

Hurston and Haiti

The United States military occupation of Haiti begun in 1915 brought Haiti dramatically to the consciousness of African Americans who perceived the event as another manifestation of American racism. The occupation continued to 1934. It became a major issue for the NAACP, founded in 1910, and awareness of Haiti was prominent during the Harlem Renaissance. One of the principal mentors of the Harlem Renaissance, personally admired by Zora Neale Hurston, was James Weldon Johnson. Shortly after he became secretary of the NAACP, in 1920, Johnson went to Haiti for several weeks. His findings were recorded in a series of four articles in the The Nation magazine under the title "Self-Determining Haiti: The American Occupation."

Hurston's awareness of Haiti would have been constantly refreshed throughout the twenties, and at the end of the decade as she undertook her field research in African American folklore, a book by W. B. Seabrook, The Magic Island (1929), appeared with its sensational presentation of Haitian voodoo. Her own Southern research was absorbed by the presence of spiritualism reflected in her account Mules and Men (1935) in which the second half is entitled "Hoodoo."