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Suffering and Survival in Black American Literature. Zora Neale Hurston's "Dust Tracks on a Road"

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Dust Tracks on a Road: Survival Through Cultural Roots

Empowering the African cultural heritage is a frequent theme in Zora Neale Hurston's fiction. According to her, the cultural heritage is not something stagnant or inert; it continues to affect her black folks in the present and the future. Therefore, as she always believes, it is necessary for black Americans to turn to their African roots to inspire strength and guidance. Hurston's approach to the cultural heritage coincides with Diane Barthel-Bouchier's belief that heritage can be used as a way of life in order to attain sustainability. To Barthel-Bouchier, cultural heritage is a "living history incorporating social process of both continuity and change" (9). Indeed, Hurston's fiction is an attempt to make African culture serve life. Her novels and short stories can be read as endeavors to transform the perception of the African roots in the African Americans' psyche from a stain that needs to be washed out into a powerful force that can uphold the whole Afro-American community.

Like most of her works, Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, for which she won the Anis field-Wolf Book Award in 1943, portrays the importance of recognizing one's cultural roots. As Christy Rishoi states, Hurston's autobiography "expressly details and celebrates black community and culture" (120). But the main issue for Hurston is not only to celebrate the richness of the Afro-American culture, but more importantly, to realize the best use of it. *Dust Tracks* mainly highlights the necessity of embracing and empowering one's cultural legacy.

Historically, the Afro-American autobiography writing, as a genre, is rooted in slave narrative which is colored by a collective social outlook rather than a personal perspective because the black writer identifies himself or herself