiction Writers Workshop. Octavia says, " I write about people who do extraordinary things. It just turned out that it was called science fiction." Two of her short stories were bought while she was attending Clarion, however she didn't sell anything else for another five years. With the resolve shown by some of her characters, she continued to write in spite of rejection by publishers, financial hardship, and discouragement from family and friends who advised her to get a " real" job. Her first novel was published in 1977, after that first novel, she has had less and less trouble getting her work published. She now has 10 novels and a book of short stories. In her book of short stories, she has two essays titled " Positive Obsession" and " Furor Scribendi". " Furor Scribendi" is an essay for aspiring writers. Butler has won several awards for her writing. In 1984 she won a Hugo Award for her short story, " Speech Sounds." In 1985 she won the Hugo for her novella " Bloodchild." " Bloodchild" also won the 1984 Nebula Award. The Hugo and

<https://assignbuster.com/research-paper-on-octavia-butler/>

Nebula Awards are considered science fiction's highest awards. Other science fiction writers and fans decide them on. In 1995, Butler won the MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" which pays \$295,000 over 5 years.

4SynopsisKindred is one of those novels written by Octavia butler that grabs you by the throat and doesn't let you go till the very end. From the first sentence Butler's simple, straightforward ordinary writing moves the story quickly making it hard for the reader to stop reading it.

The story is about Dana a black woman living in Los Angeles in 1976, is transported to 1815 to save the life of a small, red-haired boy on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It turns out this small boy, Rufus, is one of her slaveowning white ancestors, who she knows very little about. Dana continues to be called to save Rufus, and frequently stays long periods of time in the slaveowning South. The only way that she can get back to 1976 is to be in a life-threatening situation. During her stays in the past she is forced to assume the role of a slave to survive. She is whipped, beaten, and she is nearly raped, twice. She is forced to watch whippings and families being broken up. She learns to enjoy hard work as an escape from the other horrors of slave life. 5She watches the small son of a plantation owner grows up to be a cruel, capricious, hot-tempered slave owner in his own right and to be her great-grandfather many generations to come. Kindred is about slavery and the scars it has inflicted on American society. There are really three key factors that Octavia Butler focuses on that reveal the ability of the South to institutionalize slavery. First, are the physical abuse and the constant work, especially the physically exhausting work of a field hand, kept slaves too tired to run or become insolent. Being ever on the edge of a lash

or two for minor offenses kept slaves working to avoid punishment. Being beaten nearly to death after escape attempts made a slave reluctant to try again, especially if this is coupled with the abuse of the slave's family. Second there is the psychological abuse. The continual threat of being beaten or watching others be beaten broke the spirits of those in servitude. The worst punishment she had to watch a family member abused for your violating a rule, encouraging slaves to marry and have children also kill their desire to escape. Families made a slave settle down, gave him or her something to protect and care for.

6The selling off of a few family members had a damping effect on a slave's spirit. The most distressing example is the slave Sarah the primary house slave. She rarely questioned slavery, thought little of freedom, because " she had lost all she could stand to lose". The risk of losing the one daughter she had left was too big. Slaves that escaped had to be willing to risk not only their own life but also possibly the lives of their family.

The physical and psychological abuse imposed on the slave made it so much easier to accept one's lot in life and avoid the unpleasantness that revolt entailed. The ease with which Dana falls into the routines of everyday life as a slave shocks her. Work is a refuge from the other toils of slave life and the patterns become the norm. There is even an unclear feeling toward the slaveowners. Slaveowners are hated for the physical and psychological abuse imposed on the slave. But at the same time the slave loved the owner in a familial sense, even though the slaveowner was little worthy of this. Thus slavery became for many the accepted norm of life, even if this acceptance was a tenuous and unhappy one at best. This acceptance was

<https://assignbuster.com/research-paper-on-octavia-butler/>

passed on from generation to generation. 7Dana at one point spies on children playing at selling each other on the auction block and haggling over price. Many times throughout history terror has been used to subdue a population and sap it of its strength. One only has to look at the Tsar's of Russia like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Stalin to realize the extent to which terror can be used to subjugate a people. The Southern aristocracy of the United States practiced a similar terror till 1864 and beyond.

There is historical evidence for the Butler's acting of slavery and its effects. Kindred is creative after the slave narratives are becoming more widely read today. Butler could have illustrated the beatings and physical abuse in more graphic detail to give a greater impact on the reader. Slavery even has its effects in 1976. The scars Dana brings back to 1976 are symbolic of the scars slavery has left on contemporary society. Some will heal with time and some would never heal. Others will scab over and be just below the surface, but they are all there. But in another sense healing has taken place. Dana is married to a white man, Kevin, who is transported to 1815 with her once. While there they both fall easily into the pattern or act of slaveowner and slave mistress, roles they must assume to survive. 8The ease with which they fall into these roles brings about a greater consciousness of their ethnicity. But through this relationship Butler leaves the reader with hope. Dana's love for Kevin is what really pulls her through the most agonizing terrors she faces and in the end gives her the strength to survive this horrible test.

Analysis of Criticism Carl Burris from Kings Mountain, NC 28086 Although I have several novels by Miss Butler in my library, this is the first one I have
<https://assignbuster.com/research-paper-on-octavia-butler/>

read. The ambivalence of the male protagonist, Rufus, was bewildering. If we are products of our environment, he surely was. He learned lessons well from his Daddy. The more Dana helped him, the crueler he became. The scenes where punishment was dealt out to the slaves were very realistic. The beatings especially could feel the sting of the whip as it was being wielded. The characters were well defined and the plot moved smoothly and the dialogue was crisp and to the point. The ending was inevitable, but the journey was worth the trip. (1)9Orrin Judd Hanover from NH, USA

emailprotected On going challenge11While being assigned to read one of many novels for my Honors English, freshman high school class, my friends and I chose ' Kindred.' As I began reading the book, I felt as though I had truly made the wrong decision, and the book was extremely not at all my type. As the second chapter arose, I was so into the book I couldn't for a second put it down. The intense struggles of a African American woman; Dana, being sent back in time to save her ancestor truly fascinated me. This is a wonderful book, and remember: Not only not to judge a book by it's cover, but also... don't take the first bite and consider it done. (3)Tamara from Toronto, OntarioCompulsively readable, yet unsatisfying October 31, 2000Despite the fact that the ideas and events in Kindred make it " unputdownable," the writing was a disappointment. I couldn't quite shake the feeling that I was reading a book targeted at a " young adult" readership — one that needs to be educated about American racial history. When Dana makes a comment about slave life then follows it up with " or so I read in my book," it comes across as contrived. 12Time travel wasn't used as anything except a plot device. It would have been nice to see some exploration of the reasons Dana gets called back to Rufus, other than the fact that he's always

in trouble. I realize that this is secondary to the plot, but if Dana exists in the future, Rufus must have been alive long enough to father her ancestor — without her help. I had a little trouble getting past that. I found the changes in Rufus interesting and believable — he grows from a likeable little boy, into the ruthless, self-involved man he has to be in order to continue living as a slave owner. It would have been great if there had been more detail about Kevin's experiences in the five years he was stuck in the past. It would be interesting to compare how the two white men dealt with their race and their relationship with black people. (4)As you can see most of the critics of Octavia Butlers Books like her writing but some are always wanting more for example Tamara from Toronto, Ontario. Tamara says that the book was readable but yet unsatisfying and one of the reasons why was that the book itself was simple and it was more for a young adult audience. As I looked through amazon. com and bn. com I saw that most of the reviews for Miss Butlers books were very good. Octavia Butler has brings up a great dispute about what her shortstory, " Bloodchild," is really about. Some critics say that the short story is about slavery but others say that the story is about love. (5)Influences on SocietyMiss Octavia Butler has a big influence on society. She brings all of these fiction stories and makes the critics wonder. Her books cause disputes between whether they are love or slavery related. I think slavery is a big topic in todays society, not slavery but what had happened in the past with discrimination and slavery. Most of Miss Butlers books are targeted towards the young adult audiences and this should be a reason for us to go and grab one her books and give our own opinion whether she is talking about slavery or love in her book BLOODCHILD. One of the biggest effect Octavia has on society I think is the way she thinks and

writes fictions for example the book blood child is about a family of humans and the dominator of this supposed family, a female alien Tlic. Supposedly in the story human race comes to an end due to a nuclear war and the remaining humans on earth are captured by aliens and taken to another planet. The funny thing is that in order for those aliens to reproduce they need humans to plant their eggs and feed off of them.

I think this is a very creative and controversial story and how this has an effect on society in a way that it might influence someone to be creative as her and come up with stories, themes, art and creative ideas to help human civilization. Today in human civilization there is a lot of hate and discrimination and I think she might help influence society by bringing us human beings to collaborate with each other and share ideas or just thoughts as she does in her books.

Footnotes

1. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0807083054/customer-reviews/2/104-8249468-8516748?show=-submittime>
2. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0807083054/customer-reviews/1/104-8249468-8516748?show=-submittime>
3. <http://shop.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbninquiry.asp?userid=1E7ST5K6K5;mscssid=EGWXS1GJHM369NB13VC9XK8X9C7H43GD;isbn=0807083054;displayOnly=creviews>
4. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0807083054/customer-reviews/1/104-8249468-8516748?show=-submittime>

16Bibliography

Beal, Frances M. "Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre: Interview with Octavia Butler." *Black Scholar*. 1986 Mar.-Apr., 17: 2. 14-18.

Butler, Octavia E. "Bloodchild." *Bloodchild and Other Stories*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996. 1-32. Kenan, Randall. "An Interview with Octavia Butler." *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American Arts and Letters*. Baltimore, MD (Callaloo). 1991 Spring, 14: 2. 495-504. A BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH OCTAVIA E. BUTLER <http://www.plcmc.lib.nc.us/novello/1999/listen/obutler.htm> ESSAY ON OCTAVIA BUTLER <http://www.towanda.com/sela/essay.htm> Octavia Butlers Xenogenesis Trilogy: A Biologists Response by Joan Slonczewski, presented at SFRA, Cleveland, June 30, 2000 <http://www2.kenyon.edu/depts/biology/slonc/books/butler1.html> Xenogeneis Patterns of Octavia Butler http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/butler/butler_octavia0.html Voices from the Gaps Woman Writers of Color <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/OctaviaButler.html> Octavia E Butler works and more. http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/Octavia_E_Butler.htm Online Literary Criticism Collection Octavia E. Butler <http://ipl.sils.umich.edu/cgi-bin/ref/litcrit/litcrit.out.pl?au=but-61617>