published work, lecture notes, and various magazine and newspaper clippings and pamphlets. Additional materials are in the Schomburg Collection of the New York Public Library, the library of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and the Fisk University library.

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Zora Neale Hurston

Lillie P. Howard
Wright State University

BIRTH: Eatonville, Florida, 7 January 1891, to Lucy Ann Potts and John Hurston.

EDUCATION: Howard University, 1919-1924; B.A., Barnard College, 1928; Columbia University, 1934-1935.

MARRIAGES: 19 May 1927 to Herbert Sheen (divorced); 27 June 1939 to Albert Price III (divorced).

AWARDS AND HONORS: Guggenheim Fellowships, 1936 and 1938; Litt.D., Morgan State College, 1939; Anisfield-Wolf Award for Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942.


From the 1930s through the 1960s, Zora Neale Hurston was the most prolific and accomplished black woman writer in America. During that thirty-year period she published seven books, numerous short stories, magazine articles, and plays, and she also gained a reputation as an outstanding folklorist and novelist. She called attention to herself because she insisted upon being herself when blacks were being urged to assimilate in an effort to promote better relations between the races. Hurston, however, saw nothing wrong with being black: “I do not belong to that sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal.” Indeed she felt there was something so special about her blackness that others could benefit just by being around her. Her works, then, may be seen as manifestos of selfhood, as affirmations of blackness and the positive sides of black life. For many of her readers, black and white, they reveal life’s possibilities. She had gotten glimpses of those possibilities back in her native Eatonville.
She was born on 7 January in Eatonville, Florida, to John Hurston and Lucy Ann Potts Hurston. She kept the exact year of her birth such a secret that it was only recently that a conclusive date, 1891, was uncovered. In her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), she claims that one morning, she “just rushed out herself,” the umbilical cord being cut by a passerby. She was the fifth of eight children. Her mother was a former country schoolteacher, her father a wayfaring carpenter, Baptist preacher, mulatto from “over the creek” in Alabama. The all-black, incorporated, self-governing town of Eatonville fostered and nurtured the strong, unshakable sense of self that was later to inform Hurston’s fiction and govern her life. Lucy Ann Hurston died when Zora was thirteen, and it is this fact more than any other that disrupted Hurston’s schooling and her life. She was passed around from relative to relative, rejected by her father and his new wife, and forced to fend for herself. She took a number of odd jobs to make ends meet and attended school only intermittently. In June 1918 she graduated from Morgan Academy, the high school division of what is now Morgan State University. In the fall of 1918 she entered Howard University, attending Howard’s college preparatory program in 1918-1919 and taking university courses intermittently until 1924. At Howard she met and studied under poet Georgia Douglas Johnson and the young philosophy professor Alain Locke. She also met Herbert Sheen, who, on 19 May 1927, became her first husband. As Sheen later told Hurston’s biographer, Robert Hemenway, the marriage was doomed “to an early, amicable divorce” because Hurston’s career was her first priority.

Hurston had been extremely imaginative and curious as a child; these qualities inform her fiction. She records in her autobiography that as a child “I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. . . . It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like.” This tendency toward the picaresque colors her work. Her main characters are dreamers who long for experience and spiritual freedom and want to break with the fixity of things. Hurston’s first short story, “John Redding Goes to Sea” (May 1921), was written in this picaresque tradition and was published in Stylus, the official magazine of the literary club at Howard University. The protagonist of “John Redding Goes to Sea” cannot “stifle that longing for the open road, rolling seas, for peoples and countries I have never seen.” The story brought the young author to the attention of sociologist Charles S. Johnson, and by January 1925 Hurston was in New York City with “$1.50, no job, no friends, and a lot of hope.”

She could not have arrived in New York at a more opportune time. The Harlem Renaissance, the black literary and cultural movement of the 1920s, was already under way. Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and W. E. B. Du Bois were already in New York. Other black writers from all over—Claude McKay from Jamaica, Eric Walrond from Barbados, Langston Hughes from Kansas, Wallace Thurman from Salt Lake City, Jean Toomer and Sterling Brown from Washington, D.C., Rudolph Fisher from Rhode Island—were flocking to New York, as Hughes so aptly put it, to “express their individual dark-skinned selves.” Charles S. Johnson was just founding Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, and he was interested in material that exemplified New Negro (the phrase coined by Alain Locke) philosophy. Hurston’s works celebrated blackness, and she became an en-
thusiastic contributor to the New Negro Renaissance literary movement. The short story “Spunk” was published in Opportunity in June 1925 and in Locke’s landmark publication The New Negro (1925). Hurston’s play Color Struck was later reworked and published in the one-issue periodical Fire!! (1926). Hurston had made a propitious beginning, but many frustrating years were to pass before she would publish a full-length work.

At an awards dinner sponsored by Opportunity, Hurston’s works won second prizes, but, more important, Hurston herself was introduced to two people: novelist Fannie Hurst (Imitation of Life, 1933), who gave Hurston a job, and Annie Nathan Meyer, who arranged for her to receive a scholarship to Barnard College. Between 1925 and 1933 Hurston saw several of her works published, including “John Redding” and the tale “Mutsy,” which appeared in Opportunity; The First One, a play collected in Charles Johnson’s Ebony and Topaz: A Collectanea (1927); and “The Gilded Six-Bits” in Story (1933).

Near the end of her studies at Barnard, Hurston came to the attention of anthropologist Franz Boas, who was then teaching at Columbia. Impressed by a term paper Hurston had written, Boas decided to make an anthropologist of her. Under Boas’s tutelage, Hurston learned the value of the material she had already incorporated into her fiction. She learned to view the good old lies and racy, sidesplitting anecdotes that were being passed around among black folk every day in her native Eatonville as invaluable folklore, creative material that continued the African oral tradition and reflected the ebb and flow of a people. Encouraged by Boas and a $1,400 fellowship from the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, Hurston decided to collect some of this Afro-American lore, to record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, and games.

Unfortunately her southern, country subjects balked at her “Barnard” accent, and her mission failed. As she says in her autobiography: “When I went about asking, in carefully-accented Barnardese, ‘Pardon me, do you know any folktales or folk-songs?’ the men and women who had whole treasuries of material seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads. No, they had never heard of anything like that around here. Maybe it was over in the next county. Why didn’t I try over there?” As a result, Hurston was not able to collect enough material “to make a flea a waltzing jacket.” She was not to make the attempt again until she accepted the patronage of Charlotte Osgood Mason.

Mason was a wealthy, white Park Avenue matron who supported Indian and Afro-American arts and any other endeavors which she felt exemplified “primitivisms.” Hurston was probably introduced to Mason by Alain Locke, who seems to have functioned as Mason’s emissary to black artists. When Hurston met Mason in September 1927, Mason was already the patron of Langston Hughes, Miquel Covarrubias, Louise Thompson, and Richmond Barthe. To them and to Hurston, Mason became a beneficent godmother and a surrogate parent, wielding her strong wand over them, prescribing and proscribing the courses of their lives. She was impressed by Hurston’s credentials, and on 1 December 1927 she drew up a formal contract which would allow Hurston to return to the South to collect folklore. The contract promised a monthly stipend of $200, a moving picture camera, and one Ford automobile. Hurston was “faithfully” to perform her task: and “to return to Mason and to Mason all of said information, data, transcripts of music, etc., which she shall have obtained.” Though this opportunity was what Hurston needed, its accompanying restrictions were not. Hurston felt like a child laboring under a difficult taskmaster.

Though between 1927 and 1931 Hurston collected mounds of material from small communities in Alabama and Florida, for several years she was unable to get any of it published. With Mason’s approval, she was able to feature some of it in musical revues. The bulk of it, however, remained unpublished, even after the 1931 severing of the Mason-Hurston contract (Mason continued to offer intermittent support even after the contract ended).

Hurston had gone to New York expecting to fulfill her dreams. As the correspondence between Hurston and Mason in the Alain Locke Collection at Howard University shows, however, Hurston’s dreams were bitterly deferred. She was desperately trying to prove herself to Mason and to herself, and she was beginning to doubt her abilities as a writer. Feeling herself an albatross around Mason’s neck, she began to consider other sources of livelihood. In one letter, she proposed opening a chicken specialty business as a way of easing the financial burden she had become to Mason. In another, she wrote: “I want to remain in your love, but I shall take nothing further from you in a material way. I shall feel that perhaps someone with a greater gift deserves your help more than I . . . I feel justified in accepting from you only if you
Dear Friend,

I have been practicing your physiology. I am feeling on fire. I am very grateful.

I suppose that "fire" has gone to ashes better management. I see all! Don't you think we ought to be a purely literary magazine in our group? The way I look at it, "The Crisis" is the house organ. William and "Opportunity" is the same name as it were. My belief is an excellent man and I feel he can do great work in the hands with no fire. I am not with you in Philosophy is less confining than Hughes. Hurston do something with your time? Besides I am certain that you are behind groups with think of me.

Prof. Adam tells me that he was with you and Masam in N. Africa. I wonder if he could get a chance to teach in the Washington High School? I wanted to suggest to him, but I thought that might be some harm to your face and I wanted to avoid it. Is it feasible? I think he wants to establish himself financially this fall somewhere.

Letter to Alain Locke (courtesy of the Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University)
are fostering ability. If I am convinced that I have nothing the world wants then you are too high for my mediocrity to weigh down."

Fortunately Hurston's musical revues received good notices; unfortunately, they generated little money. Still, there was one flattering response to one of these revues, *The Great Day*; "George Antheil, the French composer, paid me the compliment of saying I would be the most stolen-from Negro in the world for the next ten years at least. He said that this sort of thievery is unavoidable. Unpleasant, of course, but at the bottom a tribute to one's originality." *The Great Day*, which was first performed at the John Golden Theatre on 10 January 1932, was, like her other musical revues (staged between 1931 and 1935), Hurston's attempt to bring pure black folk culture to both northern and southern audiences. What she had not yet been able to publish, she was able to present on stage with authentic folk characters. Much of the basis for the script of *The Great Day* may be found in Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935).

By 6 January 1932 Hurston was working with the Creative Literature Department of Rollins College at Winter Park, Florida, in an effort to produce a concert program of Negro art. Though she produced a successful program, her personal problems only increased. She was intermittently ill, plagued by a painful stomach ailment which was to trouble her until her death. She wrote to Mason that she had "little food, no toothpaste, no stockings, needed shoes badly, no soap." Apparently little had changed for Hurston since her penurious arrival in New York seven years earlier.

She returned to New York only to have Locke, in his role as Mason's emissary, suggest that she return south to find work. She returned to Eatonville where the pastoral atmosphere worked wonders, and Hurston was soon feeling "renewed like the eagle." She found time to compose a play, "Mule Bone," with Langston Hughes, but a rift developed after Hurston tried to have the comedy staged before Hughes had completed his work on it. Meantime, Hurston's contact with George Antheil was paying off. In the fall of 1931 Antheil, now acting as the amanuensis of Nancy Cunard, asked Hurston to contribute some folklore essays for Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology—1931-1933* (1934). Hurston complied with six essays: "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "Conversions and Visions," "The Sermon," "Mother Catherine," "Uncle Monday," and "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals." All six were subsequently published in the anthology.

Hurston was happy about these publications, but she still had not published a book. She had submitted her "story book"—her cache from her folklore-collecting days—to various publishers but none had been interested enough to publish it. She had to publish a short story, "The Gilded Six-Bits," and her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), before the "story book" would get a serious reading.

"The Gilded Six-Bits" is the best short story in the Hurston canon and it is the one most frequently anthologized today. It has more depth than the other stories, its characters are more developed, and its dialect has much of the texture apparent in the novels. Like most of Hurston's works, it explores the marriage relationship and its attendant difficulties. The marriage between Missie and Joe Banks epitomizes the pastoral and all that is right with a simple, country, edenic existence. It is threatened, however, by a city slicker who seems to have realized everyone's dreams and who snares Missie Banks with his "gold." The Bankses survive this invasion of their small paradise and reconcile themselves to their humble surroundings. They now know that the promises of the city and of the open road are often gilded and that, for the fulfillment of their dreams, they must fall back upon themselves.

When "The Gilded Six-Bits" appeared in *Story* in 1933, Hurston's fate was already decided. Bertram Lippincott of Lippincott publishers had read the story in manuscript and had written to know if Hurston was writing a novel. She was not but said that she was, moved from Eatonville to Sanford, Florida, and sat down to write "Big Nigger," published as *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934). Hurston claims in *Dust Tracks* that the notion for *Jonah's Gourd Vine* had been in her head since 1929 but "the idea of attempting a book seemed so big, that I gazed at it in the quiet of the night, but hid it away from even myself in daylight." For one of the few times in her life, she was afraid to strike out on her own. She wanted to tell a story about "a man," but "Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem." Fortunately, she wrote her story, and the novel was published the first week of May 1934. Lippincott was pleased with the novel and wrote to Carl Van Vechten, a mutual friend, that he felt the book "a really important contribution to the literature on the American Negro." The novel sold well and was even recommended by the Book-of-the-Month Club for May. Reviewers were impressed by the novel's rich language, "its compelling beauty and deep passion." Many of the reviewers, however, missed the essence of the story.
Jonah’s Gourd Vine is an impressive first novel. Set in various parts of Florida, the novel centers around John Buddy Pearson, a likable but exasperating character, modeled in part after Hurston’s own father. Though a Baptist minister, John all too frequently feels the temptations of life tugging at his sleeves. He spends his Sundays in the pulpit as a holy man, but he spends Mondays through Saturdays living the adulterous life of an ordinary one. Hurston wrote to James Weldon Johnson on 16 April 1934: “I see a preacher as a man outside of his pulpit and so far as I am concerned he should be free to follow his bent as other men. He becomes the voice of the spirit when he ascends the rostrum.” The plot turns on Pearson’s attempts to live this double life in a community where ministers are supposed to be above the common man and thus above reproach.

John does not understand the objections of his parishioners and refuses to live the life they prescribe for him. Through careful characterization, Hurston makes a strong case for Pearson. He is obviously the product of a philosophy which recognizes no difference between the material and spiritual realms. Larry Neal explained it best in his introduction to the 1971 reprint of the novel. What Hurston gives us in Jonah’s Gourd Vine, says Neal, are “two distinctly different cultural attitudes toward the concept of spirituality. The one springs from a formerly enslaved communal society, non-Christian in background where there is really no clear dichotomy between the world of spirit and the world of flesh. The other attitude is clearly more rigid, being a blend of Puritan concepts and the fire-and-brimstone imagery of the white evangelical tradition.” John’s problems, then, are caused by his inability to reconcile himself to the society in which he must live. The real tragedy, notes Nick Aaron Ford (The Contemporary Negro Novel, 1936), is that John never really discovers “the cultural dilemma that created his frustration. His rise to religious prominence and financial ease is but a millstone around his neck. He is held back by some unseen cord which seems to be tethered to his racial
heritage. Life crushes him almost to death, but he comes out of the mills with no greater insight into the deep mysteries which surround him."

Other critics have focused upon the inconsistent imagery of Jonah's gourd vine in the novel and Hurston's failure to produce a work whose parts all work together to produce a unified whole. In spite of these problems, however, the novel's theme is universal, its handling of it impressive. As Robert Hemenway remarks, "Although the sum may be less than the parts, the parts are remarkable indeed."

After *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, the "story book," called *Mules and Men*, appeared. Bertram Lippincott liked *Mules and Men* but thought it too short for publication. He wanted a $3.50 book, 180 pages more than the 65,000 words Hurston had submitted. To lengthen the book, Hurston added the "between stories conversation and business" and a condensed article on hoodoo she had written in 1931 for the *Journal of American Folklore*. The book was finally published in 1935.

As folklore, *Mules and Men* offers invaluable insight into a people and a way of life. As Boas explains in his foreword to the volume, "To the student of cultural history the material is valuable not only by giving the Negro's reaction to every day events, to his emotional life, his humor and passions, but it throws into relief also the peculiar amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life, with its strong African background in the West Indies, the importance of which diminishes with increasing distance from the south."

The last third of the book, in essence, the hoodoo article, has drawn considerable attention to Hurston. Here Hurston chronicles her many experiences with the hoodoo culture in New Orleans. In some cases she apprenticed herself to local hoodoo doctors and was able to learn a number of "spells" with which she later threatened her second husband. According to *Mules and Men* Hurston found the practice of hoodoo to be widespread, "burning with a flame in America with all the intensity of a suppressed religion."

Despite its undeniable value *Mules and Men* was not favorably reviewed by a number of critics, most of them black. Sterling Brown found the picture it presented "too pastoral, with only a bit of grumbling about hard work, or a few slave anecdotes that turn the tables on old master... *Mules and Men* should be more bitter, it would be nearer the total truth." Harold Preece, a white radical, attacked Hurston, saying, "When a Negro author describes her race with such a servile term as 'Mules and Men' critical members of the race must necessarily evaluate the author as a literary climber."

Hurston certainly wanted to succeed, but that she omitted the bitter tone of her black subjects from *Mules and Men* for this reason is by no means clear. It is probably nearer the truth to say that Hurston sought to capture the sometimes happy, affirmative side of black life, to show that the picture of blacks being "saturated with our sorrows" was a partial, if not a false one. As she explained in *Twentieth Century Authors*, "We talk about the race problem a great deal, but go on living and laughing and striving like everyone else."

Between novels Hurston traveled the country with her musical revues. She presented *From Sun to Sun* to audiences in Florida, *The Great Day* and *Singing Steel* to audiences in Chicago. After one of the performances in Chicago she was approached by representatives of the Julius Rosenwald Foundation who offered her a fellowship to pursue a doctorate in anthropology and folklore at Columbia University. Hurston initially accepted the fellowship but soon objected to the rigorous, partly "irrelevant" schedule she was required to follow. She bristled under the restrictions and soon took off for more congenial parts.

In the fall of 1935 she joined the WPA Federal Theater Project. While working with the Project, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to collect folklore in the West Indies. By 14 April 1936 she was in the Caribbean, collecting material for her second book of folklore, *Tell My Horse* (1938). She stopped in Haiti and Kingston, Jamaica, proposing to make an exhaustive study of Obeah (magic) practices. She did much more than study magic, however, for the romantic atmosphere of the islands triggered emotions that had been "dammed up in" her since she had left the United States. Back in America she had been romantically involved with a twenty-three-year-old college student who had been a member of the cast for *The Great Day*. As usual the callings of Hurston's career were stronger than those of her heart, and she had left the young man to continue to pursue what she considered her mission in life. Fortunately, she was able to transpose her emotions into great literature, releasing on paper, in just seven weeks, what was to become her best novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Lippincott liked the story, and the book was published on 18 September 1937.
of the period." It is that and much more. It is a tribute to self-assertion and black womanhood, the story of a young black woman in search of self and genuine happiness, of people rather than things, the story of a woman with her eyes on the horizon. The heroine, Janie Crawford, against her better judgment, lives conventionally for much of her life. When she finds no real satisfaction in that life, she strikes out, like Huckleberry Finn, and like Hurston herself, for the territory and the possibility of a better life beyond the horizon.

Janie Crawford wants "marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think." The limited, non-communicative alliances that she makes, however, desecrate this image. She sees herself as a pear tree in bloom, but she is around forty years old before she finds the right "dust-bearing bee." Before that, she marries two men who represent her grandmother's and society's ideas of success. Both husbands own or acquire property, are much older than Janie, and are conventional in their thinking, the second husband even going so far as to group women with "chilluns, and chickens, and cows," all helpless beings who need a man to think and do for them. The first marriage had been arranged by the well-meaning grandmother to provide some "protection" for Janie; the second had been Janie's own doing. Janie survives these marriages by retreating into herself. She discovers that "she had an inside and an outside and how not to mix them."

Janie realizes her "pear tree" dreams with the man who becomes her third husband. Although Vergile "Tea Cake" Woods is several years Janie's junior, he is more mature and wiser in the ways that count. Whereas Janie's other husbands had wanted to restrict Janie's participation in life, Tea Cake, a hedonist, encourages her to enjoy it to the fullest. There are no forbidden areas. The two give and take equally and, for Janie, arriving at the horizon seems imminent.

To Janie, Tea Cake is "a glance from God," the embodiment of the best life has to offer. She eagerly embraces her life with him, throwing off the shackles of womanhood and society. Though their marriage is shortened by Tea Cake's untimely death—Hurston, for reasons readers have yet to appreciate, has Janie shoot him after he is bitten by a rabid dog—Janie has lived a full life during the year and a half of the marriage. As she tells her best friend, Phoeby: "Ah been a delegate to de big 'ssociation of life. Yessuh! De Grand Lodge, de big convention of livin' is just where Ah been dis year and a half y'all ain't seen me." As she settles down to live through her memories, she has no regrets. She has seen the light—"If yuh kin see de light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de fight at all. Ah wuz fumblin' round and God opened de door."

The novel is a powerful affirmation of life, of physical and spiritual fulfillment. Its power is in its language, its vividly emotional, folksy, often heart-rending descriptions of the day-to-day yearnings of a woman who wanted more than a house and "respectability."

Their Eyes Were Watching God was followed by the publication of Tell My Horse (1938), the book based on Hurston's findings in the West Indies. For various reasons, it did not sell well. Less interesting than Mules and Men, it tried unsuccessfully to analyze the politics of the West Indies. It was not really the book Hurston had wanted to write. Frightened by some of the rituals she had observed, she had felt it wiser to write a book that would be "safe and acceptable" rather than honest.

Beginning in fall 1939, Hurston worked for a time as a drama instructor at North Carolina College for Negroes at Durham. While there, she met Paul Green, who was working in the drama department at Chapel Hill. The two discussed the possibility of writing a play together, but they never got beyond the discussion stage. Hurston was nevertheless hard at work. Not only had she found time to marry Albert Price III, a man at least fifteen years her junior, but she had also found time to write her third novel. Moses, Man of the Mountain was published in November 1939.

Moses, Man of the Mountain is an ambitious amalgam of fiction, folklore, religion, and comedy, all provocatively combined. Darwin Turner calls it Hurston's "most accomplished achievement in fiction," Robert Bone, a "brilliant allegory" in the picaresque tradition, and Robert Hemenway, "one of Hurston's two masterpieces of the late thirties," "one of the more interesting minor works in American literary history."

The book is a bold, problem-ridden reworking of the Moses legend. Hurston's Israelites appear to be American blacks, and Moses is a hoodoo man. The abundant humor these changes generate frequently clashes with the solemnity of the novel's subject. Hemenway was prompted to call the book a "noble failure," Locke, to call it "caricature instead of portraiture," and Ralph Ellison, to say that "for Negro fiction it did nothing." Hurston, writing to Edwin Grover, to whom she dedicated the book, admitted: "I have the feeling of disappointment about it. I don't think that I achieved all that I set out to do. I thought that in this book I would
achieve my ideal, but it seems that I have not yet reached it... It still doesn't say all that I want it to say." In spite of its problems, however, the novel is often compelling and deserves serious critical attention.

The winter of 1940-1941 found Hurston in New York contemplating what to write next. When her publisher suggested an autobiography, she at first balked at the idea—"it is too hard to reveal one's inner self, and still there is no use in writing that kind of book unless you do"—but soon settled in California with a rich friend, Katharine Mer- shon, to begin the book. From October 1941 to January 1942 she also found time to work as a story consultant at Paramount Studios. She revised the manuscript back in Florida, and Dust Tracks on a Road was published in late November 1942.

Unlike Moses, Man of the Mountain, the autobiography sold well and won the Anisfield-Wolf Award for its contribution to better race relations. Critics, however, found much to attack about the volume. Arna Bontemps concluded that "Miss Hurston deals very simply with the more serious aspects of Negro life in America—she ignores them," while others felt it perhaps the "best fiction she ever wrote."

Still, the book pleased many readers, for Hurston was deluged with requests for magazine articles. Soon her political views were appearing in American Mercury, Saturday Evening Post, Negro Digest, World Telegram, and Reader's Digest. Many of these essays, because of their controversial sentiments, caused friction within the black community. In the World Telegram article (1 February 1943), for instance, Hurston claimed that "the Jim Crow system works." Two years later, in a December 1945 Negro Digest article, she was "all for the repeal of every Jim Crow law in the nation here and now." Her black readers were understandably suspicious and confused. Hurston was able to repair some of the damage with the explanation she offered through an interview with the New York Amsterdam News: "A writer's material is controlled by publishers who think of the Negro as picturesque... There is an over-simplification of the Negro. He is either pictured by the conservatives as happy, picking his banjo, or by the so-called liberals as low, miserable, and crying. The Negro's life is neither of these. Rather, it is in-between and above and below these pictures."

When World War II began, Hurston was living in Saint Augustine, Florida, teaching part-time at Florida Norman, the local black college. Later she moved to Daytona Beach where she purchased Wanago, a houseboat, which allowed her to take scenic tours up and down the Halifax and Indian rivers. She read Marjorie Rawlings's Cross Creek (1942), which impressed her, and struck up a correspondence with the novelist. This relationship would later help to further Hurston's career.

Though Hurston continued to write novels, they were all rejected because they lacked the quality of her published works. No doubt the quality of these works suffered because she was "burning to write" another one, a story about "the 3000 years struggle of the Jewish Peoples for democracy and the rights of man." She eventually wrote this story under the title of "Herod the Great." The manuscript remains unpublished, however, a depressing part of the Hurston papers at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

Hurston's friendship with Rawlings resulted in Rawlings's publisher, Scribners, taking an interest in Hurston's work. By May 1947 Hurston had sold Scribners the option on a new novel, later called Seraph on the Suwanee, and had taken off for Honduras to write. The novel was published on 11 October 1948. Hurston's readers were in for a surprise: Seraph on the Suwanee was about white folks.

Set in various parts of Florida, Seraph on the Suwanee explores the psyche of Arvay Henson, a poor, neurotic white woman who feels that nothing good is ever going to happen to her because she does not deserve it. She must grow and learn to appreciate herself. The battle is an exasperatingly long one, for Arvay and for the reader, but Arvay emerges whole and with a positive sense of self. Hurston wrote to her editor that it was "very much by design" that the novel's characters are white and to Carl Van Vechten that "I have hopes of breaking that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people." She had always felt that people were people, all of whom reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Seraph on the Suwanee was her proof of that hypothesis.

Critics have found the novel confusing and have speculated that perhaps Hurston was joining the ranks of a new group of assimilationist writers—Willard Motley, Chester Himes, and Ann Petry. Since Hurston never published another novel, it is difficult to say where her interests were tending (although the manuscript for "Herod the Great" seems to indicate her subject matter was undergoing a broadening treatment). Seraph on the Suwanee sold well and good things seemed to be in the offing. Those things were not to be, however; the nadir of Hurston's life was just around the corner.
Dear Mr. Lippincott,

This is to notify you that I am within a week of finishing "Big Money" the novel of which I am writing. I am within 5,000 words of the end. But now the typing! Having been secretary to someone who is about to become President, it seems to me difficult that there is no deadline for a book being in the hands of a publisher. If it is to get in (provided it is accepted) there is the deadline with you of such a thing. But in my mind?"
Title page and dedication page from the manuscript for Jonah's Gourd Vine, published in 1934 (by permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston; courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)
On 13 September 1948 Hurston, then living in New York, was arrested and charged with committing an immoral act with a ten-year-old, the son of a woman from whom Hurston had rented a room during the winter of 1946-1947. Though Hurston was able to prove that she had been out of the country at the time of the alleged crime and the charges were subsequently dropped, the story was leaked to the press and sensational, humiliating news headlines followed. Hurston was devastated. She wrote to her friend Van Vechten that, "I care nothing for anything anymore. . . . My race has seen fit to destroy me without reason, and with the vilest tools conceived of by man so far. . . . All that I have ever tried to do has proved useless. All that I have believed in has failed me. I have resolved to die. . . . I feel hurled down a filthy privy hole." Fortunately, she did not die, though the incident took its toll. Although she continued to publish in national magazines and sold an option on another novel to Scribners, she left New York and refused to communicate with her friends.

In March 1950 she was discovered working as a maid in Rivo Alto, Florida. She claimed to be resting her mind and collecting material firsthand for a piece she intended to write about domestics; it is more probable that she needed the money.

In the winter of 1950-1951, at the invitation of friends, she moved to Belle Glade, Florida. In the spring she wrote to her literary agent that she was penniless, "just inching along like a stepped-on worm from day to day. Borrowing a little here and there." It was becoming embarrassing, however, "having to avoid folks who have made me loans so that I could eat and sleep. The humiliation is getting to be much too much for my self-respect, to look and look at the magnificent sweep of the Everglades, birds included, and keep a smile on my face." The infrequent sale of a magazine article brought temporary relief, but over the next ten years Hurston worked at odd jobs. She lived in a one-room cabin she had purchased in Eau Gallie, her stomach ailments and money problems making this period less than idyllic.

In 1952 Hurston was hired by the Pittsburgh Courier to cover the Ruby McCollum case; in 1956 she found work as a librarian at Patrick Air Force Base but was fired in 1957, ostensibly for having too much education for the job; in December 1957 she became a reporter for the Fort Pierce Chronicle, the local black weekly; and in 1958 she did some substitute teaching at Lincoln Park Academy, the black public school of Fort Pierce. These frequently humiliating jobs did not daunt Hurston's spirit. In 1955, in a letter to the Orlando Sentinel, she expressed her outrage about the 1954 Supreme Court Desegregation Decision. According to Hurston it all centered around "the self-respect of my people. How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for somebody to associate with me who does not wish me near them. . . . It is a contradiction in terms to scream race pride and equality while at the same time spurning Negro teachers and self-association."

On 29 October 1959, after suffering a stroke, Hurston was forced to enter the Saint Lucie County Welfare Home. She died there on 28 January 1960 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce's segregated cemetery, the Garden of the Heavenly Rest. She had died in poverty, and a collection had to be taken up to pay for her funeral. As the minister said at her funeral, however, Zora Hurston had lived a rich life: "Zora Neale went about and didn't care too much how she looked. Or what she said. Maybe people didn't think so
much of that. But Zora Neale, every time she went about, had something to offer. She didn't come to you empty. They said she couldn't become a writer recognized by the world. But she did it. The Miami paper said she died poor. But she died rich. She did something."

Hurston would have agreed with the minister. She had lived the good life. She had risen from obscurity, after all, to become a member of the American Folklore Society, the American Anthropological Society, American Ethnological Society, New York Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and she was listed in the 1937 edition of Who's Who in America. She had been courted by political figures and, most important, she had published an exceptional body of literature. Like Janie of Their Eyes Were Watching God, she had seen the "light," and no amount of dusk could dim its glow. As she wrote in 1941 while working on her autobiography:

> While I am still below the allotted span of time, and notwithstanding, I feel that I have lived. I have had the joy and pain of strong friendships. I have served and been served. I have made enemies of which I am not ashamed. I have been faithless, and then I have been faithful and steadfast until the blood ran down into my shoes. I have loved unselfishly with all the ardor of a strong heart, and I have hated with all the power of my soul. What waits for me in the future? I do not know. I can't even imagine, and I am glad for that. But already, I have touched the four corners of the horizon, for from hard searching it seems to me that tears and laughter, love and hate make up the sum of life.

Interest in Hurston had diminished long before her death. Her works had been long out of print, and the literary world was being dominated by such male giants as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. Fortunately, however, a few readers were beginning to discover Hurston, and in the 1970s this interest mushroomed into a coterie of Hurston followers. Robert Hemenway published his valuable work, Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, in 1977; Alice Walker edited I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . , a collection of Hurston's most impressive works, published in 1979; Lillie P. Howard published Zora Neale Hurston (1980) in the Twayne U.S. Authors series; a number of articles on Hurston appeared in literary journals; and various publishers reprinted Their Eyes Were Watching God, Mules and Men, Jonah's Gourd Vine, and Dust Tracks on a Road. The University of Florida set up a Zora Neale Hurston Fellowship in Anthropology; the City of Orlando, Florida, acknowledged Hurston's accomplishments by naming a city building after her. Today, the Hurston renaissance is in full swing. All of her published works have been or soon will be reprinted; some of the unpublished works and a collection of her letters may be available soon; several dissertations and books on Hurston are being written, including one that links her work with Alice Walker's. Hurston continues to live in her works and in the hearts and minds of those who have read them. Though her shortcomings as a writer will continue to bother those who have never written novels themselves, her honesty and power as a storyteller will one day earn her the place she deserves in the history of the American novel.

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Charles Spurgeon Johnson (photo © by Fabian Buchrach; courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)