

Lifting Others, We Rise

In Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, my students and I read Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon*. Hurston was a Black folklorist and anthropologist who recorded Cudjo Lewis' life story. Lewis was a Yoruban man who was captured into slavery at age nineteen, in 1861. He was placed in a barracoon (a confining structure) and shipped to Alabama on the last known slave ship to carry human cargo from West Africa to the American South. Emancipated several years later, he was unable to return home and spent the rest of his life in Alabama.

Hurston recorded this story in the 1920s, but it took nearly a century to reach its audience. *Barracoon* was published in 2018, to acclaim. Black scholar Deborah Plant recovered the manuscript, and Alice Walker wrote the book's Foreword. These contemporary Black women lifted up Hurston's work, as Hurston herself lifted up Cudjo Lewis' life.

As a professor, I'm inspired to see a lineage of support and uplift stemming from Walker and Plant back to Hurston and Lewis. Reaching from today back to 1861, these Black Americans carry one another through history. Lewis shared his story with Hurston, who wrote it down. Plant recovered the manuscript, and Walker used her fame to share it with the world.

Throughout Black history, I see people cultivating strength and dignity in the midst of severe strain and injustice. I see people sharing support, passing on stories, and recovering a shared past to inspire a better future. From Black history, we learn a universal truth: in lifting others, we rise.