

Obsidian

Notes from the Editor

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“A thing is mighty big when time and distance cannot shrink it.” - *Zora Neale Hurston, Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*

When my colleague, Deidre Crumbley, proposed that we publish a special issue of *Obsidian* on Zora Neale Hurston to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Zora Neale Hurston Festival, I was immediately reminded of Hurston’s words about time, distance, and

largesse. We honor her here, nearly 50 years after she died, unheralded and almost forgotten in 1960. Despite the circumstances surrounding her death, Hurston’s life and legacy continues to captivate her ever-expanding audience. In fact, rather than shrinking, Zora continues to inspire artistry and critical inquiry in her readers. She certainly qualifies as being “mighty big.”

Although her place in African American, Afro-Diasporan, and Afro-Spiritual letters cannot possibly be defined in a single publication, this special issue of *Obsidian* nevertheless attempts to celebrate Hurston’s life and her imagination. I think it is particularly appropriate, given Hurston’s life as a multidimensional writer, anthropologist, and spiritualist, that the essays featured here are interdisciplinary in their foci. Jason Young’s “Of Moses, Mules, and Men: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Folk Art” contextualizes Hurston’s ongoing engagement with Africa as well as Hurston’s insistence on the particularities of African American folk culture. Mawuena Logan’s “Metaphysical Cloning: An African Epistemology in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Maryse Condé” reminds the readers of Hurston’s embrace of Vodun in her and her work. In her contribution focused on the spiritual experiences at the crossroads, Temitope Adefarakan focuses on Hurston’s *Mules and Men* and the spiritual dynamism of the crossroads as a trope

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Diaspora experience. Kevin Meehan completes our exploration of the poetics and politics of spirituality in Hurston's work in "Decolonizing Ethnography: Spirit Possession and Resistance in *Tell My Horse*."

Just as Hurston defied being categorized in a single discipline, this issue includes essays and creative work that speak to the multidisciplinary appeal of Zora Neale Hurston. Eika Tai presents a comparative view of the cultural and political work that festivals perform in "Festivals as Ritual Assertions for Sustaining Diaspora Communities: Comparing Cases in the USA and Japan." This essay resonates well with Melvin Butler's "Contested Boundaries: Negotiating Music, Ritual, and Identity in Haiti and Jamaica" in which we get a deeper sense of Hurston international and interdisciplinary presence. The least traditional essay in the collection, Bill Mullaney's "Her Eyes Were Watching Katrina: Unnatural Deaths in a Natural Disaster" considers the impact of Hurston's novel in post-Katrina discourse.

The poetry of Frank X. Walker, Anjail Rashida Ahmad, and Ebony Golden acknowledge Hurston's own focus on African American women who defy what might be considered a logical response to gendered and sexual oppression and affirm themselves. Likewise, Joi Jackson, in her debut publication, pays homage to Hurston's work as folklorist, as owner of her spiritual power, in her short story, "Bitter Water," in what might well be called a tribute to Hurston's "Sweat." Collectively, the essays, poetry and fiction in this issue acknowledge and honor Hurston's manifold, abiding, and timeless legacy.