Biography of Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston, novelist, playwright, poet and anthropologist, was born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, the fifth of eight children. Her parents were John Hurston, a carpenter and Baptist minister, and Lucy Ann Hurston, a schoolteacher. At the age of three, the Hurston family moved to Eatonville, Florida, an all-African American community located north of Orlando. In 1904, Hurston's mother passed away, and her father subsequently remarried. For the next several years, due to problems with her father and his new wife, Zora led an itinerant life, moving from relative to relative, and then working as a domestic, and next as a wardrobe girl with a Gilbert and Sullivan repertory company. Because of the family issues, Zora had little educational opportunities until she enrolled in Morgan Academy (now Morgan State University) in Baltimore, Maryland. She followed that in 1918 by enrolling at Howard University in Washington, DC, attending the college preparatory program until 1919 and taking university courses off-and-on until 1924.

By January 1925, Hurston lived in New York City, where she began her literary career. This was the time of the Harlem Renaissance, when black artists began to “explore black culture and express pride in their race.” In addition, she combined her studies in anthropology with her writing career. She transferred to Barnard College in New York City, where she was offered a scholarship in anthropology and subsequently earned her B.A. in 1928.

While at Barnard College, Zora came to the attention of and received tutelage from the renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, who was teaching at Columbia University. She conducted field research (1927–1932) in the American South thanks to a fellowship from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, collecting folklore and interviewing a former slave. As result of this work, she published an article, “Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaves” (1927). Unfortunately, in the early 1970s, this article proved to be plagiarized from a previous work by another author.

Hurston received additional fellowships, including a Rosenwald Fellowship in 1934 and a Guggenheim Fellowship for the period 1935–36 that resulted in what some say was “her most fruitful anthropological field research which produced her finest literature.” In 1934, she published her first novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine: A Novel, followed in 1935 by Mules and Men. From 1936 to 1938, Hurston studied in Jamaica and Haiti on another Guggenheim Fellowship. This activity resulted in the book Tell My Horse, which came out in 1938.
Hurston wrote several other books, including the novels *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) and *Seraph on the Suwanee*, and her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942).

In addition to writing novels, articles and her autobiography, Hurston also wrote musical revues; created a concert program of African American art with Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida; worked with the WPA Federal Theater Project; taught drama at the North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham, North Carolina, now North Carolina Central University; taught part-time at Florida Normal in San Augustine, Florida, later becoming Florida Memorial University; worked as a maid, then as a librarian at Patrick Air Force Base; took a job as a reporter for the *Fort Pierce Chronicle*; and was a substitute teacher at Lincoln Park Academy, the black public school in Fort Pierce.

Poor health plagued Zora the last months of her life. She suffered a stroke in late October 1959, and then died of hypertensive heart disease on January 28, 1960, while living in the Saint Lucie County Welfare Home.

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**Selected Books by Zora Neale Hurston**

*Jonah’s Gourd Vine: A Novel* (1934)
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789J66 1990

*Mules and Men* (1935)
Doheny Memorial Library: GR111.A47H86 2008
Leavey Library: GR111.A47H86 2008

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789T5 2000

*Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939)
Doheny Memorial Library: PS3515.U789M6

*Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942)

*Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948)
Doheny Memorial Library: PS3515.U789S4

*I Love Myself When I Am Laughing...And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (1979)
Edited by Alice Walker
Doheny Memorial Library: PS3515.U789I2 1979

**Selected Books about Zora Neale Hurston**

*New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Edited by Michael Awkward
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789T636 1990

*Zora Neale Hurston*
By Harold Bloom
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789Z96 2008

*Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*
Edited by Gloria L. Cronin

*Zora Neale Hurston: An Annotated Bibliography and Reference Guide*
Edited by Rose Parkman Davis
Special Collections: Z8428.66.D38 1997

*Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*
Edited by Henry Louis Gates and K.A. Appiah
Doheny Memorial Library: PS3515.U789Z96 1993
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789Z96 1993

*The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston*
By Karla F. C. Holloway
Leavey Library: PS3515.U789Z72 1987

*The Assertive Woman in Zora Neale Hurston’s Fiction, Folklore, and Drama*
By Pearlie Mae Fisher Peters