
Influences On Zora Neale Hurston That Caused Her Literature Style

Everyone has written something during their lifetime. Whether it is an essay, a letter to a colleague, or a simple text to a friend, we use writing throughout our everyday lives. Some people even go on to write short stories, books, and even more. Zora Neale Hurston at a young age learned to love writing and wrote many expressive pieces during her lifetime. She started writing her stories around the 1920s and wrote many award-winning novels such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Mules and Men*, and *Dusk Tracks on a Road*. Zora Neale Hurston, an American author, influenced many people through her different themes, styles, and tones in her inspirational writings.

Zora Neale Hurston had many influences during her lifetime that drove her to write the way she does. According to Susan Butterworth, “the circumstances of Hurston’s life and family and the influence of growing up in Eatonville, Florida, are of primary importance in understanding Zora Neale Hurston’s life and works” (Butterworth). Zora was an “intelligent daughter of respected Eatonville citizens was conducive to her self-esteem and her feeling of safety, free from the sense of second-class citizenship common in southern black life. Her circumstances also led to an inborn appreciation for the richness of southern black culture” (Butterworth). One main thing that happened during her childhood was that her father, John Hurston, was a slave at one point in Alabama (Butterworth). He then went on to be a successful carpenter and a Baptist preacher (Butterworth). Eatonville was her home for many years. It was home to many black Americans and was the main reason she would write about black rights. Hurston “married Herbert Sheen, a jazz musician and former classmate at Howard who would later become a physician, but the marriage ended in 1931. In 1939, while Hurston was working for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), she married Albert Price, a 23-year-old fellow WPA employee, but this marriage, too, ended after only months” (Zora Neale Hurston, pre-eminent Harlem Renaissance author). This part of Hurston’s life was tragic, but she used it to write one of her many best selling novels. In her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she used the failure of her relationships and incorporated it into this award-winning novel, making an awful part of her life turn into something that was inspiring for other people. Hurston’s main use in life was her race. Being a black American woman is hard especially during this time period. She went on to later “experience health problems and soon died broke and unrecognized by her literary community” (Zora Neale Hurston, pre-eminent Harlem Renaissance author).

Due to the various influences during her lifetime, Hurston developed and used many different themes throughout her writings. According to Cheryl Wall, who criticized Hurston’s works, “Hurston was not the first Afro-American woman to publish a novel, but she was the first to create language and imagery that reflected the reality of black women’s lives. Ignoring the stereotypes, social and literary, that her predecessors spent their energies rejecting, Hurston rooted her art in the cultural traditions of the black rural South” (Wall, 101). One huge example of this is her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In this story, it had many themes and styles that were also used in her other works. One major theme that is present is racism. Hurston talks about the discrimination she received because of her color. In everything that she writes, there is at least one example of racism in the story. Another theme that she used was love and relationships. Josie P. Campbell quotes, “Hurston deals with love and betrayal, loss and

regains in the relationships between men and women, from John Buddy and Lucy Potts to Arvay Henson and Jim Meserve.” (Campbell, 19). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main character is “a Southern Black woman in search, over 25 years and 3 marriages, for her true identity” (Zora Neale Hurston, pre-eminent Harlem Renaissance author). Hurston is relating her personal love life to her main character’s life in the story, revealing to the readers what her love life was like. A third theme that is shown throughout her novels is her language and voice. Hurston had a very strong voice that she used to stand up for the rights of a black American woman. Emily Kendall claims that “language does not only shape the novel’s form; it also provides an important metaphor for Janie’s development into a powerful, independent woman. *Their Eyes Are Watching God* may be described as the story of Janie’s quest for a voice in her community” (Roberts and Kendall). The final theme that Hurston uses in her story is religion. Hurston indulged in her religion when she could and talked about her faith in most of her writings. Josie P. Campbell states that “in all four of her novels, Hurston explores the relationship between the individual and his or her God” (Campbell, 19). In the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “Janie Crawford [the main character] sees God in her vision of the world from under the pear tree; Moses goes to the mountain to talk with God about leading his people out of slavery” (Campbell, 19). Through these themes, she influenced many readers with her writings.

Zora Neale Hurston affected many people through her many writings and other movements that she participated in. During the time that she was writing most of her works, the Harlem Renaissance, which “was a period of a fertile flowering of black art, music, and voice in the 1920s and 1930s,” was taking place (Butterworth). Hurston participated during this time by using her voice and standing up for not only her rights but the rights for other black Americans that were to afraid to stand up. Some topics that Hurston would address are “issues of race and gender, relating them to the search for freedom and equality” (Zora Neale Hurston, pre-eminent Harlem Renaissance author). Hurston also addressed hard social issues such as “rape, violence, religion, racism, class, gender, feminism, poverty, and materialism” (Campbell, 19). This is one prime example of why Hurston would write about racism and religion an abundance of times in her works.