

INTRODUCTION

Zora Neale Hurston was born probably on January 7, 1891, although she frequently gave her birth date as 1901 or 1903 .She was born and raised in America's first all-black incorporated town Eatonville Florida . Her father, John Hurston, was a former sharecropper who became a carpenter ,preacher, and three-term mayor of Eatonville .Her mother, Lucy Hurston, died in 1904 two weeks after her death Hurston was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to attend school, but wound up neglected by her remarried father and worked a variety of menial jobs. A five-year gap in her personal history at this time has led some biographers to conjecture that she was married ;however no evidence exists to support or disprove this speculation . In 1917 she began studies at Morgan Academy in Baltimore and in 1918 attended Howard University, where her first short story appeared in the college literary magazine . She later won a scholarship to Barnard college to study with the eminent anthropologist Franz Boss.

While living in New York Hurston worked as a secretary to the popular novelist Fannie Hurst . Though she only lived in New York for a short time Hurston is considered a major force in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s .She was an associate editor for the one- issue avant-garde journal Fire!! And she collaborated on several plays with various writers including Mule Bone :A comedy of Negro life written with Langston Hughes . Boss arranged fellowship for Hurston that allowed her to travel throughout the south and collect folklore .The result of these travels was the publication of Hurston s first collection of black folktales *Mules and Men* (1935) . Hurston is thought to be the first black American to have collected and published Afro-American folklore and both of her collections have become much-used sources for myths and legends of black culture . Her interest in anthropology took her to several Latin American countries including Jamaica Haiti and Honduras. Her experiences in Jamaica and Haiti appear in her second collection of folktales *Tell My Horse* (1938).

Hurston s best-known work the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* ,was published in 1937 . Written after a failed love affair , *Their Eyes Were Watching God* focuses on a middle – aged woman s quests for fulfillment in an oppressive society. Hurston also wrote *Moses* , *Man Of The Mountain* (1939), an attempt to fuse biblical narrative and folk myth

.In addition to her life as a writer ,Hurston worked temporarily as librarian at an air force base , a staff writer at paramount studios, and a reporter for the *fort pierce (Florida) Chronicle*

Her autobiography , *Dust Tracks on a Road* , won the 1943 Annisfield Award . Her final novel , *Seraph on the Suwanee*, appeared in 1948 . *An attempt to universalize the issues addressed in Their Eyes Were Watching God* ,*Seraph* is Hurston s only novel to feature white protagonists .Hurston s other honors include Guggenheim Fellowships in 1936 and 1938 .She wrote for various magazine in the 1950s , but her increasingly conservative views concerning race relation effectively alienated her from black intellectual culture . She died on January 28,1960 , in fort Pierce , Florida.

Chapter one

1.1 Struggle within community and natural world

as “intra-racism”. According to Lester (1999), the racial discrimination is based on the skin color even among African American communities. The “light-skinned” person is treated better than the “dark-complexioned” black person for the fact that lighter-skinned people have white blood in their veins (pp. 93-99). Bertice Berry (1999) points out that during that age, the variety of the white society’s perceptions of African Americans was controlled by their skin color, she comments: “if you were light you were all right, brown you could stick around, but if you were black, you had to get back” (p. 96). Hurston skilfully represents this “intra-racism” through the character of Mrs Turner. Mrs Turner is a black woman who, on account of her pointed nose and thin lips, is proud of not looking like “Negroes”. She believes that “white European features are cherished and black Negroid features are lamented” (Lester, 1999: 93). Although she is black, Mrs Turner is as racist as any white American . She asserts her hatred for blacks as she declares her understanding of the reasons why white people despise blacks, she says: “Ah can’t stand black niggers. Ah don’t blame de white folks from hatin’ ’em ’cause Ah can’t stand ’emmahself” (188-89). Janie is introduced to Mrs. Turner after she leaves Eatonville with Tea Cake and stays at the muck in the Everglades. Mrs. Turner urges blacks to marry lighter-skinned people in order to “lighten up de race” (188). She tries to convince Janie to leave Tea Cake and marry her brother instead. She thinks that a woman with Janie’s beautiful features (luxurious straight-hair, thin-lips, high nose and coffee-and-cream complexion) should not marry a dark-skinned man like Tea Cake. However, Mrs. Turner thinks that Janie’s faulty decision of marrying Tea Cake can be corrected only through divorcing him and marrying her brother. By portraying the character of Mrs. Turner, Hurston asserts that racism is more pervasive in American society than the typical confrontations between blacks and whites. Plus, during the court scene, Hurston emphasizes intra-racism when a black man objects to the way Janie has been justified, believing that her light skin is the reason for her acquittal. He says: “Aw you know dem white menswuzn’tgointuh do nothin’ tuh no woman dat look lak her” (252). The claim that Hurston's novel neglects the racial issues is poorly founded. In fact, Hurston's

depiction of racism in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is as skilful and effective as that of Richard Wright in his novel *Native Son* (1940) and Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952) (Lester, 1990:94). Lester (1990) argues that instead of showing the violence and hostility between African Americans and whites the way it is represented by Wright and Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston's "social protest" is presented through "decentring" the white society and its existence in her "celebration of the fullness of black existence". Hurston's novel draws an image of an African American community in Eatonville that survives the social, political and economic obstacles imposed by white Americans. The novel's incidents are focused on the African American society while white people are pushed to the margins of the narrative. Despite the fact that they own the authority and power, white Americans have no presence in the perfect portrait of this community in Eatonville (p. 90). By contrast to the negative reviews of some African American critics like Wright, female critics honoured Hurston for portraying the life and struggle of African American women, and womanhood in general, under male dominance. Alice Walker explains that the importance of the novel is due to addressing womankind and their inner feelings, she argues: "It speaks to me as no novel, past or present, has ever done" (Hurston, 1986, back cover). McKay (1990) describes Janie's story as a reflection of the African American women's efforts "to liberate themselves and all black people from the oppression of race and sex through the power of language and the struggle to own their history" (p. 55). Washington (2000), similarly, believes that the novel represents women's "exclusion" from power and particularly the power of "oral speech". She argues that the society in that period had a tendency towards "silenc[ing] women" and, moreover, to make them conspirators in that silence (pp. 27-28). Wolff (1982) indicates that the beginning of Hurston's novel points to the difference between men and women through the fact that women are more realistic than men. Men have "inner hopes" that can be achieved only through uncontrollable factors. For them "life is given, not made". On the other hand, women "create their own lives from their interpretations of reality" (p. 29)

Chapter two

2.1 Slavery as the Price of Civilization

In Their eyes were watching god by Zora Neale Hurston a former slave named Nanny's ideal marriage if the relationship provides both protection and security .Although people always have their own perspective and stand points of problems that are different from others Nanny own view of marriage is influenced by slavery and her ill fated life experience. Nanny's idea of marriage influenced by her social status .back to the years of slavery ,African-American could not get too much freedom , and they were treated as goods by their white master . Especially for the African - American women ,they were at the bottom of the society which had mad their lives even harder .The slavery had anchored Nanny's mind ,she believed that the best thing could happen to an African -American women is to marry a man that can depend on ,which marriage can provide protection .Johnny Taylor is not the one because Nanny thought some trifling youth like him would ruin Janie's life ,Nanny has chosen someone who is respectable ,someone like Logan Killicks. Nanny's granddaughter Janie a youthful girl who born as free child she does not have to go through the hard time as a slave that her Nanny has experienced .Janie believes that she should Fulfill her own dream by marrying a man that, she loves and disregard the importance of material wealth. Nanny has learned the lesson that love is not synonymous with love ,and she thinks Janie is just too young to realize the truth . As a slave near the end of the civil war ,Nanny gave birth to her white master's child who became Janie's mother. But the white man disappointed Nanny when his wife realized the baby is her husband's his wife went into jealous rage ,she declared that Nanny would receive a hundred lashes in the morning and watch her baby sold off when it is a month old ,but he did not do anything for Nanny and his own child ,and Nanny had to escape with her baby eventually . This painful heart breaking experience has taught Nanny a harsh lesson that love can not always be trusted ,more than that love can not play only part of marriage Unlike her young granddaughter Janie who is youthful and only sees the reason to marry is if is true love ? she saw a dust bearing bee sink into the sanctum of bloom ,the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight

.So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation”. Janie's youthful idealism leads her to believe that this intense sensuality must be similar to the intimacy between lovers , she wishes to be a pear tree-any tree in bloom ! Nanny is much older than Janie and she may already have felt the same way about love when she was in Janie's age ,but her experience tells her love dose not mean marriage . Nanny sees Janie as another chance for her to see her dreams fulfilled ,but those dream do not include Johnny Taylor. Even though Nanny was born as a slave ,she had dreams .for she was a slave ,Nanny did not allow doing more than dreams ,but

Emancipation give her freedom and a chance to transfer those dreams to her daughter Leafy. Nanny was always hoped Leafy would become a schoolteacher . her hopes ere dashed when Leafy was raped by the town's schoolteacher at age 17. After giving Janie Leafy left one day and abandoned both her mother and daughter , Leafy has disappointed Nanny. Nanny had the opportunities to marry but she chose to devote her life to her granddaughter Janie , what she wishes is to see Janie become a good girl can marry a man which can give Janie protection . Nanny has chose Logan killicks , a much older man, but someone who can offer Janie the protection and security of his age , plus a sixty -acre potato farm . Nanny knows Janie has to be taken care by someone else , and it's not someone Johnny Taylor , which can give nothing to Janie . in my opinion , Nanny's idea of marriage is influenced by the slavery and her unsettling past directly .Nanny tries to protect her young granddaughter Janie by marriage her to a man that can give Janie enough to eat and wear . Even though Nanny's idea of marriage is based on materials and she doesn't care much about Janie's feeling , she believes that everything she does is did it for Janie . she is just trying to do her best to keep Janie from suffering , and wishes Janie fulfill her dreams of freedom and joy.

Nanny reveals to Janie that while the male is controlled by his white . master, he tries to practice his power on the African American woman. She says: “de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks” (19). Moreover, the novel makes several references to the fact that these women are placed in an equal position to animals by men. Joe Starks, Janie's second husband, states that women, like animals,

have no ability to think and decide what is best for them and therefore they should be controlled by men and their thoughts and decisions, he says to Janie: “Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves” (95). Nanny, as well, redraws this image to Janie as she says to her: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (19). Yet, Nanny’s indication of the similarity between women and mules is more positive than Joe’s suggestion that women are as primitive as animals. Nanny compares the strength of the African American woman to the strength of the mule; she carries the loads that are thrown on her shoulder by men of both races, in addition to white women, without complaining. Davie (1993) explains the symbolism of the mule as the fact that for white Americans, “blacksseemed to slide into the category of animal-a convenient justification for owning them” and African American men see their wives and female mates in the same way so as to justify controlling them (p. 449). In another feminist gesture, Hurston uses the trial scene not only to discuss the racial issues but goes further to discuss gender-related matters. Du Plessis (1990) describes this scene as “the main place in which race and gender, as well as class and sexuality, show intense cross-purposes and mutual conflicts” (p. 102). In her trial, Janie faces white men, white women and African American men, The only group that shows sympathy for her is the white females. Hurston implies through this scene that white women are more affectionate towards African American women than the African American man despite the race difference. In addition to being socially at the bottom, African American women had to suffer from the violence of the men in their lives. In order to preserve their superiority over women and to keep them silent, men resolve to violent behaviours. Janie faces physical and emotional brutality not only from her three husbands but from her grandmother as well. Nanny slaps Janie when she objects to marrying Logan Killicks. She slaps Janie to show her that the man is the ruler, the one who has the upper hand in society and the only one who is capable of protecting her, and as such, deserving respect and obedience (Lester, 1999:81). In this scene, the

grandmother adobts the male gaze and she treats Janie accordingly. After marrying Killicks, Janie faces another kind of cruelty. Logan is like a “slave master”, he forces Janie to work for him in his barn. He treats her

as if she is an animal; in fact, Janie becomes his second mule. He says to her: “You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever I need you” (42). When Janie refuses to obey his orders and commands and to be treated as a slave, he resorts to insulting her. He threatens her and reminds her that he is her benefactor since he kept her from becoming a slave for white people, “Ah just as good as take you out de white folks’ kitchen” (42). Consequently, when Joe Starks starts telling her with his rhythmic words how she should be treated as a lady and to be served rather than being the servant; she is tempted to leave Logan and to escape with Jody. Unfortunately, Janie discovers that Jody used his sweet rhymes and words to deceive her into becoming his wife as part of his plan to become a “big voice” (38). Soon after leaving with him, he gets busy building the first state of African Americans in Eatonville hoping to be elected its mayor. He builds a nice house for Janie and himself and he buys her precious things. He aspires to make her the perfect mayor’s wife who speaks acts and dresses according to his designs. In the process of establishing his “big voice”, he silences Janie and restricts her freedom. He slaps her once “until she had a ringing sound in her ears” (96) because his dinner was not as good as he expects it.

Chapter three

3.1 Self Realization and Identity

Zora Neale Hurston once said, “The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting” (828). In her article entitled, “How It Feels to be Colored Me,” Hurston argues that her skin color never posed any hindrances for her opportunities to succeed in life. In fact, it was only “when [she was] thrown against a sharp white background” that she would “feel most colored” (828). If the context of race was taken away from this article, one could argue that “the game of getting” could also apply to the then-viewed infirmity of being female. At the same time African-Americans battled racism, women battled sexism. African-American women, therefore, fought two battles simultaneously

The battle fought against sexism included being deprived of self-realization and self-affirmation, or a realization of one’s dreams and desires and a positive value placed upon them. The African-American community of the early 20th century set aside self-realization and self-affirmation for African-American women by restricting them through male dominance and male dominated values. Restrictions included control over the fate of African-American women’s marriages by their parents in hopes of opportunities for social advancement and from fear of sexual assault by white men. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s definition of the “politics of respectability” best describes the aspirations of African-American women’s acceptance of these restrictions in her work *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1994). Referring to African American's “promotion of temperance, cleanliness, property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity,” the politics of respectability was part of what Paisley Harris calls “uplift politics” (Harris 213). “African American women were particularly likely to use respectability and to be judged by it” by members within their community in order to undermine the scientific claims of the racial superiority of whites. African-American women, therefore, mothered their race’s reputation in how they carried themselves. “By linking worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and neatness, respectability served a gatekeeping function, establishing a behavioral ‘entrance fee,’ to the right to respect and the right to full citizenship” (213). Further, according to Harris,

respectability progressed out of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church which consisted of mostly working class women (213). Thus the politics of respectability, while establishing moral differences, also established class differences within the African- American community. Janie's story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) exemplifies the restraints African-American women faced at the expense of their personal happiness and desires during the early 20th century. For instance, Janie's grandmother, Nanny, arranges Janie's first marriage in hopes of an opportunity for social advancement and to protect Janie from the threats of sexual assault following with the goals of the politics of respectability. Entering into the marriage planned by Nanny is not a part of Janie's desires, and this event leaves space to wonder about Janie's vision of herself in a world that seeks to dominate and restrict her—even beyond her experience of self under the pear tree.

Silber argues that Janie does not gain self-actualization until after Tea Cake's death (280). However, through a deeper analysis of symbols and relationships in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, clearly Janie gains self-actualization not after Tea Cake's death, but before she begins a relationship with him as a result of incremental growth which she first experiences under the pear tree. Instead, her relationship with Tea Cake marks the moment when she gets to live out the 'self' she knew existed deep inside of her even during her previous unhappy relationships. Janie's self-defense against Tea Cake, which results in his death, is not the most important event in her journey to self-realization; it is only a part of the journey. This view changes the popular take on Tea Cake as a savior to Janie's self- realization and shifts the weight of her newfound identity to a culmination of her experiences and previous relationships, with specific attention to her earlier actions of leaving Logan Killicks for Joe Starks and speaking out to Starks on his deathbed. In the words of the novel's author, where "[t]he game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting," Janie "got" herself years before she was faced with the heartbreaking duty to her 'self' of having to defend herself.

.against Tea Cake

Many scholars contend that Tea Cake represents the savior to Janie's self-affirmation. Sharon Jones argues this point, quoting Hurston's word choice in describing Tea Cake as "a glance from God" in direct contrast

to Joe Starks, who sees himself as a god. Jones argues that Starks's use of the phrase "I, God" to really mean "My, God" or "By, God" illustrates this contrast (196). William Nash views Tea Cake as a character who "breaks the formerly suffocating heroine out of a lifeless life and reawakens her" (75). Tea Cake is also "bound less by conventional morality than by a devotion to pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction (75). While Jones and Nash argue for Tea Cake's morality, Janice Knudsen feels that 'Janie's ultimate evolution of self is only possible because of the strong, healthy relationship she shares with Tea Cake, which fosters the self-worth necessary for full self- realization"

Janie's relationships prior to meeting Tea Cake place her on the road to self- realization before she even knows Tea Cake exists. Additionally, these relationships do not just include men. Each relationship and noteworthy event in Janie's life provide her with a new lesson learned about her 'self' and what she wants. It is clear how Janie's marital relationships influence her through male dominance; these men live out the tradition of treating women as property and not as equals. However, Janie also faces female enforcement of male dominance by Nanny and later by women in Eatonville.

Diana Miles argues in *Women, Violence, & Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston that Their Eyes Was Watching God* "interrogates the patriarchal social system that condones the use of violence as a way of maintaining control over women" (42). I would add that the novel also examines the use of financial security to control women. Miles identifies three traumas that Janie endures in the relationships she has with men, which allow her to define her identity. These include, first, "a marriage that forces her to make herself sexually available to a man whom she doesn't love;" second, "a marriage where she is silent and powerless;" and third, "a marriage with physical abuse that suggests in order to experience love a man must take ownership of you" (55). Miles does not, however, address the traumatic thinking of Nanny and its effects on Janie beyond the fact that Nanny's experiences as a slave transform her goals for Janie (56). Nanny's opinions on marriage are based not only on physical security, but also on the financial security necessary to enter into a higher social class. Therefore, the early 20th century notion of the politics of respectability fits Nanny's understanding of proper

womanhood; however, Janie is not an ex-slave and has not experienced a .past filled with racial sexual violence

Nanny prioritizes physical and financial security over love through the enforcement and practice of African-American male dominance in order to protect Janie from sexual assault by white men and low-class womanhood. Lorraine Bethel argues that the “domestic pedestal” provided by the politics of respectability is the only form of protection (15). Nanny restricts Janie based on her own past sexual assault through white male dominance, or in other words, rape by her master. As a former slave, Nanny has big dreams for Janie to thrive in property and prosperity—things not formerly available to Nanny in her younger years because of her social status as a slave. Nanny was used as a bed wench for her master during the days of slavery, and she does not want the same disregard for the preciousness of Janie’s womanhood to happen as it did to her and her daughter, Leafy. Nanny attempts to insure a better life for Janie by arranging her to marry Logan Killicks, a drastically older, yet wealthy and stable man. Davida Pines argues that “In the aftermath of slavery, marrying, like voting, demonstrated newly won freedom, citizenship, and equality; marriage confirmed and showcased black civility and morality within a racist society” (76). In Nanny’s eyes, gaining these characteristics of equality and higher social status can only be achieved by giving up personal desire and dreams in order to marry someone compatible with this vision of freedom and civility. Nanny tells Janie, “Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do . . . Ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn’t want my daughter used that way neither” (Hurston 16). Nanny tells Janie that in slavery days she could not be “whut a woman oughta be” because of the constraints of the “peculiar institution.” Nanny was not allowed to be viewed as precious and pure; instead, she was simply a breeder for more slaves and a sexual release for her master. Nanny’s language suggests her acceptance of how things were and her acknowledgement that Janie’s time in history is different. Since slavery is over, Janie needs to seek marriage in order to become a respectable lady of high societal values. The passage speaks from Nanny’s experiences and assigns the task of fulfilling womanhood to Janie based on Nanny’s aspirations when she .was a young woman

Nanny feels that what women need is to seek advantages that can be used to keep a woman's dignity and domesticity; this includes marriage to a respectable and well-known African-American man of substance and you sho oughta. Heah 'property. Nanny tells Janie, "If you don't want him you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road" (23). This passage illustrates Killicks's notoriety in the community based on his property. His possession of the only "organ in town" is steeped in symbolism, representing life through a biological necessity. The organ suggests that his wealth is a key factor in keeping the town alive and a necessity for the life of the community. Without organs a body, for example, could not survive. The "organ" also represents a male phallic authority, as Killicks is one of the most powerful men in the community—the only owner of the most male power in town. In the eyes of Nanny, without property ownership and a strong marriage with a man like Killicks, a young woman cannot survive. Upon finding Janie kissing Johnny Taylor, a possible release of personal desire for Janie, Nanny vows to marry off her granddaughter as soon as possible to the wealthy, yet starkly older, Logan Killicks in accordance with his property ownership. Nanny views Johnny Taylor simply as a man who will use Janie for his physical pleasures, then leave her like Nanny and her daughter were left by the men with whom they were involved. In her 'defense of marrying Janie off to Killicks, Nanny says

Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection. Ah "' ain't getting' ole, honey. Ah'm done ole... Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life...You ain't got nobody but me. Neither can you stand alone by yo'self. De thought uh you bein' kicked around from pillar tuh post is uh (hurtin' thing." (15

This passage shows the importance of creating a suitable stake in society based on the African-American women's history of victimization by physical abuse. Nanny's tone is one of concern and tiredness as she is using her last days to secure a spot in higher society for Janie; again, she is living out her own past ambitions through the life of her granddaughter. Likewise, the politics of respectability lives out of the civility of the African-American community through its women. The quote "neither can

you stand alone by yo'self" shows Nanny's male dominated thinking that a woman cannot survive without the support of a man in lieu of the threat of racial sexual abuse and the absence of a breadwinner. Nanny's male dominated views toward marriage and love lock women in a cage of dependence and incapability. The following conversation occurs between Nanny and Janie in reference to the absence of love within the marriage :between Janie and Killicks; Janie complains

you told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don't. Maybe if . . . "
".somebody was to tell me how, Ah could do it

:And Nanny responds

You come heah wid yo' mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah " you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love... If you don't want him, you sho oughta. Heah you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land . . . Lawd have mussy! Dat's de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis (love!" (23

According to Nanny's beliefs, Killicks's suitability for marriage is based on his land, luxuries, and mule, all of which possess the potential to provide Janie with the protection she needs for her womanhood and financial security after Nanny dies. Nanny wants Janie to focus on protection and not foolish fantasies of romance. The statement "Dat's de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love!" suggests that love is the emotion that keeps African-American women in the lower social .status. Only marriage and wealth accomplishes a higher status in society

Pines also argues that love is equal to the political well-being of African-American women of the time (77). However, from the analysis of Nanny it seems that love remains secondary, not equal, to uplifting the African-American female's social status. The quote, "heah you got uh prop tuh lean on all yo' bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis' Killicks, and you come worryin' me 'bout love" alludes to Nanny's view of love as secondary to marriage and the institution's advancement opportunities to a higher social status. Love is a hindrance. Being a former slave, Nanny pushes for Janie to marry an

established man who can provide for her during his life and well after his death—to gain freedom comparative to white women socially and via citizenship and equality. Within the home, however, she must remain submissive. Love may develop over time, but it is not guaranteed and nor is it a necessity in Nanny’s view of marriage. A prioritized woman worries about physical and financial protection before love and romance, .according to Nanny’s beliefs

Nanny also upholds male dominance by promoting the salvific wish, which according to Candice Jenkins calls for “self-control or self-denial” of female sexual desires in order to achieve middle class status through its adopted values (14). This includes the denial of both experiencing and expressing sexual desire (17). Had Janie never had to suppress her desires, she may never have had to go on a journey for self-realization, and her experiences in her relationships would have led to another type of journey. Under the wrath of Nanny, Janie is introduced to the salvific ‘wish when she explores her sexuality under the pear tree. Nanny yells

‘!Janie‘

The old woman’s voice was so lacking in command and reproof, so full of crumbling dissolution, — that Janie half believed that Nanny had not seen her. So she extended herself outside her dream and went inside of the house. That was the end of her childhood... [Nanny’s] eyes didn’t bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world (into one comprehension. (Hurstun 12

This passage evokes a tone of anger and disgust. The look in Nanny’s eyes, which “diffused and melted Janie,” exemplifies her disapproval and disgust of Janie’s exploration of her body. Additionally, the fact that this diffusion and melting occurs to Janie suggests that the disapproval destroys Janie, or her ‘self.’ Virtuous women suppress these desires in order to sit on the pedestal of morally righteous women. In accordance with the salvific wish, Janie should have experienced those feelings only with a husband, and this is why Nanny decides to marry her off right away. Nanny’s repugnance in this passage suggests that she sees Janie becoming a woman of ill-repute who seeks sexual pleasure and not the best opportunities available—the very type of woman she is trying to prevent Janie from becoming. By this point, Janie has no female support

for independence due to the fact that Nanny enforces male dominance in order to ensure social well-being. This results in a relentless, adventure-seeking spirit in Janie, though Killicks and Starks try to kill this spirit in .Janie in various ways

Entering into an arranged marriage with Killicks, Janie experiences unhappiness from the beginning. Additionally, Killicks does not conjure any feelings of desire or love in Janie, although Nanny suggests earlier that those feelings may develop. For Killicks, Janie is merely an asset to his farm who can help him in gaining more wealth. Killicks restricts Janie by defining them as members of the “aspiring class,” which “while not members of the black economic elite nonetheless sought class mobility through hard work and sacrifice” (Jenkins 14). The following :conversation occurs between Killicks and Janie

Looka heah, LilBit, help me out some. Cut up dese seed taters fuh me. “ .Ah got tuh step off a piece,” said Killicks

.Where you goin’?” said Janie“

”.Over tuh Lake City tuh see uh man about uh mule“

”?Whut you need two mules fuh? Lessen you aims to swap off dis one“

Naw, Ah needs two mules dis yeah. Taters is goin’ tuh be taters in de “ fall. Bringin’ big prices. Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah’, talkin’ ‘bout is got uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle (‘im.” (Hurstons 27

The hard work of running a mule places Janie in the position of the “aspiring class,” while at the same time the image challenges the highly regarded domestic life Nanny has in mind for her granddaughter. Nowhere in the passage does Janie volunteer to help Killicks with the plowing; he simply volunteers her services since she is his property. Therefore, while Janie secures protection from the evils of a racist and sexist world by marrying a man with property, Killicks secures dominance over another human being. In so many ways, Janie pays for her protection by almost giving up her own desires and aspirations, even to the point of giving up dreams of true love. Killicks does not take her to Lake City as the image of “de big road” suggests. Instead, Janie becomes .merely a mule driver in Killicks’ collection of property

Marriage to Killicks adds to the spark of self-actualization in Janie. As mentioned earlier, it is not when Janie meets Tea Cake that she gains self-actualization, but much earlier due to the relationships she has with Nanny, Killicks, and then Starks. Upon knowing that she is arranged to marry Killicks, Janie acts on the fact and “self-realizes” that she wants more. She gains the self-realization necessary to know what she is worth and what her desires are. This explains why Janie rejects the beliefs and practices of Nanny and Killicks once she meets Joe Starks—a man who upon first glance seems to be everything Janie wants in a marriage based on passion, love, and desire. Once Janie crosses the confining “big road” she lives on with Killicks in order to be with Starks, she begins to fulfill her own personal desires and realizes what it will take to complete her. Starks “did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon” (29). Crossing the horizon is Janie’s completion of
.‘self

Even though Janie realizes what she deserves in a marriage and thinks she sees this in Starks, Starks also attempts to subject Janie to his dominance both in life and in death by keeping her silent and removed from the community. However, Janie rejects his dominance in both circumstances. She finds her voice while Starks is living when she speaks out to him both on the porch of his store and on his death bed. For instance, when Starks faces death on his sick bed, Janie says, “All dis bowin’ down, all dis obedience under yo’ voice—dat ain’t whut Ah rushed off down de road tuh find out about you” (87). This passage shows that Janie realizes her ‘self’ before running off with Starks. What, in fact, she leaves with him for is to fulfill her own dreams of what love is and to get away from
.the male dominance of Killicks.

In death, the ghost of Starks’s dominance does not completely leave Janie’s world since the citizens of Eatonville expect her to remain faithful to his memory; in other words, the town adheres to the male dominated thinking process. However, after Starks dies, Janie continues being “self-actualized” when she rejects men in the town who wish to pursue her and who do not fulfill her aspirations. And yet the townspeople, succumbing to male dominance, think that Janie’s seclusion is based on her mourning
.over Starks

Taint dat Ah worries over Joe's death, Phoeby. Ah jus' loves dis ".freedom

Sh-sh-sh! Don't let people hear you say that, Janie. Folks will say you " (ain't sorry he's gone." (93

Janie shows no mourning over Starks's death. Having gained self-actualization for some time now, Janie says, "Ah jus' loves dis freedom." Freedom is what Janie realizes should be a part of her life—the freedom to love unconditionally and equally. This conversation between Janie and Phoeby proves that Janie gains self-realization and self-actualization compared to Phoeby, who remains content in the mindset of living under male dominance. "Sh-sh-sh! Don't let people hear you say that" reveals that Phoeby, along with other female members of Eatonville, put their own opinions and emotions on the backburner in order to save the .reputation of their male partners

Janie's frustration with the male dominated mindset of Eatonville urges her to, again, take actions toward her own happiness. Upon meeting Tea Cake, Janie prepares to fulfill her own desires; however, some scholars continue to remember Starks as a martyr in the creation of self-realization in Janie. Houston Baker argues "[Nanny] is unequivocally correct in her judgment that only property [matters]...Starks's property...enables Janie's freedom [to move to the muck]. The lyrical pleasures associated with Tea Cake are merely

a derivative benefit' of having worked so hard for Starks" (Tratner 173). ' This argument proves debatable because when Janie leaves Killicks in pursuit of her own pleasures she does rely on financial security from his estate. Coincidentally, Starks's estate places Janie at a safer position to leave Eatonville, but his money does not fund her adventure of living for herself with Tea Cake, and she has sought adventure while penniless once .before

Tea Cake is not a savior for Janie but, rather, the vehicle through which she assumes full bloom of her self-affirming beliefs. Missy Kubitschek argues that Janie and Tea Cake's relationship rejects ordinary conceptions of dominant and subordinate sex roles (25). This argument fits perfectly with the notion of Janie having already self-realized and self-actualized since it suggests equality. Tea Cake is her companion, then, not her

master or mentor (25). In fact, the following passage demonstrates Janie's feeling of equality and self-realization after finding Tea Cake and another woman together

Janie] walked slowly and thoughtfully to the quarters. It wasn't long] before Tea Cake found her there and tried to talk. She cut him short with a blow and they fought from one room to the other, Janie trying to beat him, and Tea Cake kept holding her wrists and wherever he could to mind (her from going far. (Hurstons 137

While violence traditionally illustrates male dominance, the violent scenes between Janie and Tea Cake do not function in this light. Janie's control over the physical altercation shows the equality she feels in the relationship as well as the strength she feels within herself. Tea Cake's action in holding her wrists balances out the fight as he is not beating her but expressing equal control over the situation. Neither manhandles the other, even though this claim works only in Janie and Tea Cake's private lives and they remain open to judgment from a patriarchal society. Tea Cake constantly feels the need to claim his manhood through the violence which occurs between him and Janie. When Mrs. Turner's brother came and she brought him over to be introduced, Tea Cake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him . . . The way he petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her made the women see visions and the helpless was (she hung on him made men dream dreams. (147

In maintaining an image of manhood to control his fears of losing his manhood, Tea Cake must promote the ideals of male dominance publically even if he does not agree with them. Tea Cake tells the other 'men on the muck

Janie is wherever Ah wants tuh be. Dats's de kind uh wife she is and Ah " love her for it. Ah wouldn't be knockin' her around. Ah didn't wants whup her last night, but ol' Mis' Turner done sent for her brother tuh come tuh bait Janie in and take her away from me. Ah didn't whup Janie 'cause she done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss."(148) However, Tea Cake does not "beat" Janie outright. The encounter is a fight which gives both Janie and Tea Cake and equal

physical power within the encounter. The same is true in her self-defense over the rabid Tea Cake which leads to his death. While Janie protects herself with the rifle from Tea Cake, who staggers with the pistol, the image mocks a power struggle, and “The pistol and the rifle rang out almost together,” killing Tea Cake. The fact that both guns, weapons used to conquer another person, fire at the same time represents equal opportunities for power over the other. However, Tea Cake’s death represents Janie’s, or African-American women’s, claim to self-actualization and self-ownership. The trial scene in the wake of Tea Cake’s death speaks to the moment’s extension to not only Janie, but also to the African-American community. Hurston writes here: “Then [Janie] saw all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom . . . They were all against her . . . The white part of the room got calmer the more serious it got, but a tongue storm struck the Negroes like wind among palm trees” (185-186). The African-American spectators’ quickness to speak against Janie’s self-defense symbolizes the African American community’s support and promotion of the “politics of respectability.” Janie’s, or early 20th century African American women’s, following of the politics of respectability determines the success of the community’s image of civility. Thus Janie’s actions result in death and a bad reputation for the community, according to her peers. However, Janie represents a positive reformation of selfhood for the 20th century African-American women—the power to take ownership over oneself, free from the constraints of a racist and patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Despite being a very diverse literature genre in terms of influence and inspiration, North American literature encompasses many works that share some very common thematic elements. Though there are several themes shared, one in particular can be found in most any work – the importance of identity. Particularly in some selected pieces yet to be named, identity is a very important element, not only because it is a necessity for a main character in any work of literature, but because these works express ideas about identity as being very individualistic – as opposed to being a mere result of cultural surroundings.

Zora Neal Hurston She departs in secret from Logan and marries a newfound companion named Jody Starks, who she initially believes is a companion better suited to help her celebrate her individual identity. Yet, as their marriage progresses, and Jody becomes mayor in the town they relocate to, Jody begins to exercise his newly acquired power on her and against her wishes, and she becomes a mere fixture to Jody and his aspirations of power and influence. Again, this commanding influence from outside culture hampers her attempts at finding her identity, and again she becomes unhappy, and after finally voicing her displeasure at Jody, he even exerts physical force on her and assaults her. After their marriage ends, and Jody perishes shortly thereafter, she begins to date a young man whom she meets named Tea Cake, and finds a strong attraction for him, and marries him. Here is the ultimate culmination of her search for her own identity – not only does she go against common cultural precedent by marrying a man twelve years younger than her, but by doing so, she finds a companion not strong enough to exert overbearing power on her, and Tea Cake allows her to celebrate her independence with him. Though their marriage does end, it comes about ‘by Tea Cake tragically perishing.