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A “Look Out Over...the World as Far as I Can See”:

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Barracoon* and the Socio-Political Act of African-American Anthropology

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In 1935, Zora Neale Hurston—now recognized as a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance era that inherently transformed the literary landscape for the Black community across the United States—published *Mules and Men*, in time lauded for not only preserving the African-American folklore that “[f]ew Americans, white or black, believed in the value of” (Wall 15) but also for her work in highlighting the diversity of the Black experience. In doing so, she asserted the value of amplifying Black voices, necessary in recording the stories of their ancestral past passed down as part of the oral storytelling tradition but also the histories of early Black communities and peoples that would otherwise have been lost to the world. Therefore, deeply committed to combatting the tradition of cultural erasure by recording the stories of the folk she encountered along the coast, from Baltimore to Florida, until her death in 1960, Hurston used her “spyglass of Anthropology” (*Mules* 9) to “look out over...the world as far as [she] can see” (*Dust* 667). This proposed paper will examine Hurston’s recently published *Barracoon* as part of this important anthropological tradition alongside her work with the Federal Writers Project and her recording of Black folklore in texts such as *Tell My Horse* and *Mules and Men*. By examining these works in conversation as part of a social and political act aimed at cultural preservation (in a society that too often worked to silence Black voices and erase that African-American past), we can reach a better understanding of what Deborah G. Plant described as “an argument against such notions of cultural inferiority and white supremacy” and “a counternarrative that invites us to break our collective silence about slaves and slavery” (159).

#### Works Cited

- Hurston, Zora Neale. “*Dust Tracks on the Road*.” *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, edited by Cheryl A. Wall, Library of America, 1995, pp. 561-808.
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- Wall, Cheryl A. *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2016.