

# American MASTERS

thirteen  
WNET NEW YORK

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## press information



PBS

AMERICAN MASTERS  
is produced for PBS  
by Thirteen/WNET  
New York

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S AMERICAN MASTERS EXPLORES THE  
INDOMITABLE SPIRIT OF A BRASH FLORIDA AUTHOR AND INTELLECTUAL IN  
**ZORA NEALE HURSTON: JUMP AT THE SUN, PREMIERING WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9 AT  
9 P.M. (ET) ON PBS**

Film Includes Rare Archival Footage From Hurston's Own Collection, And Features Interviews With  
Alice Walker, Dorothy West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Maya Angelou And Others.

Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry.  
It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company!  
It's beyond me.

- Zora Neale Hurston

Writer. Cultural anthropologist. Chronicler of folk roots and ethnic traditions. Daughter of a former  
slave. The first black graduate of Barnard. Zora Neale Hurston attained unique success in many areas,  
but during her lifetime her words and conclusions were often surrounded in contention. A flamboyant  
and gregarious woman, she was called unpredictable, outrageous, bodacious. She collaborated with  
Langston Hughes, was criticized by Richard Wright and ultimately died a pauper's death in total  
obscurity. Resurrected by Alice Walker, who journeyed to Hurston's gravesite in 1975 after reading a  
dog-eared copy of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston is now considered a lioness of African-  
American literature. Her works *Dust Tracks on a Road* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are  
essential reading in American classrooms today.

The life of one of the most celebrated - and most controversial - voices of the 1920s Harlem  
Renaissance is profiled when *AMERICAN MASTERS Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun*

- more -

premieres Wednesday, April 9 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings).

“Hurston was truly a maverick,” said Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*. “As a black woman in the early 20th century, her accomplishments certainly defied the norm. She was unafraid to speak her mind, even when her opinions alienated peers. That fearlessness, along with her gift as an incredible storyteller, defines the legacy of this truly remarkable American woman.”

Hurston grew up the mayor's daughter in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated all-black town in America. Her books, plays and short stories embraced small town black Southern life, where the oral tradition of telling tales played out in high drama on front porches and in back yards. Trained as an anthropologist, Hurston was prescient in anticipating the importance of black culture in shaping modern and popular American culture. Along with Alan Lomax during the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935, she recorded folktales, narratives and music from coastal Georgia into Florida and, later, in the Caribbean and Central America. *Jump at the Sun* features original footage she filmed during these expeditions.

A bootstrap Republican and conservative, Hurston became increasingly out of step with contemporary black thought, moving to the right while most of black America moved into the Democratic party. Focusing only on what blacks accomplished without government assistance, she opposed welfare and forced integration, believing special treatment was demeaning. At the very height of Jim Crow, segregation and lynchings, she refuted the notion that blacks were victims. White readers loved her romantic depictions of the old South, but black intellectuals - including race champion Richard Wright - trashed them for their blind eye to racism.

In addition to Hurston's original anthropological recordings, *Jump at the Sun* includes rare archival film footage of the rural South, and interviews with Alice Walker, Dorothy West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Maya Angelou, and individuals who knew Hurston personally. The film also features dramatic re-enactments of Hurston's 1943 radio interview by actress Kim

Brockington, who also portrays her in an acclaimed one-woman show *Zora*.

“Everyone we talked to about *Zora* described how she left a lasting impression, even in the briefest conversation,” said producer Kristy Andersen. “If they didn't agree with her, she'd always explain herself and they'd end up seeing her point of view. So she may not have had the pulpit, but she was remembered as a great orator. And it's her voice we're trying to present in our film.”

*AMERICAN MASTERS* is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. The film, a co-production with Bay Bottom News in Tampa, is produced by Kristy Andersen and directed by Sam Pollard. Narrator is S. Epatha Merkerson. Susan Lacy is the creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*. To take *AMERICAN MASTERS* beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories, and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site ([www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters)), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources.

*AMERICAN MASTERS* is made possible by the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding for *AMERICAN MASTERS* is provided by Rosalind P. Walter, The Blanche & Irving Laurie Foundation, Jack Rudin, The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation, and public television viewers. Additional funding for *Jump at the Sun* is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Ford Foundation, Southern Humanities Media Fund, Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Maryland Humanities Council, National Black Programming Consortium, Humanities Council South Carolina and New York Council for the Humanities. More information about *AMERICAN MASTERS* can be found at: [www.pbs.org/americanmasters](http://www.pbs.org/americanmasters).

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