



March 13-27, 2025

Dear Reader,

I have always been a voracious reader. Growing up in Houston, my parents and teachers often used library visits as a reward for good behavior. I lost myself in my local library—and found myself there too. It was a librarian who truly ignited my love of writing. She saw something in me when I showed her that I had rewritten the ending to *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The look on her face as she read my story—and the encouragement that she gave me to craft my own—changed everything.

Books became my refuge, my inspiration, and my motivation. I was deathly shy and introverted, but I had a deep love for stories. I powered through math and science (classes I didn't exactly love) just so I could escape into books. My library visits sparked an ember that roared into a full-on flame. That flame led me to storytelling, and storytelling led me to my latest novel, *The Queen of Sugar Hill*, a fictionalized account of the life of Hattie McDaniel—one of the women who has inspired me for years.

Like many, I first knew of Hattie because of her historic win as Best Supporting Actress at the 1940 Academy Awards for her role as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*. She was the first Black person to receive an Oscar, but despite that groundbreaking moment, Hollywood never opened the doors she hoped it would. As an aspiring actress (yes, I wanted to do it all), I studied Hattie in high school, and the more I learned about her, the more intrigued I became.

Hattie's story is one of perseverance in spite of—in spite of being criticized by Black audiences for playing subservient roles, in spite of being rejected by white audiences for making those roles too bold, in spite of being pigeonholed in nearly 100 uncredited films, in spite of failed marriages and never feeling fully seen. She forged ahead. That unshakable spirit endeared her to me and made me determined to tell her story.

In some ways, Hattie reminded me of my own grandmother, Pearly, and so many other quiet warriors who found ways to work around injustice, to survive and thrive in a world designed to limit them. They may not have led protests or marches, but they were fighters in their own right. They worked within a system that sought to break them and found ways to make a difference.

Writing *The Queen of Sugar Hill* has been a labor of love, and I am proud to introduce—and reintroduce—Hattie McDaniel to readers in a way that honors her legacy beyond the narrow lens of history. I invite you to immerse yourself in Hattie's world, to step into her shoes, and to see her as the trailblazer she was in the time she lived. She was more than Mammy, her most famous role—she was a force, a woman of undeniable talent and resilience who refused to be defined by the limitations placed upon her. And she wasn't alone. Her circle of friends—from Clark Gable to Dorothy Dandridge to Bette Davis—stood with her, reminding us all of what can be achieved with the right people in your corner. I hope you'll lose yourself in her journey as much as I did while bringing it to life.

With love and gratitude,

ReShonda Tate