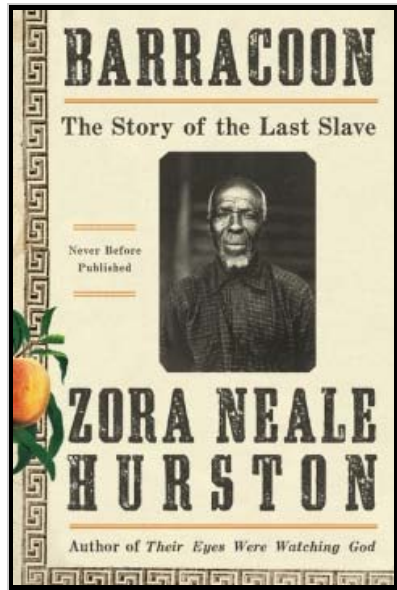


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 Barracoon



Barracoon

The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"
by Zora Neale Hurston, Deborah G. Plant

Price: \$24.99(Hardcover)
 Published: May 08, 2018

★★★★★
 Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: A major literary event: a never-before-published work from the author of the American classic *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that brilliantly illuminates the horror and injustices of slavery as it tells the true story of one of the last known survivors of the Atlantic slave trade—abducted from Africa on the last "Black Cargo" ship to arrive in the United States. In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston went to Plateau, Alabama, just outside Mobile, to interview eighty-six-year-old Cudjo Lewis. Of the millions of men, women, and children transported from Africa to America as slaves, Cudjo was then the only person alive to tell the story of this integral part of the nation's history. Hurston was there to record Cudjo's firsthand account of the raid that led to his capture and bondage fifty years after the Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in the United States. In 1931, Hurston returned to Plateau, the African-centric community three miles from Mobile founded by Cudjo and other former slaves from his ship. Spending more than three months there, she talked in depth with Cudjo about the details of his life. During those weeks, the young writer and the elderly once enslaved man ate peaches and watermelon that grew in the backyard and talked about Cudjo's past—memories from his childhood in Africa, the horrors of being captured and held in a barracoon for selection by American slavers, the harrowing experience of the Middle Passage packed with more than 100 other souls aboard the *Clotilda*, and the years he spent in slavery until the end of the Civil War. Based on those interviews, featuring Cudjo's unique vernacular, and written from Hurston's perspective with the compassion and singular style that have made her one of the preeminent American authors of the twentieth-century, *Barracoon* brilliantly illuminates the tragedy of slavery and of one life forever defined by it. Offering insight into the pernicious legacy that continues to haunt us all, black and white, this poignant and powerful work is an invaluable contribution to our shared history and culture.

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About The Author

Zora Neale Hurston, Deborah G. Plant










Zora Neale Hurston, the author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was deemed "one of the greatest writers of our time" by Toni Morrison. With the publication of *Lies and Other Tall Tales*, *The Skull Talks Back*, and *What's the Hurry, Fox?* new generations will be introduced to Hurston's legacy. She was born in Notasulga, Alabama, in 1891, and died in 1960.

Release Info

List Price: \$24.99 (Hardcover)
Published: May 08, 2018
Publisher: Amistad
Pages: 208
ISBN 10: 0062748203
ISBN 13: 9780062748201

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What We Say

This singular work of biography, cultural history and witnessing reminds us that writer Zora Neale Hurston was not just a brilliant author but also an ethnographer and esteemed collector of folk tales. This book shows her the respect of detailing the genesis of "Barracoon" (both good and ill) while providing the historical context essential to such a document. Hurston went to Alabama to speak with a man known as Cudjo Lewis, but whom she respectfully calls Kossola. He was almost unique among once enslaved people -- Kossola was able to tell his story from life in Africa to the Middle Passage to enslavement in the US and freedom after the Civil War, right on down to the injustice meted out to black people long after their freedom was first dangled as a possibility. That journey is preserved here by an empathetic listener. "Barracoon" also documents the plagiarism that Hurston's initial piece about Kossola contained, keeping it in the context of why and how it might have occurred and how it never appeared again throughout her lengthy and distinguished career. Then comes the main narrative that Hurston captured after returning to Alabama and spending months nearby, slowly winning Kossola's trust and thus gathering essential details rarely if ever captured. Footnotes explain certain claims Hurston made with the best available information at the time and why scholars now make new judgements in certain areas and confirm her judgement in others. Hurston told Lewis's story in his voice and went to great lengths to back it up with facts from other sources; that work continues here. His journey is an atypical "slave narrative," explaining the warring peoples in Africa and how one group might sell another into bondage. (Are we surprised that England and France warred for centuries and often despised each other? So why is it surprising in Africa? It too is a continent filled with diverse civilizations, after all.) Kossola's mournful, sometimes humorous voice comes through, along with Hurston's passion for the stories he digresses into, not to mention the cruelty of the court system and life in general for black people long after Reconstruction was abandoned by the government and betrayed by the South. It is not a gripping story the way many slave narratives are, with their dramatic beats, heroic escapes and triumphs over evil crafted to win sympathy. This is history, with all its complications and refusal to tie up a story in a neat bow. It won't satisfy the casual reader looking for thrills. But it's an important addition to the work of Hurston and our knowledge of the lives uprooted by the slave trade. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

"Zora Neale Hurston's genius has once again produced a Maestrapiece." (Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Color Purple*) "That Zora Neale Hurston should find and befriend Cudjo Lewis, the last living man with firsthand memory of capture in Africa and captivity in Alabama, is nothing shy of a miracle. Barracoon is a testament to the enormous losses millions of men, women and children endured in both slavery and freedom—a story of urgent relevance to every American, everywhere." (Tracy K. Smith, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Life on Mars and Wade in the Water*) "Barracoon reinforces what those of us who love Hurston's work have known all along: her keen intellect and curiosity was only surpassed by her genuine empathy for her subjects. This book is not just an account of one man's survival in the face of atrocity, it's a celebration of language and tradition; a clear labor of love." (Angela Flournoy, National Book Award Finalist and author of *The Turner House*) "Barracoon is a powerful, breathtakingly beautiful, and at times, heart wrenching, account of one man's story, eloquently told in his own language. Zora Neale Hurston gives Kossola control of his narrative— a gift of freedom and humanity. It completely reinforces for me the fact that Zora Neale Hurston was both a cultural anthropologist and a truly gifted, and compassionate storyteller, who sat in the sometimes painful silence with Kossola and the depth and breadth of memory as a slave. Such is a narrative filled with emotions and histories bursting at the intricately woven seams." (Nicole Dennis-Benn, author of *Here Comes the Sun*)

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