

Race in america in the souls of black folk, how it feels to be colored me, and re...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Many authors explain being black and the issues of race in America differently. Authors like W. E. B Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison all use different types of narration, point-of view, and engagement with historical context to touch base with the issues of race in America.

W. E. B Du Bois was a scholar and activist who became the first African American to earn a Ph. D. from Harvard University. Du Bois is most known for his writing and was a spokesperson for African American rights during the first half of the 20th century. One of Du Bois's well known works is *The Souls of Black Folk* which is a work of American literature published in 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk* is composed of chapters that bring attention to issues of race in America. A chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* include "Of Our Spiritual Strivings". The chapter opens up with a poem by Arthur Symons, "The Crying of Water". Below the poem is a fragment of a Negro song. A connection between the poem and the song is that the poem was written by a white person and the song was created and sung by Negro people. The putting of the poem and the song ties into the chapter, as Du Bois explains how powerless blacks feel in America and how society treats blacks differently from others. The putting of the poem and the song also shows how similar the poem and the Negro songs are. Du Bois is trying to explain that these two races have similarities and are not so different from one another after all. Another connection between the poem and the song is that they both carry the same sort of message, which shows that these are human issues, not just black people issues. We humans all have the same sort of issues no matter what the color of our skin is. In this chapter Du Bois explains that the one question white people always want to ask Negroes is "

How does it feel to be a problem?”. Du Bois first became aware that he was a “problem” when a white girl in his elementary classroom did not want to exchange cards with him because he was black. This experience made him realize that he was different in a world full of white people, this being said, as Du Bois stated “The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,- refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others” (Du Bois 921). Du Bois tells the story of race in America from his own experiences and tribulations. The story is told through first person point of view and we as readers get an inside look into how a Negro person in America gets through life every day and all the challenges that come with it due to racist white people.

Zora Neale Hurston was an American author. She portrayed racial struggles in the early 20th century. One of Hurston’s well known works is “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” which was published in 1927. In the work of literature, Hurston describes her experiences as a colored person in America. We as readers get to see exactly how she felt and all the experiences she faced as the work of literature is told through the first person point of view as well. She explains that she always felt normal and just like all Americans until her thirteenth year of life, which was when she “became colored”. Hurston, even though treated differently due to skin color, does not let that bring her down or make her feel ashamed that she is a Negro. She is proud of who she is and will not make any excuses to make up for her “differences”, this being said, as Hurston states “But I am not tragically

colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all” (Hurstun 534). Hurstun tells her story of how she grew up in a full Negro community in Florida. She did not feel colored until she turned 13 years old which is when she and her family moved to another city in Florida, where the community was very different compared to the community of her hometown. In this new city is where she became the “ little colored girl”. Hurstun notes that she does not always feel colored, but she feels it in most places like the college she attends due to the large amount of white students. Hurstun’s mental strength is shown when she states “ 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?” (Hurstun 536). This shows, that no matter how “ colored” she may feel and how society has failed her and so many other Negroes in America, she does not let that bring her down. It almost brings her up and makes her stronger as a person and as a woman. A metaphor Hurstun uses in comparing herself and her race versus others is when she states “ I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red, and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless” (Hurstun 536). After the metaphor, Hurstun goes on to describe the contents of the bag and how they’re all similar in all the different colored bags. Through this it is evident that Hurstun’s message is that no matter what color the bag is, the contents inside are very similar. No matter the skin color of a person, all people of all colors share similar thoughts, emotions, and memories.

Toni Morrison is an American novelist. Her novels are known for giving details of African American characters, as she is an African American as well. One of Morrisson's well known works is "Recitatif" which was published in 1983. In the fictional story, there are two main characters named Twyla and Roberta. We as readers learn that both girls live in an orphanage due to the fact that their mothers are not fit to care for them. Twyla is told that her mother danced all night and Roberta is told that her mother is sick. The relationship between the two girls did not start off on a good note as Twyla the narrator reveals, "It was one thing to be taken out of your own bed early in the morning- it was something else to be stuck in a strange place with a girl from a whole other race" (Morrison 606). It is through this that we learn the girls are completely different races. In this story Morrison uses fictional characters to depict the issue of race. Morrison tells a story of two girls, one white and one black. Even though we know all about the girls and their lives, we never really find out which character is white and which character is black. Morrison through the use of narration, plays with the reader's mind as she secretly and discreetly inserts things she knows people will make assumptions about when it comes to race. Basically, the characters in the story have characteristics that could be each race, but we are never entirely sure. An example of this would be "Her own hair was so big and wild I could hardly see her face" (Morrison 610). Immediately after reading this, us readers seem to picture Roberta as black due to her "big" hair. Another example would be "Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the tragedy lining- to shake hands, I guess. Roberta's mother looked down at me and then looked down at Mary too. She

didn't say anything, just grabbed Roberta with her Bible-free hand and stepped out of line, walking quickly to the rear of it" (Morrison 610). After reading this, us as readers seem to picture Twyla and her mother as black, due to the fact that Roberta's mother did not want to shake Twyla's mothers hand at all. This story takes place during the 50s and during this time, most white people did not want to touch or talk to a Negro person at all.

Throughout the entire story, we assume that one girl could be one race but we are never exactly sure. Morrison does this to show that we are all equal no matter our skin color. By having the reader almost guess who is the black character and who is white character helps to prove that we are all equal. Twyla could be black or Twyla could be white and same goes for Roberta, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter because a color does not define a human being. Even though this is a fictional story, we as readers get the reality of ourselves as we stereotype against African Americans. It opens up our minds as we realize that African Americans are judged and stereotyped by the rest of Americans every day and we realize we are the ones who feed into those judgements and stereotypes.

Many authors like W. E. B DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison, explain being black and the issues of race in America differently. All these authors all use different types of narration, point-of view, and engagement to touch base with the issues of race in America. In " Of Our Spiritual Striving" and " How It Feels To Be Colored Me" we as readers get an inside look into how Negro people of America are treated and how the treatment they receive affects them mentally due to the narration and first person point of

view. In "Recitatif" we as readers get to know ourselves as we stereotype against African Americans. It opens up our minds to realize that African Americans are judged and stereotyped by the rest of Americans every day and we are included in those who feed into those judgements and stereotypes. These works and their authors are important to understand the United State's cultural history as we see that these works of literature were written years ago, yet issues of race are still a part of our society and remain unchanged.