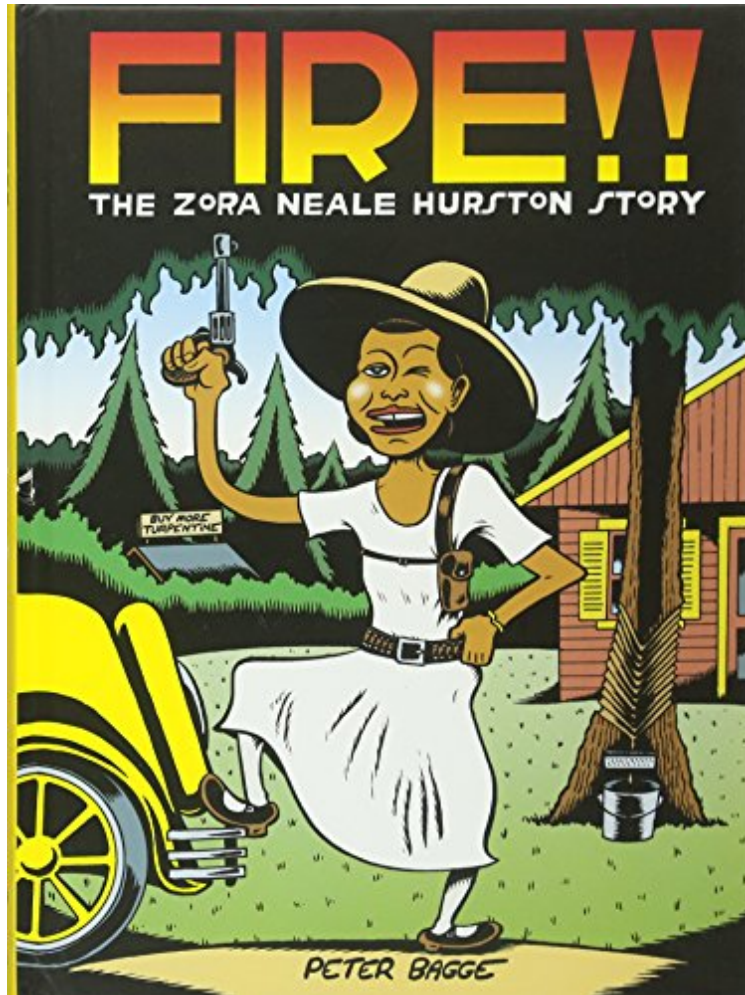


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## Fire!!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story

*Peter Bagge*

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#281332 in Books Drawn Quarterly 2017-03-21 2017-03-21 Original language: English 9.09 x .70 x 6.72l, .0  
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**Peter Bagge : Fire!!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fire!!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Who Would Have Thought P. Bagge Would Be A Perfect Fit With Zora Neale Hurston? By Tim Field I'm a big fan of Peter Bagge from way back to his Weirdo and Neat Stuff days and I'm enjoying the twists and turns of his artistic career. I enjoyed his graphic novel biography of Margaret Sanger, but was a little bit leery of his subject choice for his second biography. Then, I thought of the marvelous mini-biographies that Robert Crumb did of blues men and others unlikely subjects like Kraft-Ebing and Kafka and realized that it all made sense. As much as I enjoy Bagge's always lively art, I found myself much more impressed with his copious notes and photos at the back of the book. Honest analysis and entertaining commentary. This book is highly recommended for both the diehard Zora Neale Hurston fan and the reader who is a blank slate on the subject. 5 of 5 people found the

following review helpful. Don't Miss this! By JLDI don't normally read "graphic novels," but I was very impressed with this work. I devoured it in one sitting. The extensive notes at the end are also excellent, explaining further many of the episodes and people referenced in the main body. Bagge is also honest in stating and defending his interpretations. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Don't Miss the Notes! By Christine Whittington Peter Bagge has been a staff writer and cartoonist for Reason magazine since 2003. As a libertarian, he was no doubt drawn to Zora Neale Hurston's independent social and political views that refused to mesh with those of her intellectual friends, both black and white. She made controversial statements about race, segregation, language (she was criticized for using dialects in her writing), and politics. Bagge brings to life Hurston's significant and pivotal moments from childhood to death, including her family (not poor, although publishers sometimes presented her that way), an evil stepmother, her professors (one was Franz Boas), lovers and several husbands, mentors and supporters, and folklore and W.P.A. colleagues like Alan Lomax, Katherine Dunham, and Stetson Kennedy. I read somewhere that Bagge was influenced by the kinetic movement of early Disney cartoons like Steamboat Willy. I can't find this reference now, so you will have to take my word for it! He also collaborated with R. Crumb, and both influences are perceptible in his work, but transformed by Bagge's acid bright color and the personalities that shine through his character drawings. Eyeballs pop, spaghetti arms and legs fly everywhere, and screams reveal teeth, tongues, and tonsils. On the other hand, the subtlety of a Bagge sneer can impart just as much emotion as a tantrum. Hurston is usually in white or bright yellow, as seen on the cover, which depicts a folklore-collecting adventure for which she bought a new car, pistol, and holster with her grant money. The loveliest illustration of her, in my opinion, is the back cover. This drawing was based on the only known color photographic portrait of Hurston, taken by photographer Carl Van Vechten, with Hurston wearing something Van Vechten described as a "traditional Norwegian skiing outfit." Bagge notes that Hurston was an adventurous dresser! Reading the graphic-novel biography took only a few days. I spent far more time reading through the 26 pages of Bagge's \*tiny\* notes that flesh out the comic episodes with archival photographs, stories, and even some gossip. The notes are permeated with a joyful, breezy style with lots of exclamation points, italics, and caps, calling Langston Hughes a "doofus" and including tidbits that did not make it into the body of the book, such as Hurston's creation (with a white friend) of a black "Sara Lee" baby doll that was supported by Eleanor Roosevelt and ultimately manufactured by Ideal Toy Company. Bagge's commentary made me want to read the Hurston works that I have missed (of which there are too many) and talk with Bagge about them over a beer. There has been some criticism of Bagge because he is a white man taking a biography of a black woman and/or that he is employing some kind of revisionism to make Hurston seem less of a feminist or her politics more ambiguous. I didn't know Hurston and have not done any kind of extensive research on her, but it seems to me that Bagge was inspired by her complex ambiguities rather than selecting a black, feminist icon and saying, "let's see if I can make a Libertarian out of her!" Nah. I don't think he would do that. I think he loves Hurston too much to mess with her story.

A bold retelling of the life of the *Their Eyes Were Watching God* author Peter Bagge has defied the expectations of the comics industry by changing gears from his famous slacker hero Buddy Bradley to documenting the life and times of historical 20th century trailblazers. If Bagge had not already had a New York Times bestseller with his biography of Margaret Sanger, his newest biography, *Fire!!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story*, would seem to be an unfathomable pairing of author and subject. Yet through Bagge's skilled cartooning, he turns what could be a rote biography into a bold and dazzling graphic novel, creating a story as brilliant as the life itself. Hurston challenged the norms of what was expected of an African American woman in early 20th century society. The fifth of eight kids from a Baptist family in Alabama, Hurston's writing prowess blossomed at Howard University, and then Barnard College, where she was the sole black student. She arrived in NYC at the height of the Harlem Renaissance and quickly found herself surrounded by peers such as Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman. Hurston went on to become a noted folklorist and critically acclaimed novelist, including her most provocative work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Despite these landmark achievements, personal tragedies and shifting political winds in the midcentury rendered her almost forgotten by the end of her life. With admiration and respect, Bagge reconstructs her vivid life in resounding full-color.

"Peter Bagge's *Fire!!* is thoroughly researched and eminently readable. Weaving together the complex tapestry of Zora Neale Hurston's life (and featuring accurate-and-entertaining cameos by Langston Hughes and Alice Walker, among others), this graphic novel is both insightful and fun to read a rare combination." Tami Navarro, Ph.D. Barnard Center for Research on Women, Columbia University "Zora Neale Hurston was always larger than life, colorful the ideal subject for graphic work. Here comes Peter Bagge's well-researched interpretation of her talent, persistence, contrariness, and just Zora-ness in *Fire!!*. Here's Zora laughing, also looking mean and impressive." Missy Dehn Kubitschek, Professor of English and Africana Studies, IUPUI "From its cover image on, Bagge's *Fire!!* presents Zora Neale Hurston's story in a format worthy of its subject. Vibrant and humorous, this comic book is as an homage to a heroine who lived her life as an adventure fueled by intellectual curiosity, and creative desire." Glenda R. Carpio, Professor of English African and African American Studies, Harvard About the Author Peter Bagge is the 2014 USA Rockefeller Fellow in Literature. He is the Harvey Award-winning author of the acclaimed 1990s alternative

comic series Hate starring slacker hero Buddy Bradley and a contributing editor to Reason magazine. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York City, he got his start in comics in the R. Crumb-edited magazine Weirdo. Bagge lives in Seattle with his wife Joanne, daughter, and three cats.