

The theme in how it
feels to be colored
me



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Maya Angelou said: “ we all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.” In *How It Feels to Be Colored Me* Zora Neale Hurston toys with the idea that one may be able to channel an inner awareness acknowledging that one may embody two selves, two spiritual beings. Throughout the years, African Americans have faced injustice and unfortunately still do present day. Some carry the anger of slavery that their ancestors faced; some hide behind that anger and project their emotions differently.

Some are able to project a double consciousness of who they are and some find the strength and self-confidence to embrace individuality in their African American heritage. Hurston does just that, but identifies herself with the human race, rather than solely the race associated with the color of her skin. She states that she “ has no separate feeling about being an American citizen and color” (Hurston 3). Illuminating the fact that despite events and beliefs that surround her, she is confident and finds comfort in who she is: “ I am merely a fragment of the Great Souls that surges within the boundaries” (Hurston 3).

In *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*, Zora Neale Hurston presents the capacity of harboring strength and utilizing it for control in claiming who you are despite outer influences from those surrounding you. In her essay *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*, Hurston speaks of her memory as a thirteen years old growing up in Eatonville, Florida. Very subtly she highlights events, memories from the “ very day [she] became colored”(Hurston 1). Living in an exclusively colored town she noted that the only time white people would

pass by was on their travels to and from Orlando. She describes the interactions between the whites passing by and the town's people of Eatonville, highlighting the difference between the Southerners and Northerners. She notes that interaction with them seldom occurred, "they were peered at cautiously from behind curtains by the timid. The more venturesome would come out on the porch to watch them go past" (Hurston 1). A formal connection never made between the two, except for the ones that Hurston initiated. She did not see any differences between her and the white people passing through town, in fact she even spoke to them. But, "if one of [her] family happened to come to the front in to see [her], of course negotiations would be rudely broken off" (Hurston 1).

She acknowledges the differences between her family and herself partaking in social exchanges with whites, but never gives off any ideas or hints that she is ashamed of whom she is or the community that she and her loved ones embody. Zora Neale Hurston has worked on ethnographic texts that have given authors and researchers a more in depth perception on African Americans and all Americans living amongst one another (Lori Jirousek). Hurston states in her essay that she is "not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all" (Hurston 2). Using ethnographic context from Hurston, analyzers have been able to conclude that through *How It Feels to Be Colored Me* Hurston, "attempts to transcend race and avoid victim status", "has an individualistic standpoint that not only emphasizes her own self-determination and self-definition, but also promotes those same qualities in

others” and develops “ a new definition of community that challenges [...] boundedness of such categories as race and nation” (Jirousek).

Hurston illuminates the mere fact that what others may think or say about ones skin color cannot make one feel less than or inferior or unless he or she lets it. She does not let the mere fact that she is black belittle her in any shape or form. She grabs racism by the horns when stating “ At certain times, I have no race, I am me” (Hurston 3). Her ability to channel self-confidence is what allows her to transcend race and its rubbish tendencies, develop and urgency towards self-definition and breaks the barriers between stereotypical sense of belonging between race and nations. Stating that she does “ feel discriminated against, but it does not make [her] angry. It merely astonishes [her]” (Hurston 3). She continues to capitalize and assert her confidence in one sentence: “ How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me” (Hurston 3).

Hurston worked on the establishment of “ national coherence and solidarity” (Jirousek) by providing the shared relationship between an individual and their nation, something she broke through in her essay How It Feels to Be Colored Me. United States in the 1920’s was an era of injustice. Filled with many wrong doings on certain groups of people. Hurston alludes that she does not view herself any differently than her neighbor, “[she] has no separate feeling about being American and colored” (Hurston 3) as stated previously. She decided to not let outer influences have a say in the image she wants to create for herself and share with the world. She dives into her ancestry stating: “ Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery <https://assignbuster.com/the-theme-in-how-it-feels-to-be-colored-me/>

is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you (Hurston 2). The strength and resilience she embodies is what gives her the strength to look past that and recognize that she is equal to her fellow Americans no matter her the color of her skin or her ancestry.