



4-1-2001

Kingdom Come

Carol Miles
carolmmiles@hotmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Miles, Carol (2001) "Kingdom Come," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.05.01.10>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol5/iss1/10>

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Kingdom Come

Abstract

This is a review of *Kingdom Come* (2001).

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In this modern day dramedy set in the small town of Lula, the Slocumb family is preparing to bury Bud, the family figurehead. Bud, physically present for his family through the years, has led an otherwise unremarkable life. His death occurs within minutes of the onset of the film and we are never shown any flashbacks of him when he was living. Technically, he could be called the patriarch, but this family is clearly matriarchal. Raynelle (Whoopi Goldberg) is the glue that holds things together. Hers is the quiet and enduring strength. Her relationship with Bud took a dramatic turn two decades earlier when she "got saved," while Bud wanted no part of her new found faith. Raynelle recalls that he cursed her, though we are never offered an explanation for his anti-religious sentiment. In an attempt to persuade Bud of the "danger" to his everlasting soul, Raynelle "cut him off." Except for a one-night encounter, which resulted in daughter Delightful being conceived, theirs has been a platonic relationship. When Rev. Hooker (Cedric the Entertainer) asks for remembrances to include in the eulogy, the best, or in this case the most truthful thing that Raynelle can say of Bud is that he was "mean and surly."

As the news of Bud's death spreads, the family gathers to make arrangements for the funeral. The Slocumbs include Ray Bud (L.L. Cool J), the dutiful son and a recovering alcoholic, and Junior (Anthony Anderson), a ne'er do well with big dreams and half-baked schemes. Ray Bud is married to Lucille (Vivica A. Fox). Lucille is a sweet and gentle soul. She is also a broken woman

who finds comfort in fixing things for others. Junior's wife, on the other hand, Charisse (Jada Pinkett), is an attention-starved shrew wired for sound.

Once the family is assembled, secrets come to light, fears are revealed, relationships are tested and Bud still has to be buried. The family is far from perfect, but they are family.

Kingdom Come is a hit and miss production. Anyone who has experienced a traditional southern African-American funeral knows these occasions are events. They are part last rites for the deceased, part family reunion for the living and a smorgasbord for everyone else in attendance. The movie is at its best in allowing the cultural nuances to come through. The family is African-Methodist and everything from the music to the religious iconography to their style of dress reflects their ethnicity. Theirs is the personal and relational Christianity so richly steeped in the African-American tradition. In the midst of the pain and the struggle, Raynelle helps her son Ray Bud to understand that the healing begins when we allow the little window to open up inside of us. In spite of some overt typecasting, each character is a flawed, but likeable human being struggling to resolve some inner conflict.

The film misses in portraying the Slocumbs as a sort of black Everyfamily. The real dysfunctions of poverty, unemployment, limited economic opportunities,

substance abuse and incarceration, all of which plague them, are barely mentioned and seem normative. Instead, our attention is diverted to quirky personalities, antics and bodily noises.

By the end of the film, we have a sense that things are going to be looking up for the Slocumb Family. The fairy tale ending is crammed into the last few minutes of the film, occurring just as the family says farewell to Bud. Changes are on the horizon and we are assured that the circle of life continues. A series of still shots, a family album of sorts, serves to show us a new and brighter future for everyone. Hence, thy will is done.

Kingdom Come is a mildly entertaining movie. Hollywood does not take many chances on films that reflect aspects of African-American family life. This film is at least a step.