Were Their Eyes Watching the Ladies?: The Treatment of African American Women in Harlem Renaissance Literature

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Abstract
I wrote this paper at the conclusion of the course, Literature of the Harlem Renaissance, with Angelo Robinson. I wanted to investigate Nanny's statement in Their Eyes Were Watching God -- the black woman is "the mule of the world" -- in relation to other novels of that period, and in relation to more current musings on the otherwise ignored area where race and gender issues intersect. I have never felt so consumed by a subject as I was with this paper and the research that preceded its writing.
Their Eyes Were Watching God is a 1937 novel by Zora Neale Hurston. It's considered a hallmark of African-American literature, women's literature, and the Harlem Renaissance. At the time of its original release, it was heavily criticized by other African American authors, mainly for its use of phonetic accents for dialogue of the characters and the theme of division between light and dark skinned blacks. Hurston died in relative obscurity, but in modern times her works have been widely studied as a response to the African American people's social conditions. It offered affirmation of their dignity and humanity in the face of their poverty and the racism that had become a part of their everyday lives. - The portrayal of African American women in recent films, has served to highlight the negative stereotyping against them and increase awareness to their plight. The negative stereotyping occurred before the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment, where African Americans were predominantly bought and sold as slaves. In The Bluest Eye, African-Americans function as the ‘Other’, thereby representing everything that white people do not want to be. [tags: african americans, standards, self-esteem]. Better Essays 522 words (1.5 pages). African American women writers have helped bring the black woman's experience to life for millions of readers. They've written of what it was like to live in slavery, what Jim Crow America was like, and what 20th and 21st century America has been like for black women. On the following paragraphs, you'll meet novelists, poets, journalists, playwrights, essayists, social commentators, and feminist theorists. They're listed from the earliest to the latest. Langston Hughes called her a "midwife" of African American literature. Fauset was also the first African-American woman in the United States elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Zora Neale Hurston. Zora Neale Hurston, photo portrait by Carl Van Vechten.