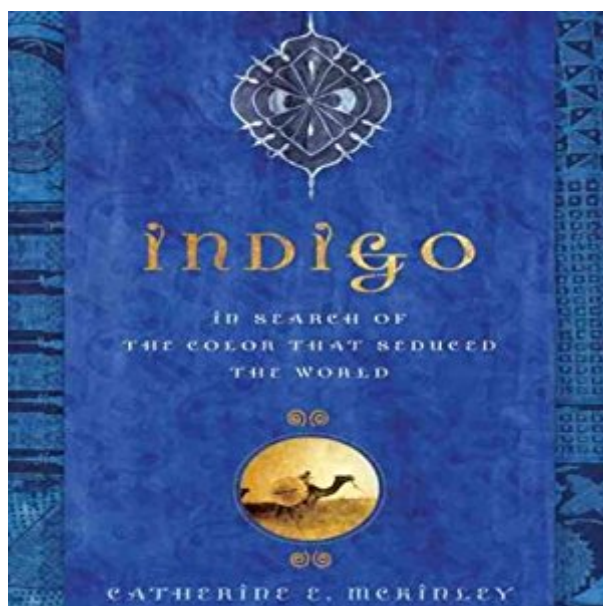


The book was found

Indigo: In Search Of The Color That Seduced The World



Synopsis

Brimming with rich, electrifying tales of the precious dye and its ancient heritage, Indigo is also the story of a personal quest: Catherine McKinley is the descendant of a clan of Scots who wore indigo tartan; Jewish "rag traders"; a Massachusetts textile factory owner; and African slaves - her ancestors were traded along the same Saharan routes as indigo, where a length of blue cotton could purchase human life. McKinley's journey in search of beauty and her own history leads her to the West African women who dye, trade, and wear indigo - women who unwittingly teach her that buried deep in the folds of their cloths is all of destiny and the human story.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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Customer Reviews

I received this book via the Vine program. It's the no-frills, pre-published edition complete with typos and inexpensive binding. My understanding is the final edition has a map or two + some lovely photos to accompany the story. I certainly could have used both but honestly, this book was so good I didn't really care. McKinley has taken what might have been a rather dull, dry topic and turned it into something incredibly compelling. However the title of the book is misleading and my sense is perhaps the publisher wasn't really sure how best to categorize it. This isn't just a history of indigo...it's also a seamless series of travel essays, a memoir, a social, political, and cultural commentary, and lastly -- an unflinching homage to Africa and art. The writing is eloquent and poetic, the descriptions vivid...an excellent reminder of what good writing looks like. McKinley is incredibly respectful of her subject matter without coming across as stiff...she treats people and places with a quiet dignity and a gentle sense of humor. And she doesn't flinch from depicting the

harsh realities of life in Gold Coast Africa, especially for women and children. I've never been to Africa...and, for the most part, I've never had a burning desire to go. But McKinley has sparked an interest in me, a desire to see for myself some of the things she brought to life in the pages of her book. Even though her primary focus was the Gold Coast areas (with a beautiful glimpse into the Tuareg culture of North Africa) she did an excellent job of giving me a sense of the sheer enormity of the continent and the seemingly rich, infinite sub-strata of languages and cultures that it holds. And the clothes! As someone who's wardrobe consists of black, white, and brown...

Just to be perfectly clear, Catherine McKinley's *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World* is only tangentially about indigo. It's a memoir about the author's quest for the elusive blue fabric and her own identity -- both in Africa and America. If you're looking for a natural history of the indigofera plant, or a comprehensive history of indigo from its earliest uses in the Old World, the brief Wiki page is actually more helpful. McKinley mentions that during wilderness hikes with her parents, she always felt something missing -- the human connection. And that's exactly what you'll find in *Indigo*: lots of interesting characters, from McKinley's cheerful Ghanaian friend Eurama, to an Ivory Coast potter, to the *tokosi*, women held in a particularly disturbing form of ritual servitude. Many of the episodes are fascinating in their own right, like the traditional Ghanaian funeral that occupies a good chunk of the book, but are only loosely related to indigo. This is a bit frustrating if you were expecting a book about, well, indigo. The memoir is organized (mostly) chronologically, based on McKinley's trip to Africa on a Fulbright grant. What information there is about indigo crops up somewhat haphazardly, with some disorienting jumps in time and lots of digressions as McKinley's attempts to locate genuine indigo are frustrated. (By the time she visits Africa, indigo has been almost entirely replaced by synthetic dyes and imported prints, so she spends most of the book on its disappearing trail.) Once you accept the idea that *Indigo* isn't really about indigo, it's an interesting enough travelogue through a part of the world I will probably never visit. McKinley has a nice ear for dialogue and brings the people she meets to life.

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