



Traditions & Beliefs

A Quarterly Publication of the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD)

Volume 7, Issue 1



Special Issue!

The 2012 Watching God and Reading Hurston Conference

Dr. Regennia N. Williams, Director

After two years of planning, the Cleveland Chautauqua committee hosted “Watching God and Reading Hurston,” the September 2012 international, interdisciplinary conference. In keeping with Cleveland Chautauqua’s mission, the conference and all related activities celebrated “**Great Ideas, Great Art, and a Great Lake!**” The conference hosts were also pleased to join people around the world in launching the year-long 75th anniversary celebration of the publication of Zora Neale Hurston’s greatest novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Approximately 300 people participated in the conference and related book discussions, choral music workshops, concerts, and other activities. More than 20 performing artists and scholars were among the guest presenters, including Dr. Cheryl A. Wall, the Board of Governors Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English at Rutgers University.

The members of the Cleveland Chautauqua planning committee extend their heartfelt thanks to the Associate Conference Directors, William Hatfield and Martha Archer, graduate students in the Department of History at Cleveland State University, and all of the program sponsors and other friends for their support; and we invite everyone to join us in facilitating on-going discussions about the life, art, and legacy of Zora Neale Hurston and other 20th-century cultural icons.

The 2012 Watching God and Reading Hurston Conference

Dr. Cheryl A. Wall, the Board of Governors Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English at Rutgers University and the keynote speaker for the September 2012 conference, autographs a copy of one of her books, *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition*, for Mrs. June Sallee Antoine.

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Dr. Regennia N. Williams, Founder and Editor | Read more on the Internet!

Website: clevelandmemory.org/pray | Cleveland Chautauqua Blog: rwilliams.csuelearning.org

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD) is seeking contributions for a special issue of

The Journal of Traditions and Beliefs

Dr. Regennia N. Williams
Associate Professor of History
Cleveland State University
and

Dr. Gillian Johns
Associate Professor of English
Oberlin College
Co-Editors for This Special Issue on

Zora Neale Hurston: Art, Religion, and the History of the African Diaspora

Submission of Completed Manuscripts:

March 1, 2013

Notifications Mailed:

July 1, 2013

Publication Date:

December 1, 2013

Email All Manuscripts to:
African.Diaspora@csuohio.edu

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was an anthropologist, a novelist, a folklorist, a playwright, and a history maker in her own right. Hurston was a product of the Harlem Renaissance and is often described as one of the greatest literary artists of the twentieth century. Praised by many for her studies of African-derived religions in the American South, Haiti, and Jamaica, she is most famous for her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and her literary works inspired such writers as Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ishmael Reed, Gloria Naylor, and Jewell Parker Rhodes, among others. (Source: The Official Zora Neale Hurston Website. For more information, please visit <http://www.zoranealehurston.com>).

This scholarly publication is timed to coincide with the year-long 75th anniversary celebration for *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 2012 and 2013, and it is related to the September 2012 “Watching God and Reading Hurston Conference.” **This open-access journal will be published electronically via Digital Commons at Cleveland State University.** For more information on the Hurston Conference, the RASHAD Initiative, and CSU’s Digital Commons / Engaged Scholarship activities, please visit <http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/hurston/>.

Possible paper topics include, but are not limited to, “Literature and Religion,” “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” “African and Neo-African Religion,” “Religion and Spirituality in Hurston’s Life and Art,” and what one writer describes as “The Complex Fate of the God-Driven Black Diaspora Discourse.” ***Established and emerging scholars are encouraged to submit papers.***

Typewritten, double-spaced manuscripts, no more than 30 pages in length (including endnotes), should be prepared using *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (University of Chicago Press, 2007 or later). **Manuscripts submitted for publication will be peer-reviewed.**

BOOK REVIEW

Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica

The *Watching God and Reading Hurston* conference provided numerous insights into Zora Neale Hurston's enduring legacy. Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), and *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1948) are indispensable works. Like all of Hurston's publications, these books combine scholarship, culture, and an account of life's hardships and beauties to create works that stand the test of time.

Because many individuals utilize their religion to explain the circumstances of their lives, knowledge of Voodoo culture is often necessary for humanities scholars whose works focus on African survivals in the Americas. Hurston understood this. As an anthropologist working in Haiti and Jamaica, she threw herself into the local customs and cultures.

For Ishmael Reed and others, Hurston can be seen as one of the proverbial mothers of Voodoo scholarship. Since her passing in 1960, the knowledge and historiography have greatly expanded, but her work is still cited.

In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston wrote, "If you stay in Haiti long enough and really mingle with the people, the time will come when you hear secret societies mentioned." Hurston went on to explore the "possession meetings" that occur in Voodoo, and her descriptions have assisted modern scholars in their quests to document Voodoo culture. Hurston's style of scholarship has provided a model for other works. Among these are Karen McCarthy Brown's groundbreaking study *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Brown embraces Hurston's style by fully immersing herself in Voodoo culture in order to dispel popular myths and stereotypes.

Tell My Horse transcends the boundaries of traditional scholarship and appeals to a popular audience, thus providing a clearer comprehension of Voodoo. Hurston's work cannot be set aside. Voodoo traditions, with roots in West Africa, traveled to the Caribbean and have now spread throughout the Americas, including the United States. Accordingly, the information in *Tell My Horse* and *Dust Tracks on a Road* continues to be relevant for anyone interested in the cultural history of the African Diaspora. Hurston came to understand that Voodoo was more than a "primitive" religion or "witchcraft."

In a presentation for CSU's Hurston conference, Dr. Kathy Curnow explored the influences of religion and spirituality in the works of several African American artists. Like Hurston, Curnow's work seems to suggest that Voodoo and other traditions often influence the artistic expressions of people who have been ignored or misunderstood.

Hurston's works will not be forgotten, because they have much to offer modern scholars. In an era when negative racial stereotypes about African Americans were the norm, she was a pioneer in collecting and using African American folklore as a form of literature and as the basis for much of her scholarship. Hurston provided a voice to people who were often forgotten or neglected. Her legacy must be linked to her ability to give voice to the concerns of those who desperately needed to be heard, celebrated, and remembered.

Historians would do well to follow Hurston's example, since it is imperative to listen to all peoples and appreciate their contributions to our understanding of the world.



Martha Archer,
Associate Director for
"Watching God and
Reading Hurston" and
graduate student in the
Department of History.

Seen and Heard at the 2012 *Watching God and Reading* Hurston Conference



1. Student volunteers from the Cleveland Transfer Connection Office helped staff the registration and information tables. 2. The Rev. Dr. Valentino Lassiter. 3. Dr. Gillian Johns looks on as Dean Gregory Sadlek greets Dr. Cheryl A. Wall. 4. (left to right) Dr. Leslie Wingard, Dr. Babacar M'Baye, Dr. Regennia N. Williams, and Dr. Jennifer Freeman Marshall. 5. Randi Woodson, CSU alumna.



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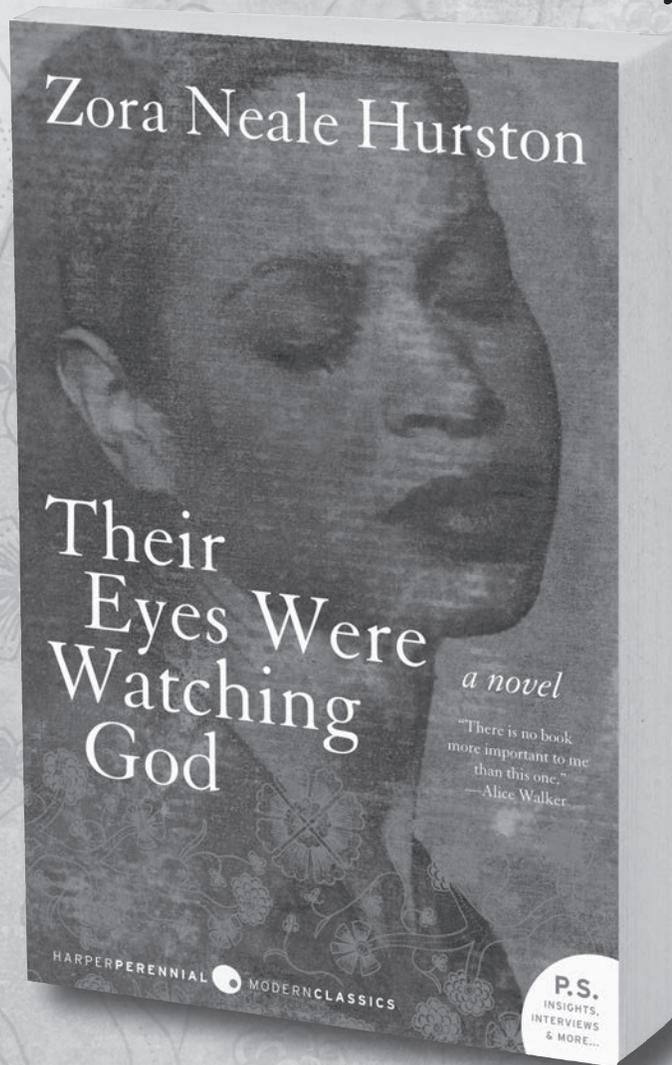
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11.

6. This University Circle, Inc., bus transported conference participants to events at the Cleveland Museum of Art and Case Western Reserve University. 7. Pictured here at the evening presentation at Case Western Reserve University are (left to right) Dr. Rhonda Williams, Dr. Cheryl A. Wall, Dr. Marilyn Mobley, and Prester Pickett, MFA, actor, writer, Coordinator for CSU's African American Cultural Center, and official conference photographer. 8. Dr. Adrienne Gosselin. 9. Dr. Jeff Karem. 10. Dr. Kathy Curnow. 11. Beverly Lloyd (standing).

Celebrate the 75th Anniversary of a Literary Landmark



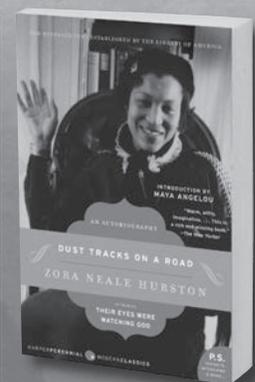
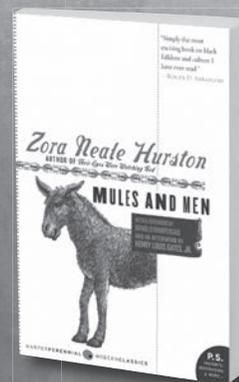
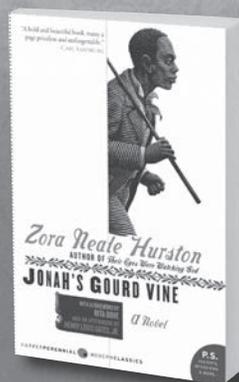
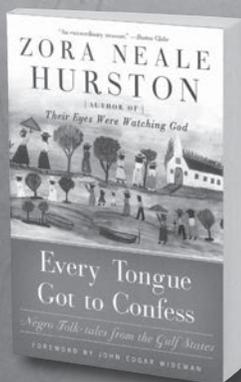
“Her greatest claim over me is that she never was ashamed of the novel as a form—she believed in the transformative power of storytelling, and she took risks with sentiment that few contemporary writers are prepared to make.”

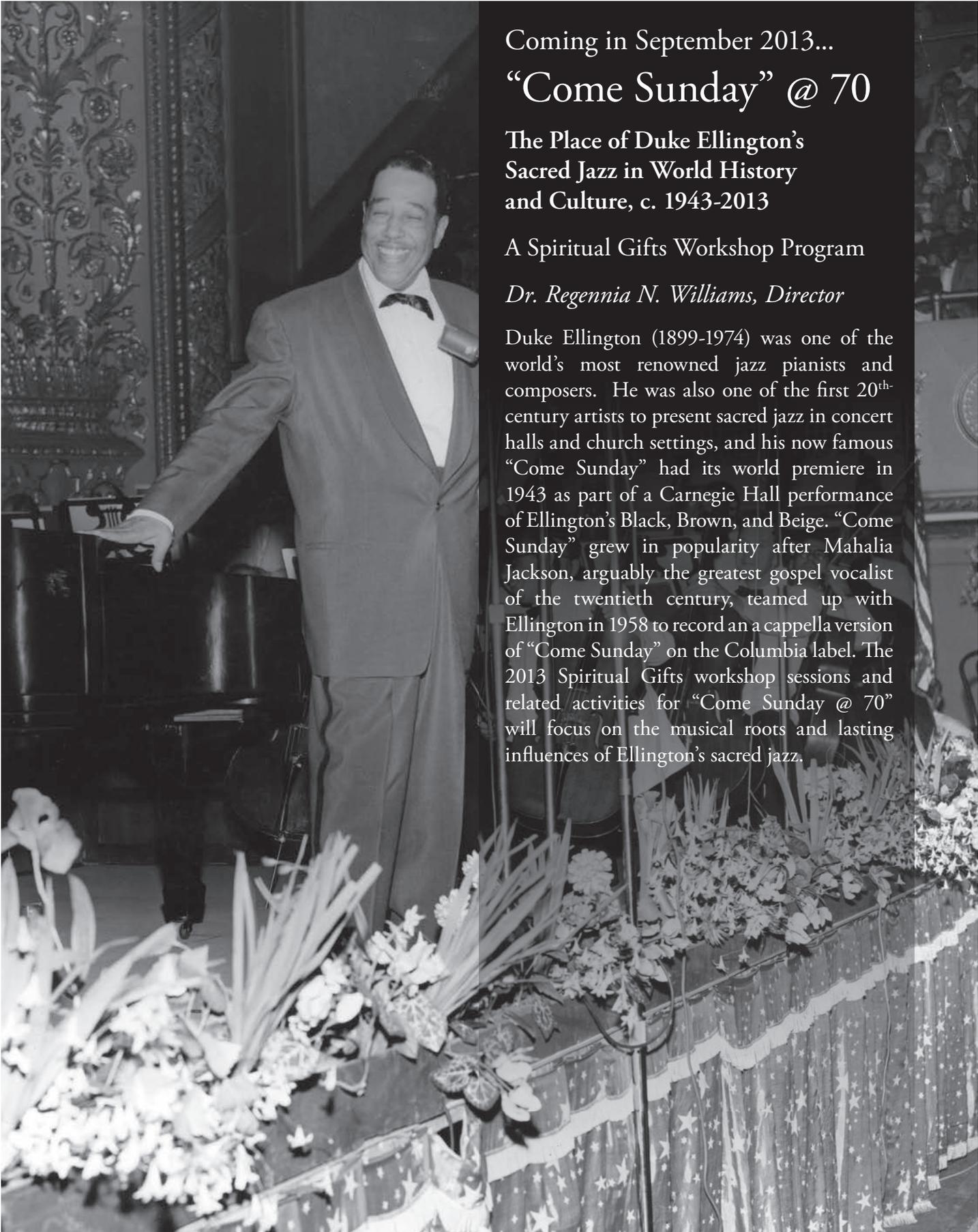
—ZADIE SMITH

“There is no book more important to me than this one. It speaks to me as no novel, past or present, has ever done.”

—ALICE WALKER

For More Books and Resources, visit www.ZoraNealeHurston.com





Coming in September 2013...

“Come Sunday” @ 70

The Place of Duke Ellington’s
Sacred Jazz in World History
and Culture, c. 1943-2013

A Spiritual Gifts Workshop Program

Dr. Regennia N. Williams, Director

Duke Ellington (1899-1974) was one of the world’s most renowned jazz pianists and composers. He was also one of the first 20th-century artists to present sacred jazz in concert halls and church settings, and his now famous “Come Sunday” had its world premiere in 1943 as part of a Carnegie Hall performance of Ellington’s *Black, Brown, and Beige*. “Come Sunday” grew in popularity after Mahalia Jackson, arguably the greatest gospel vocalist of the twentieth century, teamed up with Ellington in 1958 to record an a cappella version of “Come Sunday” on the Columbia label. The 2013 Spiritual Gifts workshop sessions and related activities for “Come Sunday @ 70” will focus on the musical roots and lasting influences of Ellington’s sacred jazz.

Duke Ellington in Cleveland, Ohio (1960). Photographer: James Gale. Courtesy of the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, CSU.

RASHAD

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ON CAMPUS AND ON THE ROAD

Available on the Internet: The recently updated Zora Neale Hurston Research Guide. For more information, please visit <http://researchguides.csuohio.edu/hurston>.



Regennia N. Williams and William Hatfield, Director and Associate Director for Watching God and Reading Hurston, after the September 13th discussion of Their Eyes Were Watching God. The Friends of CSU's Michael Schwartz Library hosted this event.



Dr. James H. Cone, internationally known expert on Black Liberation Theology, and Dr. Regennia N. Williams at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, November 18, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. The AAR devoted three conference sessions to discussions focusing on the lasting impact of Dr. Cone's scholarship, including The Cross and the Lynching Tree (2011), his most recent book.

Non-Discrimination Statement - Cleveland State University is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in employment and education. No person at the university will be denied opportunity for employment or education or be subject to discrimination in any project, program, or activity because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, disability, disabled veteran, Vietnam era veteran or other protected veteran status.