

**Zora Neale Hurston and an Introduction to African American Folklore:
“Offering a Featherbed of Resistance...under a Lot of Laughter and
Pleasantries”**

Third Thursdays, March-June, 6:30-8:30 pm

Norlisha Crawford

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Participants will receive a Zoom link before the first meeting, including the first readings.

In the course we will read and discuss a select group of short stories, essays and a classic novel brought together by looking closely at the works of one American author, anthropologist, and ethnographer: Zora Neale Hurston. African American folklore is a rich broad and varied body of artistic forms. We will investigate a small literary slice-of-life that is centered among early 20th century, mostly Southern, African Americans. No one is better-suited for introducing readers to the artistry and culture of this significant national community than Ms. Hurston, with her personal background and ground-breaking research and fiction. As we read, anthropological contexts in the United States will set the stage for understanding her works. To begin we will discuss Hurston’s life story and read both “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (1928) and “High John the Conqueror” (1943); followed by *Mules and Men* (1935); *Barracoon* (2018); and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).

Course participants are encouraged to join in the discussions with comments, interpretations, and questions. To facilitate that community-building ethic among us, questions will be offered to address in each class. Following Hurston’s lead, we will “discover a jumble of small things priceless and worthless” as we learn to appreciate and enjoy her presentation of African American life through African Americans’ own folklore stories.

Reading schedule

March 18: Introduction to course and Hurston; discussion of “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”* and “High John the Conqueror”*

April 15: *Mules and Men*, discussion of short stories

May 20: *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo,”* discussion

June 17: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, discussion

About the instructor

Norlisha Crawford, Associate Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

I graduated from the University of Maryland, Department of English, (’01). My dissertation was a focused study of the Harlem-based police detective series written by African American author Chester Himes. I have published papers, given talks and keynote addresses, and participated on conference panels, nationally and internationally, concerning Himes’ works specifically and more generally African American fiction.

As an assistant professor, I taught in the Department of English at Bucknell University (BU), 2001-2006. I left BU to direct the African American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (UWO). As an associate professor at UWO, I also was a faculty member in the Dept of English, 2006-2017. I retired early from UWO, and returned to my hometown, Washington, DC, to begin a grand adventure inventing a new product that will be a baking tool.