

Zora neale hurston – sense of self essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



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In the essay “ How It Feels to Be Colored Me” Zora Neale Hurston recalls her upbringing in an all black town, and her move to a mostly white town in the heart of racist Alabama. The author is exposed to racism and through the interaction school of symbolic interaction; she feels above the ignorance of society and negotiates her sense of self as a woman rather than as a colored person. The interaction school describes how the author has an active role in deciding who she is. When colored people Hurston knows are shaping his or her sense of self around their perceived race identity, she doesn't follow their lead and shapes her own identity.

Hurston had lived in an all colored town but had never thought twice about whether she was any different than the white people that rode through her small Florida town. She thought “ white people differed from colored people to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there” (36).

Hurston's fellow African American neighbors were suspicious of northern white people but did not deem the local white people to merit a single glance when they passed. The specific results of racism are what concern Hurston. The interaction school of symbolic interaction applies here as Hurston chooses to interact with white people passing through the town as if they were no different. All of the other people in Eatonville, Florida distance themselves from the whites that pass through, but Hurston interacts with them as is they are no different than her neighbors in her eyes.

Hurston says, “ I remember the very day that I became colored.” Up until she was thirteen years old, Hurston had never been exposed to the idea of racism. She left for school in Jacksonville, Mississippi. For the first time, Zora Neale Hurston was exposed to the racism that was not found in her small

hometown. Hurston states that “ Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me” (37). The author finally realizes what racism is, and that it is a very powerful force. But she comes to the conclusion that racism doesn't bother her. “ But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes” (36), here Hurston shows that her race does not bother her. The interaction school applies here because Hurston is exposed to racism, but does not let it affect her sense of self.

One result she sees is the loss of cultural pride. Being the “ only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief” (35) exemplifies her sorrow that members of her own race are not able to feel the pride and joy that she does in celebrating her heritage. She decides that because she cannot fit in with this group, she decides to define herself as a Woman rather than an African American. This is a fine example of the concept of Symbolic Interaction. She feels that she fits in better with women as a group, than colored people. Hurston decides not to distance herself from her African American culture, and decides to define herself as a woman. She states, “ I belong to no race nor time” (38).

Hurston feels that race does not affect the person that she is. Hurston uses an analogy to describe that inside people are all the same. She states that, “ 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! It's beyond me” (38). This quote shows that Hurston is above racism. She realizes that it is there and chooses not to let it influence her

sense of self. She decides who she ultimately is and chooses not to let race influence her decision.