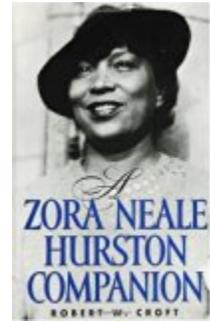


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robert W. Croft. *Zora Neale Hurston Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002. 288 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-30707-2.

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A Zora Neale Hurston Reference Guide

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Robert W. Croft adds to the growing literature addressing the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston. Aside from the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston was a footnote to most people throughout most of her life, however by the 1970s her life and work had taken on such a popular interest that she will forever be rescued from obscurity. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Hurston left us with scant personal papers. Preservationists have cobbled together a modest collection of resources in the National Archives, and in the special collections at the Yale and University of Florida libraries. Partly this adds to the mystique of Hurston's life and work, the idea that she could posthumously cultivate such a wide audience while leaving little by way of personal reflection. Croft tries to piece together as much information as he can to bridge the gap between what exists of Hurston's work and what does not.

Croft's book, *Zora Neale Hurston Companion*, is not a manuscript or literary criticism, but instead is a reference guide to her life and work. It functions as a dictionary for quick reference to aid scholars and Hurstonphiles in images, events, works, people and places that are important for interpreting her body of work. There are also important chronological timelines, bibliography, appendix and introduction that might be useful to researchers. Since Hurston has only three collections, Croft has provided a useful appendix that identifies letters from Hurston contained in other collections. This book can be useful in unlocking the mysteries of Hurston's work.

Although this work has some utilitarian value to both an academic and popular audience there are some curious omissions. Croft seems to cultivate his bibliography from a narrow definition of her work. For one thing, there is no mention of unpublished works by Hurston. In 1997, the National Archives discovered nearly a dozen plays written by the author she submitted for copyright protection. These plays have been available for some time to the public, and since this book has a 2002 copyright this information could have been included. Additionally, what about Hurston's Works Progress Administration interviews she conducted in Depression Era Florida? Although some of her observations have made it into her folklore novels, the National Archives and the University of Florida house those original interviews. What set Hurston aside from her contemporaries was the fact that she utilized an interdisciplinary approach to her work. It would seem that anyone wanting to learn more about her motivations and perspectives must consult those interviews. An inclusion of her WPA interviews and her unpublished plays would have made this book more useful to scholars, as such it is geared for people not as familiar with Hurston and her work. This book also suffers from Greenwood Press' own price gouging. Greenwood has priced their books out of reach for a popular audience, and for most of their titles it may make sense from a business perspective. Yet, since there is such a loyal and eager Hurstonophile market willing to consume anything published about her, Greenwood has priced this book out of their reach. Academics researching Hurston will quickly grow out of this book, which is tragic because it could find a better reception with a popular audience.

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