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(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION FORM

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**1. Name of Property**

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historic name: Hurston, Zora Neale House

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Location**

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street & number: 1734 School Court

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Fort Pierce

vicinity: N/A

state: FL county: St. Lucie

code: 111

zip code: 34950

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**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. National Park Service Certification**  
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
of Action

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**6. Function or Use**  
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Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current : Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

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**7. Description**  
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Architectural Classification:

No Style

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation- concrete      roof- tar and gravel  
                  walls-            concrete      other \_\_\_\_\_  
                                          block

Describe present and historic physical appearance.   X   See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: B

Applicable National Historic Landmark Criteria: 2

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): G

NHL Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): 8

Areas of Significance: Literature  
                                  Ethnic Heritage--Black

NHL Theme: XIX. Literature

          B. Fiction

            1. Novel

          XXX. American Ways of Life

            E. Ethnic Communities

Period(s) of Significance: 1957-1960

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): Hurston, Zora Neale  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Benton, C.C.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X  See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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X  See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	17	564850	3037460	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The lot on which the Zora Neale Hurston House stands is a rectangle which borders 50 feet on School Court and is 75 feet deep. It is officially designated as lot 10 on School Court.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes all the land that was part of the property when Zora Neale Hurston resided there. Those same boundaries have described the property since the house was constructed.

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller

Organization: National Coordinating Committee  
for the Promotion of History

Date: June 19, 1991

Street & Number: 400 A Street SE

Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington

State: DC

ZIP: 20003

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

School Court was the first attempt by private enterprise to provide affordable, clean, and safe housing for the poor in Fort Pierce, Florida. Dr. C. C. Benton, a highly respected and successful medical doctor, sold ten acres of palmetto land to the school board for a new negro high school. He then put some of the money back into the community by building a development of modern rentals; duplexes on the south side in 1950, and individual houses on the north side in 1957. It was named School Court because it was situated one block from the new school. This was a large scale project at that time, providing the most progressive, modern, and economical housing for this community. Houses on the north side were painted yellow or green, and the colors have never changed.

Hurston's house is green with white trim and brown doors, and she was the first tenant to live in it. It is a very modest, but substantial one story concrete-block structure with a tar and gravel roof which extends into a stoop over both the front and back door entrances. The original eight jalousie windows have been replaced with eight single-hung metal units. Almost every room has two windows for cross-ventilation, and both doors have windows in their upper half to increase the natural air flow. Inside are two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and front room.

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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Zora Neale Hurston (1901?-1960), writer, folklorist, and anthropologist, was the most noted black female writer of the mid-20th century. She lived for the last few years of her life in this house at 1734 School Court. According to historian Barbara Melosh, "the School Court house serves to commemorate a now celebrated African American writer, and to remind us of the financial hardship that disabled and sometimes silenced American writers."<sup>1</sup> In addition to her four novels, two books of folklore, and an autobiography, she wrote over fifty short stories and essays. Zora Neale Hurston's work has found a broad contemporary audience-- noted author Alice Walker has revived Hurston's major works, which after their original publication in the 1930s, fell into obscurity. Today's readers of Zora Neale Hurston "are committed to the recovery of literary traditions that flourished outside the boundaries of a white, male canon. . . Hurston's fiction celebrates an alternative language and culture, even as it renders the division of sex and class within the black community."<sup>2</sup> Hurston was

"granted honorary doctorates, published in national magazines, featured on the cover of the Saturday Review, invited to speak at major universities, and praised by the New York Herald Tribune for being 'in the front rank,' not only of black writers, but of all American writers. She was the most important collector of Afro-American folklore in the country. She published more books than any other black American woman."<sup>3</sup>

Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework the Zora Neale Hurston House has national significance under theme XIX. Literature, (B) Fiction, (1) Novel; XXX. American Ways of Life, (E) Ethnic Communities.

The only house known to be connected with Zora Neale Hurston that is still standing is located at 1734 School Court, Fort Pierce, Florida-- her home from 1957 until her death in 1960. Hurston lived at 1734 School Court while working as a reporter and columnist for the Fort Pierce Chronicle and while writing her manuscript of Herod the Great. This little green house where Hurston lived at the end of her life was discovered by Alice Walker, who has done much to reaffirm Hurston's reputation in recent years, crediting her with being a genius who "followed her own road, believed in her own gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from "common " people."<sup>4</sup>

Hurston inherited background, idioms, and characters for many of her writings from her birthplace, Eatonville, Florida. This unusual, first incorporated all-black town in Florida, nurtured the young Hurston, furnishing her with confidence and individuality during her formative years. A historic marker is in front of the site where she grew up, however, no building specifically associated with her is still standing in Eatonville.

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Zora Neale Hurston spent an number of years moving about from place to place securing an education. When she lived in New York, beginning in 1925, she moved frequently, and after attending college in New York, she traveled extensively with limited income. With the exception of a twenty-year-old houseboat that she had in the 1940s, she never owned her own home. She appears to have found it difficult to put down roots in one place and is often described as a vagabond.

Zora Neale Hurston was born around 1901 in Eatonville, Florida. Her father, John Hurston, was a successful carpenter as well as a preacher who owned a big piece of land with a five-acre garden, a fruit tree, hogs and chickens, and an eight room house. He was elected Mayor of Eatonville for three terms and wrote the local laws. Hurston's mother, Lucy Ann Potts Hurston, came from a propertied family. She would gather her eight children in the bedroom after supper in order to give them their lessons for the next day, and she exhorted them at every opportunity, to "jump at de sun".<sup>5</sup> Zora Neale was often thought to be impudent and sassy, which made her father fear for her future. At the same time she welcomed, and sometimes initiated, new experiences. "Naturally, I picked up the reflections of life around me with my own instruments, and absorbed what I gathered according to my inside juices."<sup>6</sup>

After her mother's death when Hurston was nine years old, she attended school in Jacksonville, Florida, winning the spelling bee for her school. Her father remarried, and Hurston spent the next five years moving between relatives and friends' homes, always trying to get more schooling.

When Hurston was fourteen, she obtained a job as a lady's maid to a singer with the traveling Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. She was the only black in the troupe. Eighteen months later in Baltimore, Maryland her job ended. By working menial jobs she was able to attend Baltimore night high school and Morgan Academy. In 1918 she was admitted to Howard University, "the capstone of negro education in the world,"<sup>7</sup> while still working part-time. Hurston was exultant and she wrote, "My soul stood on tiptoe and stretched up to take in all that it meant. So I was careful to do my classwork and be worthy to stand there under the shadow of the hovering spirit of Howard. I felt the ladder under my feet."<sup>8</sup>

At this time she began to write and eventually gained recognition from some of the members of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1925 she moved to New York City, living and working part-time with novelist Fannie Hurst while attending Barnard College on scholarship. She began to publish essays and short stories. The one enduring work from this period is a story about her childhood called "Sweat."



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"Zora Neale Hurston was the only woman writer to enjoy relative success during and after the Harlem Renaissance era. Although the period was dominated by such artists as Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Sterling Brown, and Wallace Thurman, Hurston published nearly a dozen short stories before her first novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine in 1934. Subsequently, she published two collections of folklore, three additional novels, and an autobiography. Her last novel, Seraph on the Suwanee(1948), marked both her attempt to reach a wider audience, and her last major publication during her lifetime. She wrote scores of essays, articles, and reviews, as well, many of which espoused views which made her unpopular among the community of scholars and artists of the time."<sup>9</sup>

After graduating from Barnard College in 1928, Hurston was granted a fellowship and under the inspiration of her teacher, Dr. Franz Boas, spent the next several years doing anthropological research. Traveling throughout the southern states, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean, she learned about conditions in the saw-mills, phosphate mines, turpentine, railroad, and citrus camps. From this, and other aspects of black life including native religions, Hurston gained material for books that accurately described the rural black experience. She was admitted to the American Folklore Society and the American Ethnological Society. During the 1930's she was employed briefly by the WPA and made several attempts at an academic career, including a brief stint in graduate school she was more comfortable as a writer than a scholar. Her former teacher Franz Boas analyzed her work in Mules and Men as follows:

"To the student of cultural history, the material presented is valuable not only by being the Negro's reaction to every day events, to his emotional life, his humor and passions, but it throws into relief also the peculiar amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life, with its strong African background in the West Indies the importance of which diminished with increasing distance from the south."<sup>10</sup>

Jonah's Gourd Vine, published in 1934, was described by one of the New York dailies at the time of its publication as the most "vital and original novel about the American Negro that has yet been written by a member of the Negro Race."<sup>11</sup> In 1935 Hurston published Mules and Men, a book containing folk tales, songs, children's games, as well as the prayers, sermons, and voodoo practices that Hurston had collected. It was called "the most engaging, genuine, and skillfully written book in the field of folklore."<sup>12</sup> Her most successful book, Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

"is the finest expression of Hurston's talent. A beautifully written work, it traces a woman's search for self-fulfillment. Janie Starks dreams of exploring

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life to the fullest, and she resists anything, or anyone, that threatens to encroach upon her dream. An independent, spirited woman, she sees no reason to exchange the oppression of slavery and racism for the vapidness of life on a pedestal. Janie and Tea Cake, her husband, represent the ideal sought by most characters in Hurston's fiction. They trust emotion over intellect, value the spiritual over the material, preserve a sense of humor, and are comfortable with their sensuality. In this novel folklore complements the narrative without overwhelming it."<sup>13</sup>

Alice Walker, noted author of The Color Purple, wrote of Hurston's work:

"condemned to a deserted island for life, with an allotment of ten books to see me through, I would choose unhesitatingly, two of Zora's: Mules and Men because I would need to be able to pass on to the younger generation, the life of American blacks as legend and myth, and Their Eyes Were Watching God, because I would want to enjoy myself while identifying with the black heroine, Janie Crawford, as she acted out many roles in a variety of settings, and functioned (with spectacular results) in romantic and sensual love. There is no book more important to me than this one."<sup>14</sup>

Tell My Horse (1938) was the result of Hurston's study and travels in the Caribbean. She stressed voodoo's religious nature and dignified its worship "removing it from the lurid and sensational association held by the popular mind."<sup>15</sup> In 1939, Moses, Man of the Mountain was published as Hurston attempted to place Moses in an Afro-American tradition instead of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942) told of her early life in Eatonville and gave recognition to many individuals who helped her during her search for an education and knowledge. Her last published novel, Seraph on the Suwanee (1948) involves white characters as she tried to reach a wider audience.

According to Hurston scholar Brenda Robinson Simmons, "Hurston's involvement with humanity transcends the immediate culture about which she wrote. The characteristics which made a person human are useful for all people, although Hurston expertly transcribed her perceptions through the culture she knew best--Black culture. It had been nearly impossible for this perspective to be given any serious consideration until the impetus of the late sixties and the Women's Movement paved the way for a more sensitive reading of Hurston's works. Through a distinctive presentation of Black life and culture, Hurston substantiates a universal, human experience."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to writing novels and short stories, Zora Neale Hurston also worked as a reporter. She covered the famous murder trial of Ruby McCollum for the Pittsburgh Courier in 1952, writing an "extensive and extremely interesting biography of Ruby

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McCollum"<sup>17</sup> afterwards. Both the Courier and Hurston were active in defense efforts and were responsible for investigation by William Bradford Huie and his resulting book.

Hurston appeared to become increasingly conservative in her last years, possibly as a result of the increasingly liberal context of the period in which she lived, rather than a shift in her own views. She refused "to admit that one could both celebrate Afro-American culture and deplore many of the conditions that helped to shape it; and second, she fixed her vision so narrowly on Eatonville, that eventually she came to ignore the multiplicity of the southern black experience."<sup>18</sup> For example, she wrote against the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation decision on the grounds that the judgment implied a pathological stereotype--that "black students could learn only if they sat next to whites,"<sup>19</sup> and that they would be integrated so that black students could be "uplifted" to white standards and a white way of life."<sup>20</sup> She claimed to see the same thinking among Communists. Hurston had pride in black institutions. Her expressed views did not provide popular reading. "I know there is race prejudice, not only in America, but also wherever two races meet together in numbers. I have met it in the flesh, and I have found out that it is never all on one side either,"<sup>21</sup> and "the interest of every individual in any racial group is not identical with others."<sup>22</sup> As historian Paula Giddings wrote,

"Hurston's work was controversial because she neither romanticized Black folk life, nor condemned it, thus falling between two schools of cultural thought. But Their Eyes Were Watching God was one of the purest pieces of fiction published in the period because of its lack of self-consciousness. It was also the most feminist novel. The key to both the novel's integrity and its woman-centeredness was the protagonist's search for identity through her relationship with the Black community rather than White society."<sup>23</sup>

Harold Bloom notes that "Hurston herself was refreshingly free of all the ideologies that currently obscure the reception of her best book. Her sense of power has nothing in common with politics of any persuasion, with contemporary modes of feminism, or even with those questers who search for a black aesthetic."<sup>24</sup>

Hurston never owned a house of her own. She spent her life living in rented apartments, cabins, or places friends found for her. She did try to put down some roots when she purchased a twenty-year-old houseboat in 1943. She rented dock space in Daytona while cruising the Halifax and Indian Rivers; fishing and enjoying nature and solitude while continuing to write. After four years, she sold the houseboat.

In 1957 she moved to Fort Pierce, Florida. Dr. C.C. Benton, a family friend from her childhood in Eatonville, offered her a small two-bedroom house at 1734 School

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Court rent-free. The back bedroom was always full of her papers, books, and typewriter when she lived there, as that was where she worked, sleeping in the front bedroom. Her companion was a white and brown dog named Sport. Outside in the east side yard Hurston always had a garden where she grew things to eat; hot red peppers, beans, peas, onions, and collards. She had a "beautiful flower yard with roses, zinnias, and hibiscus" in front.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Benton would stop by often to talk in the late afternoons. When he would inquire about what she had eaten that day, Hurston would often reply that she had been too busy writing to cook anything; Benton would take her to his large home a few blocks away where she would eat with his family. His daughter, although busy with her family and cooking, remembers thinking that Hurston must have been a typical artist, as she liked to write all the time--even missing meals.

During her last two years Hurston was a reporter and columnist for a local black weekly newspaper, The Chronicle, while continuing to work on her manuscript Herod the Great. She also substituted as an English teacher at Lincoln Park Academy, the black high school. She stressed writing skills, her writings, and their interpretations. Students did not know that she was a famous author until half the school year was over. Neighbors remember her as a "fine looking brown skin woman, easy to talk to, who fit into any group she was with. Zora had a great store of knowledge, but she didn't scorn others because they were ignorant. She herself didn't hide anything if asked. She was very direct, and didn't beat around the bush."<sup>26</sup> C. E. Bolen, owner of the newspaper, stated: "Zora had something in her brain. She was a very wise and witty type of lady-bright. She used fancy words to cuss that I didn't even know. Zora Neale was Zora Neale."<sup>27</sup>

Unable to care for herself after a stroke, and refusing to notify her family, Zora Neale Hurston entered the county welfare home. She died there on January 28, 1960. Writers, college students, professors, reporters, and people from all over the world have already come to School Court to view the home of Zora Neale Hurston. Both white and black children can visit this house and realize that a person doesn't have to come from wealth, or live in a big house to amount to something and become famous. For as Hurston wrote, "It is up to the individual. If you haven't got it, you can't show it. If you have got it, you can't hide it. That is one of the strongest laws God ever made."<sup>28</sup>

The property at 1734 School Court and its association with Zora Neale Hurston is less than fifty years old; however, it more than meets the criteria for exception. For a further discussion of the fifty-year rule and the Zora Neale Hurston House as an exception to this rule, please see the attached appendix "Briefing Sheet on Exceptions to the 50 Year Rule, June 12, 1991."

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- <sup>1</sup>Barbara Melosh, "Women in the Arts: Subtheme essay for Women's History Landmark Project," unpublished manuscript (July 1990), 20-21.
- <sup>2</sup>Melosh, "Women in the Arts," 21.
- <sup>3</sup>Robert E. Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, with a Forward by Alice Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 4.
- <sup>4</sup>Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, xvii-xviii.
- <sup>5</sup>Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography, ed. and with an Introduction by Robert E. Hemenway, Second Edition including Previously Unpublished chapters, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 21.
- <sup>6</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 61.
- <sup>7</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 156.
- <sup>8</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 158.
- <sup>9</sup>Adele Sheron Newson, "An Annotated Bibliography of Critical Response to Zora Neale Hurston (Harlem Renaissance) (Ph. D. diss., Michigan State University, 1986), 135.
- <sup>10</sup>Franz Boas, Preface to Mules and Men by Zora Neale Hurston (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1935 renewed Urbana: Indiana University Press, 1978), 5.
- <sup>11</sup>Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, 249.
- <sup>12</sup>Hemenway, 6.
- <sup>13</sup>Cheryl Wall, "Zora Neale Hurston" in Notable American Women: The Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980, 361-363.
- <sup>14</sup>Alice Walker, Forward to Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, xiii.
- <sup>15</sup>Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, 249.
- <sup>16</sup>Brenda Robinson Simmons, "Humanistic Influences in Two Novels and One Book of Folklore by Zora Neale Hurston", (Ph.D diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1987), 160.

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<sup>17</sup>Hemenway, Zora Neale Hurston, 342.

<sup>18</sup>Hemenway, 333.

<sup>19</sup>Hemenway, 336.

<sup>20</sup>Hemenway, 336.

<sup>21</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 330.

<sup>22</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 328.

<sup>23</sup>Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1985), 193.

<sup>24</sup>Harold Bloom, ed., Introduction to Modern Critical Views: Zora Neale Hurston  
(New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Levi Robinson, interviewed by Lucille Rights, 18 July 1989, Ft. Pierce,  
Florida.

<sup>26</sup>Charles Benton and Hannah Benton, interviewed by Lucille Rights, 18 July 1989,  
Ft. Pierce, Florida.

<sup>27</sup>C. E. Bolen, interviewed by Lucille Rights, 26 June 1989, Ft. Pierce, Florida.

<sup>28</sup>Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 237.

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