

4TH ANNUAL  
**JACK GLAZIER  
ENDOWED**  
ANTHROPOLOGY  
LECTURE

# DEBORAH A. THOMAS

R. JEAN BROWNLEE TERM PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
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## WHAT ZORA NEALE HURSTON GIVES BLACK STUDIES: *TELL MY HORSE*, IMPERIAL POLITICS AND EVERYDAY LOVE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12TH | 4:30 – 6PM  
HALLOCK AUDITORIUM  
RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

### TALK ABSTRACT

Is it possible to be human – socially and politically – in the wake of the plantation? Part travelogue and part anthropological analysis, *Tell My Horse* chronicles Zora's experiences in Jamaica and Haiti on two Guggenheim fellowships awarded in 1936 and 1937. In this paper, I will discuss the two analytic trajectories that I feel are key to a contemporary reading of *Tell My Horse*. The first has to do with where Zora fits in relation to a broader emergent interest among Americans, and especially African-Americans, in the Caribbean region. Here, my concern is in where Zora's *TMH* sits in relation to work by other Americans publishing travelogues outlining their assessments of the new empire growing up quickly around them. The second analytic trajectory has to do with the vitality she brings to folk practices, and her insistence on a view of black sociality as produced through the maintenance of *life*. My argument throughout is that Zora can offer us something about black life today, something about how death might be an ontological – and even hauntological – touchstone without being the definition of non-existence or absence.

### SPEAKER BIO

**Deborah A. Thomas** is the R. Jean Brownlee Term Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica and Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and The Politics of Culture in Jamaica*; and co-editor of the volume *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Her articles have appeared in a diverse range of journals including *Cultural Anthropology*, *American Anthropologist*, *Radical History Review*, *Anthropological Theory*, *small axe*, *Identities*, and *Feminist Review*. Thomas was also co-director and co-producer of the documentary film, *BAD FRIDAY: RASTAFARI AFTER CORAL GARDENS*, which chronicles violence in Jamaica through the eyes of its most iconic community; she is currently working on a film and multi-media installation addressing the state of emergency in West Kingston in 2010. Thomas edited the journal *Transforming Anthropology* from 2007-2010, and currently sits on the editorial boards of *Social and Economic Studies* and *Anthropological Theory*. A member of the Executive Council for the Caribbean Studies Association from 2008-2011, Thomas currently sits on the board of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD), and is the Editor-in-Chief of *American Anthropologist*, the flagship journal of the American Anthropological Association. Prior to her life as an academic, she was a professional dancer with the New York-based Urban Bush Women.

### JACK GLAZIER BIO

**Jack Glazier** taught anthropology at Oberlin College from 1971 until his retirement in 2013. The scope of his fieldwork included research in East Africa among subsistence farmers, Eastern European immigrants and their descendants in the American Midwest, and African Americans in the upper South. He sees anthropology as a unique discipline, combining the explanatory and generalizing goals of the sciences with the interpretive and historical sensibilities of the humanities. In the classroom and in his books and articles, he sought an understanding of human experience in wide ranging comparative terms while never losing sight of the distinctiveness of that experience in particular times and places. In honoring Jack Glazier, the lectureship bearing his name recognizes his scholarly and professional contributions to an encompassing anthropology and to the liberal education of Oberlin students.

