



Dust Tracks on a Road

Zora Neale Hurston , Maya Angelou (Introduction)

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"Told in gutsy language...her story is an encouraging and enjoyable one for any member of the human race."
— N.Y. Review of Books.

First published in 1942 at the height of her popularity, *Dust Tracks on a Road* is Zora Neale Hurston's candid, funny, bold and poignant autobiography, an imaginative and exuberant account of her rise from childhood poverty in the rural South to a prominent place among the leading artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. As compelling as her acclaimed fiction, Hurston's very personal literary self-portrait offers a revealing, often audacious glimpse into the life—public and private—of an extraordinary artist, anthropologist, chronicler, and champion of the black experience in America. Full of the wit and wisdom of a proud, spirited woman who started off low and climbed high, *Dust Tracks on a Road* is a rare treasure from one of literature's most cherished voices.

Dust Tracks on a Road Details

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From Reader Review Dust Tracks on a Road for online ebook

Nichole says

I cannot praise this book enough. It's been years since I read anything written by Zora Neale Hurston, and I find myself once again amazed by the hugeness of her life. What lyricism and spunk! She was a vital woman and writer who truly lived in her time.

Like many others, I liked her accounts of her childhood and teen years the best. I am aware of why this book had stirred up so much controversy even among her most loyal readers, but I hope I am a little more understanding than her critics. Life can be rough and unfair, and no one is flawless. No one will ever be entirely honest because we are too human. The "straight path" in life will never exist. But, we each have the ability to move past ugliness, help one another, and live our best. This autobiography is a book of lessons, not necessarily a linear account of Zora Neale Hurston's life. Dust Tracks on a Road is the memoir of a survivor and lover of life.

Shannon says

Dust Tracks On a Road, Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, was published in 1942. This verbose but colorful book reads like a collection of short stories. Hurston often poses questions that she proceeds to answer but not without excluding the reader from her thought process. Sometimes by the end of the chapter the questions are still unanswered. But for Hurston it seems just thinking through it was enough. And so goes her autobiography.

Hurston always had a fanciful way about herself. We find out early in the book that she was a storyteller from the beginning. A significant portion of the book is dedicated to stories that she recalls from her childhood. While Hurston's mother was always supportive of her anecdotes, her grandmother found them troubling. I laughed when I read Hurston's account of what happened when she was telling her mother a story within earshot of her grandmother, "Oh, she's just playing," Mama said indulgently. Her grandmother replied, "Playing! Why dat lil' heifer is lying just as fast as a horse can trot. Stop her!"

Hurston's mother died when Hurston was a teen and her father remarried. She found her stepmother impossible to get along with. They had physical altercations with Hurston admitting at one point that she wanted to kill the woman. After six years, Hurston had had enough. This discontentment was caused her to venture out into the world. Things serendipitously fall into place for her time after time once she sets out on her own. She even writes, "From the depth of my inner heart I appreciated the fact that the world had not been altogether unkind to Mama's child."

Filled with quotable material, Dust Tracks On a Road is less about the chronology of Hurston's life and more about how she makes sense of the cards life has dealt.

booklady says

Excellent writing over all, published in 1942 at the height of Zora Neale Hurston's popularity. The author lived another 18 years, died, was buried in an unmarked grave and remained largely ignored until novelist, Alice Walker, looked into her and her work with a view to having Hurston recognized by new generations.

The title probably refers to Hurston's tumbleweed existence from her youth onward. Her mother died when she was 14. Her father's unfortunate remarriage alienated not only his children but also his entire Baptist congregation. She seems to have never looked back.

During her travels, Zora found work where she could, but going to school was always her dream and eventually she realized it. She graduated from Howard University, in her words, '*It is to the Negro what Harvard is to the whites.*' Later she got a scholarship to Barnard and graduated from there in 1928. Then she was on the road again doing research, which she called formalized curiosity, poking and prying with a purpose.

There is one brief description of her participation in a ceremony where she to 'meet the Devil and make a compact'. She said it took her months to doubt it afterwards. I debated not finishing the book at this point, but decided to see if she had any further observations or consequences from this bit of 'research'. The chapter ended with a dismissive comment attributing science as the power behind Voodoo. For her sake, I pray the enemy looked at things that way as well. There was an entire chapter devoted to Religion which was certainly unique, but also confirming. For example, she says prayer is, 'folly ... the highest form of sacrilege,' because it is attempting to read the mind of God and get Him to change it. While certainly a pragmatic perspective, if thought completely true—at least to me—is utterly depressing. All that makes Christianity beautiful and desirable is having an accessible, responsive Heavenly Father who listens to us and answers ALL our prayers, perhaps not as we anticipate or intend, yet often in ways better than we can imagine.

The best chapter is twelve, *My People, My People*. Here Hurston writes as anthropologist about her fellow blacks of the early 20th Century. She concludes, 'Still, if you have received no clear cut impression of what the Negro in America is like, then you are in the same place with me. There is no *The Negro* here. Our lives are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all, except My people! My People!' She clearly loves 'her People', almost in a maternal sense.

Most chapters 3 or 4, one chapter 5, two chapters 1 or 2, for an overall book rating of 3. Sadly, I do not believe I will be reading any more Hurston. Too bad. She is very talented.

Jaylia3 says

Zora Neale Hurston approaches this moving memoir like a master storyteller, with wonderfully lyrical prose that reminded me a lot of her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Loved it.

Rowena says

"There is something wonderful to behold just ahead. Let's go see what it is." - Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road

I was a bit apprehensive about reading this book as I've read about the tragedies Zora Neale Hurston experienced in her life. This, however, turned out to be one of the most marvelous autobiographies I have ever read and more inspirational than discouraging.

I loved reading about Hurston's childhood; she was such a precocious and inquisitive child who could easily have been stifled creatively by the culture she lived in, a culture and society that did not encourage book-reading or learning, yet found ways to grow her creativity and imagination.

Her adventures and experiences as an adult were also interesting. I loved her opinionated, unapologetic personality. Her ideas about race and religion were probably considered radical in those days; she was definitely way ahead of her time.

And her writing, wow! She was adept at writing using different literary styles and idiomatic expressions, and she also respected the Southern dialect and people, therefore her understanding for the need of their different linguistic expression came across clearly in her writing and thought process. Her writing is also witty and she's also a wonderful storyteller. Her autobiography has several stories and folktales included. Also, she dislikes math as much as I do, as is evidenced by the following quote: "I did not do well in mathematics. Why should A minus B? Who the devil was X anyway?" I concur!

Her anthropology background and her positive experiences with white people made her see people beyond the veil of race, and instead just see the person. I thought that was wonderful.

I would unquestionably invite Zora Neale Hurston to my fantasy literary dinner party. She's definitely inspirational.

"My search for knowledge of things took me into many strange places and adventures." - Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road

Morgan says

"Light came to me when I realized that I did not have to consider any racial group as a whole. God made them duck by duck and that was the only way I could see them. I learned that skins were no measure of what was inside people. So none of the Race cliché meant anything anymore. I began to laugh at both white and black who claimed special blessings on the basis of race. Therefore I saw no curse in being black, nor no extra flavor by being white."

To me, this quote pretty much summarizes Zora's philosophy on life. I've said this once and I'll say it again: Zora was Zora. She wasn't trying to be anyone but herself. This isn't a "feel sorry for me" autobiography.

This is a "this is who I am" autobiography. She was a storyteller and a somewhat of a humorist and that is what you will get reading this I hope.

I think most people know Zora as the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I did love that book, but that's not the only thing she wrote. She was a very talented woman and deserves more credit than being the author of that book. She wrote a ton about folklore. She grew up liking fairy tales and mythology stories. She did a lot of traveling and gathered oral stories to put on paper for the world to read. Even though this is non-fiction, I liked the fact it read like a Zora folktale as well.

I honestly like her views on race. I don't talk about it much, but I share the same views as her and were not even the same race or sex. She believed that race didn't define who you were as a person. She saw good and bad in all race. It's funny reading this because she was living in a time oddly similar to what is happening now. Yet her view points are polar to what the social media likes to claim which is true. She didn't agree with Democrats, Socialist, or Communist. She didn't like people who took pride in their race nor did she like them forming groups. To her blacks were not a group, but individual people. She'll even admit blacks don't get along with other blacks. She didn't get along with her "folks" either. All she had to do was say she was a Republican and they would turn the other way. Although, most people think she would be a Libertarian today.

I also love what she said about her writing. Her first book wasn't liked by her black peers. It wasn't politically angry enough for them. I haven't read her first book yet, but doesn't seem like it has anything to do with politics. Her whole life she just wanted to write about what she wanted to write about. Apparently, she had people telling her what to write. This isn't mentioned in the this book because it's after, but her last book was about a white woman and she was told blacks can't write about whites...well she proved them wrong.

I really loved this book and I love Zora. She teaches me not to fall into a label. Be myself. She also teaches me to move on with my life. Love the here and now. Don't bottle up emotions from the past because i'm are only hurting yourself. If I ever write an autobiography I hope to produce something like this, not exactly like this, but clearly this book inspired me more than I thought. This book is get for independent thinking.

Lulu says

I have a serious girl crush on Zora Neale Hurston! Her personality was a thing of beauty. I think I smiled 90% of the time while reading this book!! I wish I could have met her, gone to a book signing or something, but she left me with some hope at the end of this book.

"Maybe all of us who do not have the good fortune to meet, or meet again, in this world, will meet at a barbecue."

Chrissie says

Through reading this book one discovers much about Zora Neale Hurston's life and personality. She was a short story writer, novelist (author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*), anthropologist and folklorist. She lived from 1891 to 1960. This book was published in 1942, 18 years before her death. A chronology listing the important events of her entire life is found at the book's end. She died in poverty and was buried in an

unmarked grave. In 1973 author Alice Walker saw that a gravestone was installed with the words "A Genius of the South."

Zora was born in Notasulga, Alabama, but at the age of three her family moved to Eatonville, Florida, one of the first self-governing all-black municipalities in the United States. This is where she grew up, this is where she called home and this is the town she uses as a backdrop for many of her stories. From the start, as a young child she was brazen, sassy and curious. She had opinions and there was no stopping her.

The book covers her youth, her education and what she did with her life. That she became a folklorist shows. It is reflected in how she tells of her life; her experiences are related through stories. These stories have dialogs and songs. Has she recalled them word for word? Are they noted in diaries? There is no mention of such. I assume they are improvised. What is interesting to note is that the autobiography reads almost as a collection of stories. This isn't surprising given that she was a folklorist and that she loved the songs of her people!

Chapters cover her personal beliefs - on religion, on the value of friends, on hoodoo, on dance, on books, on race pride, race consciousness and race prejudice and most importantly on individualism. One should never clump people into groups, not ever!

The book ends and then a long section is filled with what seems like add-ons. The chronology spoken of above, as well as appendixes, very lengthy acknowledgements and her involvement with a dance production. The appendixes summarize much of what was indicated earlier in the book, clarifying if you happened not to have understood. It is just that I had understood and they felt preachy, like a repetitive lecture.

What hits one immediately as you read the book is that the writing style is unusual. I found it unique in two ways. Nothing is said without a story. This became occasionally excessive. Secondly, metaphors and similes abound, but at times this felt simply wordy and repetitive. Other times what the author was saying was unclear due to the use of idioms and black nomenclature of which I am unfamiliar.

The audiobook is narrated by Bahni Turpin. She sings, she changes inflections for different characters, she recreates revivalist meetings..... or shall we just say she dramatizes for all that she is worth. Many will like this. It is not badly performed. If what you are looking for is a performance, you will be happy. I prefer a simple reading of the text.

Morgan says

It is very much situated in Hurston's internal life which is vivid and magical. It is definitely a writer's story. We get a distinct picture of the genesis of Hurston as a writer from a young child playing mostly by herself and inventing stories to an introverted youth who spent as much time as possible with her face in a book to an anthropologist who traveled to the American South and to the West Indies collecting the stories of others. Hurston is first and foremost a story teller but one driven by lush descriptions and imaginary narratives. Most of the action in this book is all in Hurston's head. She was someone who truly lived the life of the mind. Much of the book leaves you feeling as if she had no real intimacy with anyone besides herself. This couldn't possibly be the case but her personal relationships remain mostly private. Towards the end of the book, we get a quick peak at Hurston the lover in an eleven paged chapter entitled *Love*. Despite the cursory nature of this section, Hurston does make eloquent and beautiful observations, but she keeps most things to

herself. She writes: "What I do know, I have no intention of putting but so much in the public ears." As a whole I really enjoyed this book but I feel, like all texts, it must be viewed in the context in which it was written- I don't doubt Hurston's commitment to individuality or her understanding of race markers as socially constructed but the highlighting of all the white people who helped her along the way seems bizarrely self-conscious as Maya Angelou has noted. I have to wonder if these parts were emphasized in order to mollify a white audience.

Not surprisingly- there are no thoughts on reparations here, a point Hurston emphasizes several times throughout the book and again in the appendix. She is so firmly couched in individualism that she commits herself to the causes of no group even as she eloquently details the hypocrisy of foreign policy in *Seeing the World As It Is*.

My People! My People! seems to contradict her passionate belief in individualism as she ends with several generalizations on black folks- many of which made me cringe. What could have been an indictment of essentialism instead reinforces stereotypes. I could have definitely skipped this essay and been happy but the insightful and prescient nature of *Seeing the World As It Is* and *Religion* more than make up for the rest of the appendix. *Religion* made all the hairs stand up on my neck as it describes so precisely what is continuing to happen today with our current political climate. It would have made an excellent addition to *Jesus Camp* for sure.

El says

(I read this book as part of a reading project I have undertaken with some other nerdy friends in which we read *The Novel: A Biography* and some of the other texts referenced by Schmidt.)

I recently re-read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and didn't love it as much as most other readers. I read this soon thereafter, and I have to say I found it to be a much more interesting read. I understand that it was not received well critically; even her number-one-fan, Alice Walker, apparently didn't care much for this book. But I found it authentic in a way that I felt was lacking a smidge in *Their Eyes*. Obviously this book is an autobiography, and *Their Eyes* was not. But even so, I feel most fiction tends to have quite a few autobiographical moments whether it was the author's intent or not.

Anyone interested in Hurston at all should read this book. She writes quite a bit about her childhood which is charming in just how imaginative she was. At times her anecdotes would get a bit too long-winded which then detracted some of the original charm, but overall I found reading her memories an interesting insight into the mind of a quality writer. Hurston was undoubtedly an intelligent woman, even before she went on in her education to become an anthropologist. Her life, not surprisingly, was not always easy, and she doesn't shy away from talking about the more difficult part of her growth - from the death of her mother to fighting with her stepmother to going to Baltimore to live with her brother to having to go off on her own to care for other people. She was open about her experiences which I appreciated, though, again, she did sometimes take stories on a little further than I felt was necessary, so there is some repetition.

Overall, though, this is a great read and makes me want to read even more of her writing. I still have *The Complete Stories* on my stacks at home, and I will be tackling that soon. I thought it might be interesting to read the book she was best known for (*Their Eyes*), followed by her autobiography, then followed with her short stories. I feel I'm getting a well-rounded Hurston reading experience.

Dusty says

I read somewhere a quote from Alice Walker that Zora Neale Hurston has a tendency to be exasperating. I think applied to *Dust Tracks on a Road* that may be putting the matter lightly.

Allegedly, the book is a memoir. Hurston is coy about this at its start; she says that after the success of her previous books her publisher asked her -- nearly had to force her -- to put onto paper the narrative of her own life. I would say what we ended up with is rather more the narrative of the life Hurston would've liked to have had: People who've investigated her biography have revealed that she was born ten years earlier than she claimed and that she almost certainly was not born in Eatonville, Florida, the first all-black American municipality in which she obviously takes so much pride. It's true that every autobiography is a sort of self-fashioning and requires us to read between the lines. But Hurston's autobiography pushes our suspension of disbelief to its limits, while she herself writes about all the liars she's encountered over the course of her research and travels. Anyway, like Walker said: Exasperating.

That said, however, the story is quite a romp. The youthful events Hurston describes may or may not have actually happened, but either way they're deliciously written and run the gamut from the poignant to the hilarious. The later chapters, which turn from recounting the past to reflecting on contemporary social issues, particularly the present and future of the so-called "Race question," keep the coy and joyful tone intact. I defy you to find a more energetic criticism of ethnic nationalism than "Seeing the World as It Is," one of the chapters/essays at the end of the book. I've seen other critics remark that the book's chapters don't gel, and while it's true that *Dust Tracks* is more a collection of essays than a novel or memoir, I wouldn't say that makes the book any less entertaining. After all, what keeps you reading isn't so much the suspense of what's to happen as the force of Hurston's personality. And what a personality!

A must-read for anybody interested in Hurston. Recommended for anybody else. Four stars.

Jerrika says

Zora just gave me life #yessssssssssssssssssss

65% Done: Writing on paper, that Booker T Washington was trash makes Zora the dopest of the dope. Fight me.

Zanna says

2.5 stars

I feel like Zora was a brilliant, indomitable woman who would have scared me out of my skin if I knew her. I love Henry Louis Gates Jnr's afterword to the edition I read, which discusses the search for a voice in Hurston's work and contemporary black women writers related search for literary ancestors, of whom Zora may be claimed as one...

I like her style when it remains concrete; when she strays into abstractions, I start getting bored. I was bewildered by the complex mixture of attitudes to race she presents. Some of the racist joking around was

quite hard to read; while reading on public transport I kept looking around to check nobody who might get hurt by it was in glancing distance of the page. Much energy is spent shrugging off race, suppressing it, even ridiculing concepts of race consciousness and racial solidarity. I can see how this might have seemed a way forward at the time, but the way race keeps coming up even as it's denied, in the text and its contemporary reviews, speaks of the currency it would retain. Nonetheless, Hurston's love and enthusiasm for the musical and dance arts of black people in the USA and the Caribbean and of their storytelling is genuine and she brings them to life here along with many vivid characters, among whom she is the blazing star...

Cheryl says

Oh the magic and mystery that was Zora Neale Hurston. An indescribable childhood, deplorable kindred, a love life that was itself a puzzle. (In fact she does admit that her true love story with her second husband was somehow interwoven into her novel: "I tried to embalm all the tenderness of my passion for him in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*).

The first sentence of this memoir is a lyrical ambush:

Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say.

Zora Neale Hurston was a highly acclaimed writer, publishing four novels, two books of folklore, an autobiography, and more than fifty short pieces between the Harlem Renaissance and the end of the Korean War. She was seen as a dominant writer who brought the consciousness of the black woman to literature. Her use of dialect and vernacular was her framework. Her work was so important to the next generation of women writers that Alice Walker made it her literary quest to find her: "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston."

What is interesting is that at times, like the title of Walker's article, you do find yourself searching for Hurston throughout her memoir.

She was born in Alabama but considered Eatonville, Florida her home. Though she grew up in the Jim Crow south, she was surrounded by people who looked like her because Eatonville was a small black incorporated town. Hurston didn't want to touch the topic of race, didn't believe in dwelling on it, even excuses the white man who helped with her birth when he referenced the n-word. There is a chapter in her book devoted to the racial oppression of her time and aside from that, race is only seen through subtleties in conversation, like this one with her grandmother who had "seen slavery:"

Git down offa dat gate post! You li'l sow, you!...Setting up dere looking dem white folks right in de face! They's gowine to lynch you, yet...Youse too brazen to live long.

She was a woman who didn't believe in race or class. To her, they were easy generalizations and she chose individualism instead. According to her, "Negroes were neither better nor worse than any other race." She didn't believe in prayer: "Prayer seems to me a cry of weakness." Didn't believe in organized creed: "Seems

to me that organized creeds are collections of words around a wish." And yet she believed in the rituals of Hoodoo:

In New Orleans, I delved into Hoodoo, or sympathetic magic... I learned the routines for making and breaking marriages; driving off and punishing enemies; influencing the minds of judges and juries in favor of clients; killing by remote control and other things...In another ceremony, I had to sit at the crossroads at midnight in complete darkness and meet the Devil and make a compact...

There is inert gloom and placid darkness to be found in the memoir. Picture a person on a dark, cold night, smoking a cigarette next to a campfire, telling you a story so enticing, you want to hear the end even while parts of it gives you goosebumps. At times you don't know what to expect from this story, like in the beginning for instance, when Hurston tells you: "I stood in a world of vanished communion with my kind." Was she saying something indirectly? And then: "I had knowledge before its time. I knew my fate. I knew that I would be an orphan and homeless...I would stand beside a dark pool of water and see a huge fish move slowly away at a time when I would be somehow in the depth of despair."

All one can do is wonder about these passages because even with the graceful storytelling and vibrant language, much is mysterious. Some chapters feel like essays, some like avoidance. At times Hurston gets close only to disappear into narrative. Even when she gets to the 1929 Hurricane in New Orleans, she gives a few sentences of vagueness.

You still wonder, beneath it all, who was Hurston?

It makes you want to pick up a biography wherein you see her from another's eyes (probably the one written by Valerie Boyd) and perhaps answer some questions that even she couldn't have answered:

1. With all her success, why did she only get royalties of \$943.75?
2. Why did she disappear into obscurity?
3. How was it, that she receives two Guggenheims, is hired as a story consultant at Paramount, later works as a librarian, but ends up working as a maid even while her work receives awards?
4. How does she go from saying, "Negroes were neither better nor worse than any other race," to publishing an article entitled, "What White Publishers Won't Print?"

Britt says

What is there to say that hasn't already been said? She was a visionary. She is still relevant. Her work is still changing lives.
