

A Kaleidoscope Of Programs Salutes Blacks In America

World of Books



By Dottie Butler

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing...And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean And Impressive, edited by Alice Walker, is an anthology of fourteen works written by Zora Neale Hurston, the only significant female writer of the Harlem Renaissance. This collection includes Hurston's major contributions to American literature, among them excerpts from *Dust Tracks on a Road*, *Mules and Men*, *Tell My Horse*, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Several essays are also included - "How It Feels To Be Colored Me," "The 'Pet' Negro Experience," and "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience." In all of Hurston's writing, she exposes herself and her thoughts about life. Always the center of controversy and criticism, Hurston and her work were probably most misunderstood because of their honesty and frankness. In a review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Richard Wright wrote that the novel "carries no theme, no message, no thought;" it is just a "minstrel technique" to make white folks laugh. Little did he know that Hurston was writing about a black woman's search for identity which had been thwarted by her first two husbands' attempts to make her subservient. She was writing about a black woman's attempt to throw off false images forced upon her by a society which neither allowed her to live naturally nor freely. She was writing about "rollicking" with the springtime across the world." And as she liked to do throughout her writings, she represented blacks as they lived, apart from racism - as laughing, celebrating, loving, struggling people.

As she wrote in her controversial essay "How It Feels To Be Colored Me,"

Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world - I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Extremely proud of herself and her color, Hurston lived, loved and exalted blackness. "How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me." No anger, no remorse, but joy in being colored!

Born in poverty in Eatonville, Florida, an all-black town, Hurston's passion for creativity was encouraged by her mother who died when Zora was nine years old. This trait lived with her throughout life while she studied at Morgan State College, Howard University and Barnard College where she studied anthropology. This was the beginning of her interest in folklore and subsequent realization that writing was her first love.

Hurston lived a life of poverty and died penniless in a nursing home in Florida. But she was determined to be a great writer and earned the place her mother meant her to occupy when she urged Zora to "jump at de sun."

Zora lives on in this Zora Neale Hurston reader. It is the perfect beginning for anyone unfamiliar with this astounding author's works. May it serve as a starting point to whet one's appetite while thirsting to read more.

From Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee to Billie Holiday and Betty Carter; from the memory-laden streets of Harlem to the baseball diamonds of yesterday's Negro leagues -- the contributions and culture of blacks in America are highlighted on the UNC Center for Public Television.



February 15 (Premiere)

7:00 p.m. - With Ossie & Ruby. This 13-part series is a television anthology of music, dance, drama and comedy. Hosted by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, who also conceived and wrote the series, the programs will celebrate and pay tribute to the wide spectrum of America's multi-cultural heritage through a diverse format.

With Ossie & Ruby also features profiles and vignettes of some very special people. One segment, for example, profiles Mother Hale, a Harlem woman who has devoted her life to rearing orphans addicted to drugs. Another show spotlights the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, a dramatic group of young actors that has become one of the most respected repertory troupes in New York, and offers a character study of the force behind the group's success, actress Miriam Colon. Among other guests scheduled for the series are actress Butterfly McQueen, poet Sterling Brown, author James Baldwin, playwright Sammart Williams, Della Reese and former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young.

A major emphasis of the series is to introduce American television audiences to little-known

minority and ethnic writers, performers and artists. "We're reaching backward to the tradition of the storyteller," explains Davis, "to affirm human values and the human spirit." "In other words," adds Ms. Dee, "we're going to share with our audience the poems, stories and music that have meant the most to us. This show's about the fun, adventure and struggle of life. It's about spirit, soul and heart."

February 16

9:00 p.m. - To Be Young, Gifted And Black. When Lorraine Hansberry died in 1965 at the age of 34, her plays had already won her international acclaim. Her career was on the rise. "A Raisin in the Sun" won her the New York Drama Critics Circle Play of the Year Award in 1959, and subsequently was made into a major motion picture. Understanding that her life was inextricably connected to her art, Robert

played baseball in the Negro leagues.

Through archival film footage, vintage photographs and colorful interviews with former Negro league players, Only The Ball Was White sensitively reminisces about the game, the men and the times. Paul Winfield narrates this program.

February 18

10:00 - The World Of My America. Three hundred years of black history and heritage are dramatized in a one-woman performance special, The World Of My America, which will premiere Wednesday, February 18 at 10:00 p.m. Veteran actress Pauline Myers creates a pageant of characters for the role, springing from the writings of Frederick Douglass and the works of black poets Langston Hughes, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Raymond Patterson.

Beginning with the era of slavery and moving through to the present day, Pauline Myers' "world" emerges as she portrays over 30 different characters from all walks of black life.

February 25

10:00 - The Black Dyad. Deriving its title from a Greek word meaning "pair," The Black Dyad is an Emmy Award-winning drama which takes a witty, knowing look at contemporary male/female relationships, as seen through the eyes of two "dyads."

The Black Dyad, premiering nationally Wednesday, February 25 at 10:00 p.m., uses a series of eight vignettes to explore unresolved conflicts and confrontations experienced by and between men and women. Each scene depicts some variation on the themes of love, insecurity, guilt, rejection and commit-

ment. This hour-long drama, taped before a live studio audience, has the four actors speak directly to the group, inviting them to share common emotional reactions to familiar situations played out on stage.

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Skyy To Earth

Salsoul recording group Skyy may be cosmic and other-worldly oriented, but there are still some things they are tied down to earth about.

Lead singer, songwriter and co-producer Solomon Roberts, Jr. recounts one very humanoid incident. "Last year, Skyy played the Felt Forum in New York, and had to leave immediately afterwards for a show in Washington, D.C. We packed up the crew and equipment and headed off for the airport, arriving in plenty of time to set up. It wasn't until shortly before show time that we realized we had left our stage costumes at the Felt Forum! We spent hours trying to make arrangements to get them flown to D.C. in time

for the curtain to go up. We finally had to give up when we figured it would take a half hour to get to the airport to retrieve the clothes -- and we were due on stage in 15 minutes."

How did Skyy solve the dilemma? "Luckily, we all had our Skyy promotional jackets with us, so we performed that night in blue jeans and satin jackets instead of our astral outfits. The audience thought we had gone pink! But let me tell you, it was one of our hottest concerts to date."

"Next time we play Washington," concludes Solomon, "we are going to travel to the gig in our costumes just to make sure we've got them. I just hope we don't lose the equipment instead!"

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