



Major American Authors: Zora Neale Hurston, “Genius of the South”

This course is an intensive study of a single author, designed to focus on major themes in American Literature as reflected in the work of a single author’s entire (mostly) canon.

Zora Neale Hurston, 1891-1960, was a major Harlem Renaissance writer who was virtually forgotten until 1975 when writer Alice Walker helped inspire a revival of interest in her work. Today, she is found on virtually every “survey” of American Literature course syllabus. She was a folklorist, novelist, dramatist. She wrote with dialect and without. She projected herself as a character of great flair but was accused in later life of pedophilia (charges dropped) and “working

hoodoo” against an estranged husband (charges ambiguous.) From the darling of high society to housekeeper buried in an unmarked grave to canonical major figure (featured on the Barnes & Noble wall mural!). We will track her major works, including her (somewhat fictionalized) memoir, a wonderful collection of audio files she created as part of her folklore collection for the WPA, and explore what her inclusion on the canon of American Literature means.

Themes we will explore are the Harlem Renaissance, folklore and literature, memoir vs. fiction, gender and African-American writing, mythic patterns of the African American novel.

Grading:

Annotated Bibliography & Proposal 10%

Critical Essay: 30%

In-class report of critical article with handout: 20%

Daily Reading Journals: 20%

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Final Week Oral Reports: 10%

Final Project: Original Research Project, Critical Essay

Your final assignment for this class will be an essay on your research for the semester. The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to produce a potentially publishable essay reporting on research that you have conducted this semester. Use the essays in the Gates and Appiah collection as models. The final paper should be at least 15 pages in length (double-spaced, typewritten, 1" margins, 12-point font, and documented using the 6th edition of the *MLA Guide*). The draft of this paper must include a recognizable beginning, middle, and end; be proofread carefully; and be at least 12 pages in length.

Daily Reports:

A one-page summary of a scholarly article or book chapter is due each day. Sign up for your report in the first class meeting. You should bring a print copy AND post your summary on

your Blog. You should have a handout for each member of the class summarizing the main points of the article/chapter you read/report.

Required Texts

Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934)

Mules and Men (1935)

Tell My Horse (1937)

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing...and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader (edited by Alice Walker; introduction by Mary Helen Washington) (1979)

The Complete Stories (introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Sieglinde Lemke) (1995)

The complete collection of sound recordings by Hurston:

http://www.floridamemory.com/Collections/folklife/sound_hurston.cfm#

Reading Schedule

Week One: Readings from *The Complete Stories*

Week Two: *Complete Stories*, cont.

Week Three: *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*, pp. 1-152

Week Four: *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*, pp. 152-end

Week Five: *Mules and Men*

Week Six: *Tell My Horse*

Week Seven; *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

Week Eight: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Week Nine: watching movie version of *Their Eyes*

Week Ten: Sound Recordings, website

Week Eleven: final selected readings from *Complete Stories*, TBA

Week Twelve: Student reports

Please note the following website link, which has a particularly helpful section on Hurston:

http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/hurston_zora_neale.html

Daily student critical reading reports will come from the following texts. See me to sign up for your selection. Each student will give a review of one of these texts in class, presenting the major argument. Handout required.

Selected Critical Texts:

Abcarian, Richard and Marvin Klotz. "Zora Neale Hurston." *In Literature: The Human Experience*, 9th edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006: 1562-3.

Baym, Nina (ed.) "Zora Neale Hurston." In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 6th edition, Vol. D. New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 2003: 1506-1507.

Beito, David T. "Zora Neale Hurston," *American Enterprise* (6 September/October 1995), 61-3.

Boyd, Valerie. "Zora Neale Hurston: The Howard University Years." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 39 (Spring, 2003), 104-108.

Croft, Robert W. *A Zora Neale Hurston Companion*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida. 2002.

ESPECIALLY HELPFUL: Davis, Rose Parker. *Zora Neale Hurston: An Annotated Bibliography and Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997.

Duck, Anne Leigh. "'Rebirth of a Nation': Hurston in Haiti." *Journal of American Folklore* 117: 464, 127-46

Grant, A.J. and Connie Ruzich. "A Rhetoric of Roads: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as Pastoral." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 5:2, 16-28.

Harris-Lopez, Trudier. *The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996.

Hemenway, Robert E. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1977. ISBN 0-252-00807-3.

Kaplan, Carla. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*. New York: Doubleday.

King Lovalerie. "African American Womanism: From Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker." Ed. Maryemma Graham. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 233-52.

Kraut, Anthea, "Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham," *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003): 433-50.

Lamothe, Daphne. "Vodou Imagery, African-American tradition and Cultural Transformation in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters* 22:1, 157- 75.

Lowe, John. "Zora Neale Hurston." Ed. Carolyn Perry, Mary Louise Weaks, and Doris Betts. *The History of Southern Women's Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 379-85.

Menefee, Samuel Pyeatt, "Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)." In *Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists* Hilda Ellis Davidson and Carmen Blacker (eds.). Durham, NC, Carolina Academic Press, 2000: 157-72.

Powers, Peter Kerry. "Gods of Physical Violence, Stopping at Nothing: Masculinity, Religion, and Art in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston." *Religion and American Culture* 12:2, 229-47.

Roberts, Brian R. "Predators in the 'Glades: A Signifying Animal Tale in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South* 41:1, 39-50.

Schroeder, Patricia. "Rootwork: Arthur Flowers, Zora Neale Hurston, and the 'Literary Hoodoo' Tradition." *African American Review* 36:2, 263-72.

Visweswaran, Kamala, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. ISBN 0-8166-2336-8

Walker, Alice. "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston", *Ms. Magazine*, (March 1975): 74-79, 84-89.

West, M. Genevieve. *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture* Gainesville: U of Florida Press.