

THE DENUNCIATION OF PATRIARCHY AND CAPITALISM IN ZORA NEALE
HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

A Thesis by

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The following faculty have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommended that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of Master of Arts with a major in English

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We have read this thesis
And recommend its acceptance:

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Christopher Ondieki Agwata and Veronica Nyaboke, my siblings, and all my friends

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with a tide, for others they sail forever on the horizon. . . . Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth.

Zora Neale Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

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ABSTRACT

The figuration of Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an undeniable contestation of gender oppression. The contours of previous criticism have mapped out various directions of arguments, some of which make feminism a sort of critical mantra of Hurston criticism. In spite of such existing claims that the novel challenges the premises of women's oppression within the African American social milieu, a closer look at the text shows that critics have not exhausted all that needs to be said on this subject.

This essay premises its argument on the assertion that *Their Eyes* protests entrenched patriarchy and middle class or bourgeois capitalism. These two ideologies dominate Janie's grandmother's mind, and compel her to teach the protagonist to submit and accept inferior gender status, hence affirming the argument that women as well as men contribute to the existing patriarchal order. Indoctrinated into this system by her grandmother, Janie experiences three marriages that make her realize that she can no longer live according to her grandmother's wishes. Instead, she makes personal efforts to denounce capitalist patriarchy in order to live her life to the fullest. She explicitly tells her friend Pheoby, "Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means to live mine" (114). Janie's process of self discovery brings to the surface complex gender oppression which cross the racial and class divide.

My project will use radical feminist and Marxist feminist theories to look at Janie's three oppressive marriages, her support at the trial from white women, and the feminist significance of the catastrophic hurricane at the end of the novel. This natural phenomenon, I intend to argue, is symbolic of a feminist, anti-capitalist revolt which powerfully articulates Marx's theory with regards to capitalism's appropriation of women and nature for purposes of exploitation.

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The Denunciation of Patriarchy and Capitalism in Zora Neale Hurston's
Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* stands out in contemporary American scholarship as Hurston's most celebrated work. According to Yvonne Johnson, *Their Eyes*, which is partly "autobiographical" (Johnson 43), positions itself as "the first conscious effort by an American ethnic writer to subvert patriarchal discourse and also to give voice to women of color" (Johnson 44). Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West give Hurston more credit in their unreserved assertion that Hurston is actually "the first novelist to depict a black woman's successful quest to find voice and to overcome male oppression" (Gates 132). The immense critical attention *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has received since its publication, more especially over the last four decades, has earned Hurston an uncontested legacy among contemporary black women writers, who view Hurston as their "foremother" (Carby 131) and "spiritual ancestor" (Christian 61). Interestingly, while the preceding critics give credit to the novel for its engagement with gender politics, early African American reviewers discredited any reading of the novel from a political standpoint. Prominent among these reviewers was Richard Wright, an influential critic and twentieth-century writer. In his short review titled "Between Laughter and Tears," Wright observes:

Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues . . . the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. . . . The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the superior race. (Wright 76)

Equally harsh in his review was Otis Ferguson. Ferguson assessed the novel as one that is filled with “overliterary expression” and “superwordy, flabby lyric discipline” (qtd. in Corse 177). With a not too dissimilar rejoinder, but more disappointing to Hurston, Alain Locke defined the novel as “folklore fiction at its best” and he went ahead to appeal to Hurston to come to grips with “motive and social document fiction” (qtd. in Cronin 10). We may presume that these reviews largely account for Hurston’s unfortunate relegation to literary oblivion from the 1930s to the 1970s. Hurston’s literary worth resurfaced in the wake of “second-wave feminism,” which, according to Sondra Guttman, was “framed in terms of redressing the exclusion of black female writers from the canon” (Guttman 93).

Despite the limited scope of the novel’s early reviews, several critics have recently contributed extensively to various issues of language and gender politics in Hurston’s novel. Some of these critics, like Diana Miles, Barbara Christian, and Todd McGowan, have read the protagonist’s voice in *Their Eyes* from a gender perspective. In spite of these studies, I wish to point out that these critics have not covered all the gender issues inherent in the novel. In her book, *The Assertive Woman in Zora Neale Hurston’s Fiction, Folklore, and Drama*, Pearl Mae Fisher Peters points out that Janie is one of the most admirable, assertive women in Hurston’s art. Peters notes that Hurston’s Janie is aligned with the dreams and aspirations of the contemporary black woman with the verbal stamina to rebel against both the constraints of traditional marriage and the material life that threaten to infringe on her personal happiness (Peters 127). On the other hand, Phillipa Kafka associates Janie’s life with “bondage,” hence grounding *Their Eyes* in the European American cult of True Womanhood (Kafka 157). Gates takes a Marxian position to point out that Janie’s first two marriages are essentially bourgeois and that this informs the way the husbands in both marriages oppress her (Gates 186).

Despite the contributions these critics have made to our understanding of the novel, Hurston's work still begs for further feminist investigation. The novel reveals a palpable support for radical and Marxist feminist interpretations. Among other issues, both of these theories deal with issues of gender. Chris Beasley, in her recent book *What Is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* says that one of the fundamental arguments within radical feminist debates, is that the unequal power relations within capitalism are derived from patriarchy (Beasley 55) and that "when exploring women's positioning," Marxist feminists focus on "labor and economics" (Beasley 61). Using this framework to appreciate *Their Eyes*, we realize that Zora Neale Hurston seems to launch an overt literary war against patriarchy and capitalism both within her immediate social cosmology and partly within the larger American society. From this observation, we may argue that the text's effect lies in the conscious and successful effort of its protagonist to denounce the ideological systems of patriarchy and capitalism. To achieve this success, the protagonist invokes the feminist principles of individual struggle as exemplified by bell hooks (hooks 139-140) as well as Beasley's intra-racial and interracial "solidarity" or "sisterhood" (Beasley 113). For us to grasp the concept of patriarchy as manifested in Hurston's novel, it is important to refer to Michele Barrett's argument about the limitations of using the term "patriarchy." Arguing that the term "patriarchy" has lost its analytic or explanatory power and has been reduced to refer to male dominance, Barrett argues against jettisoning the concept of patriarchy altogether, but instead favors retaining it for use "in contexts where male domination is expressed through the power of the father over women *including his wife* and over younger men" (qtd. in Carby 73). Hurston's text denounces this form of institutionalized patriarchy or male dominance as it also denounces "the private ownership of the means of production" (Mascarenhas 13) manifested within two of the protagonist's marriages and within

her larger social environment. Hurston's *Their Eyes* serves as a conscious endeavor to liberate the protagonist from the ideological and physical limitations inherent in the protagonist's society, which, as the text shows, is systemically dominated by men. We, therefore, ought to see Janie, the novel's protagonist, as a symbolic archetype of female subjectivity. Each of Janie's three marriages, in effect, serves as the epitome of an entrenched patriarchal social setting from which she struggles and finally manages to escape.

Janie's grandmother plays a leading role in Janie's entire married life as she apparently participates in instilling patriarchal mentalities into Janie's young mind, although, as the ending of the novel shows, Janie's grandmother fails miserably. In this regard, before embarking on the analysis of each of Janie's three marriages, a detailed understanding of Nanny's role in Janie's life prior to and during the early days of her first marriage to Logan Killicks is crucial. We learn that she arranges Janie's initial marriage in a manner that supports the prevailing social and economic conditions. She reasons that Janie needs to marry Logan Killicks—a local propertied farmer—not on the basis of love and affection but because of what Janie would stand to gain from the arranged marriage. According to Nanny, who has grown with the experience that “De nigger woman is de mule of de world,” Janie should equally submit to the same fate (14). She feels that it is socially imperative for Janie to dispel her romantic ideas about the marriage union and accept to provide labor and wifely duties in place of “big” (23) social and economic protection. This is what is important in the prevailing social and economic dispensation. She tells Janie: “‘Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection” (15).

Dominated by patriarchy and influenced by material things, Nanny considers economic wealth as the “prop” for Janie to “lean on” in all of Janie's married days. Interestingly, while responding to Janie's dissatisfaction to her marriage to Logan, Nanny's language fails to express

her desire to address Janie's concern; instead, Nanny echoes her notion of marriage as a commercial venture. She ridicules Janie for appearing to prefer a poor husband who Nanny thinks may not even have decent clothing. Reminding Janie that from her privileged position in marriage to Logan, Janie can buy, sell, and "throw" away the poor man's apparel, Nanny unashamedly says: "You can buy and sell such as them with what you got. In fact, you can buy 'em and give 'em away" (23). Such deprecating comments give the reader an idea of Nanny's mindset. Nanny's mind is materially dogmatic and irrevocably dominated by patriarchy, capitalism, and a yearning for middle-class status. Despite Nanny advice, however, Janie rejects middle-class privilege when, in a language reminiscent of a revolt, she tells Nanny, "Ah ain't takin dat ole land tuh heart . . . Ah could throw ten acres of it over the fence every day and never look back to see where it fell" (24). Janie's refusal constitutes an emotional protest that suggests her wish to denounce and dismantle the oppressive patriarchal status quo that entraps her together with its capitalistic emblems. While we may agree with Diana Miles's argument which tends to term Janie's and Hurston's other female characters who occur in similar situations as striving for "spiritual and physical survival" (Miles 40), we are reminded by Janie's own words that an inherent desire to overhaul the dominant system simmers at the periphery of what may appear as mere spiritual and physical survival.

Phillipa Kafka makes the argument that material considerations take precedence in Janie's pre-arranged marriage. Kafka asserts that Nanny seems to wait for "the best financial offer" (Kafka 165) in order to put Janie on sale in the marriage market. Indeed, Nanny understands marriage as a market and Janie as a commodity. Market forces, therefore, demand that a woman has to invest wisely in order to make herself a saleable product worthy of the reciprocal social and economic protection. In such a transaction, the only relationship that is

supposed to exist between the woman and man is that of property and property owner, respectively. Since Nanny gives marriage tips that only commodify Janie as an object of economic, we are in effect compelled to concur with Diane Sadoff in arguing that Nanny “cooperates to oppress the black woman by conspiring, due to ‘her class aspiration,’ with ‘male dominance’” (qtd. in Kafka 165). We learn that all through her own life, Nanny has worked as a slave in the plantations owned by upper-middle-class white families. In these circumstances, she was repeatedly raped and sexually exploited by her white master, revealing how the slave system functioned to foist upon her the putative inferiority of the woman. Such sexual violation and Nanny’s subsequent pregnancy are exemplifications, according to Angela Davis, of the plantation masters’ institutionalized use of slave women’s bodies as breeding instruments to produce heirs for cheap labor (Davis 158). The fact that even Janie’s mother, Leafy, suffers sexual violation in the hands of her school teacher underscores Nanny’s notion of the black woman’s role as “a spit cup” for “de menfolks white or black” (20). Both Janie’s and Nanny’s oppressed status underscores Susan Willis’s historical analysis of the black woman’s condition in America, which she says is “the history of labor . . . firsthand knowledge of slavery . . . and domestic wage labor” (Willis 6-7). In essence, Nanny’s cooperation with the dominant culture has played a key role in the oppression of her granddaughter and prefigures the oppression Janie meets with in her marriages, but against which she victoriously fights against.

Jane’s response to her bondage in her first marriage is characteristically antagonistic. Her intention and actions are contrary to her grandmother’s infamous marital tips. Janie doesn’t seem to aspire to exploit the material conditions of her marriage as advocated by Nanny, instead she rejects the capitalist patriarchal system altogether. Janie’s initial quest to find love in marriage with the hope that love may make the marriage worth living for fails to materialize. She returns

to complain to Nanny of the absence of love and affection in her marriage to Logan. Janie's complaints single out as most important the issue of her sexual violation and exploitation as one of the misfortunes bedeviling her in the marriage. She states that in her marital bed, it is only her husband who does "all the wantin'" (23). This one-sided "wantin,'" to use Janie's own language, arguably amounts to emotional and physical defilement. Nanny responds lightheartedly, telling Janie that she should also turn around and desire her husband. In effect, Nanny seems to favor and promote the dominant social order. Nanny, like Lucy's mother in Hurston's earlier novel *Jonah's Gourd vine*, works to stuff Janie's mind with ideals which are aimed at keeping the patriarchal relations in place. Both of these old-generation parents marry off granddaughter and daughter, respectively, to propertied men mainly for the victims' perceived economic advantages. Lucy's mother in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* tells Lucy that Artie Mimms has got "sixty acres under plow and two mules." Emmeline dismisses John, who Lucy has identified as her potential husband, as a pauper without such basic necessities as "changing clothes" (127). Similarly, in *Their Eyes*, after Nanny marries Janie off to Logan and Janie complains that she is not satisfied with the marriage, Nanny dismisses Janie's pleas, telling her to be contented since Janie "is wid de onliest organ in town . . . a house bought and paid for and sixty acres of land (23). Nanny's obsession with material things—indicators of Janie's economic completeness, blind her from perceiving how the same factors complement and benefit the patriarchal system which oppresses her.

On the other hand, if we consider Hurston's invocation of custom and ritual in her 1935 novel *Mules and Men*, we will also notice Hurston's observation of the female body as a commodity. This reference links Nanny's role, in Janie's marriage to Logan, to that of Edna Pitts in *Mules and Men* when Edna coaxes and drags girls to participate in the "toe party business"

(31). During this locally popular and highly commercialized “ritual,” Edna, “the lodge’s” matron, parades young women before the men who then go ahead to buy the women’s displayed “toes . . . for a dime.” In this ritual, if a woman is lucky to “sell” her toes, she is guaranteed free food, drinks, and “anything” she may want from the man (31). In this particular episode, we see how much women’s bodies are valued, displayed, commodified, and sold for the pleasure and the leisure of male consumers and for the monetary benefits of “the lodge” owner. While Janie’s grandmother is not guaranteed pecuniary gain for coaxing Janie to marry Logan, we get the impression that Edna, on the other hand, stands to gain since she is an employee of the lodge. This popular ritual echoes exotic dance club scenarios which Danielle Egan describes as patriarchal service industries created purposely to feature women “for the pleasure of male consumption” (Egan 130). Indeed, the “toe-party” emerges as a complex site that exploits women to serve the interests of patriarchy and capitalism. Moreover, due to the male desire associated with the “toe-party” and the exotic dance clubs, we may see the women who are involved in both places as commodified objects of the male gaze. This commodification recalls Janie’s feelings of resentment with her grandmother who, by marrying her off mainly for economic security and protection, Janie feels had sets her up “in the market-place for sale” (90).

A close observation of Logan’s investment priorities will reveal the way he oppresses Janie. Hurston projects Logan as a prominent rural land owner. His property, according to Jane’s Grandmother, qualifies him as Janie’s ideal husband. Once Janie marries and moves in with him, we realize that Logan’s livelihood is predominated by an idea of work as competition and an avenue for profit accumulation. Logan’s desire to increase and consequently protect his capital investments in farming inform the perception of Janie as a tool that he should utilize to speed his ascent in the competitive world in which he is invested. He, therefore, considers it imperative

and within his powers to force Janie to perform traditional domestic duties and at the same time to join him in the fields to perform more economically-viable tasks of farm production. Logan's perception of Janie as an additional labor force necessary for the creation of surplus capital recalls the dual responsibilities of labor within which women always find themselves saddled in capitalist societies. Guettel argues that in a capitalist society, "home . . . and work demands" define the woman as privately owned and "doubly" exploited by the system. She says that "general profit considerations" that do not fit the domestic domain require that the woman take up responsibilities that generate direct income (Guettel 57). Janie, however, advocates for equality with regards to the sharing of all chores, whether they occur in or outside the home. She accepts her role in helping with the farm when Logan asks her to do so, and she also goes ahead to demand that even in the domestic domain, she can only do some but not all the duties. For instance, when Logan instructs her to chop and carry wood, she replies "Ah 'm just as stiff as you is stout. If you can't stand and not chop and tote wood Ah reckon you can stand not to git dinner" (26). While it may be argued that Janie's concern with equality and the division of labor refer to gender specific roles, the fact that Logan perceives labor and work only from the economic perspective negates Janie's view of labor. Logan's view of meaningful labor as always economic recalls the capitalist understanding of women only as a reserve of labor whose domestic labor is muted for purposes of their exploitation in the labor market. In this market economy, from which, apparently, Logan operates, Hazel Carby says that women have been "seen to form 'the only . . . reserve labor" available (Carby 74). Moreover, since Logan does not pay Janie for her labor, Janie's double exploitation becomes problematic and difficult for her to bear. Logan exploits Janie with a prideful feeling and expects her unflinching obedience especially because he feels that by marrying her, he has done her a big "favor" (31) in uplifting

her from her lower-class status. With exulted pride, he tells her that he has helped remove her from “de white folks’ kitchen and set” her down on “royal diasticutis” (31). He further brags tells her that he is not like “a whole lot of men” who would grin in Janie’s face and not “work and feed” her like he is doing (30).

Logan’s other plan to buy a second mule implies an equation of Janie to a work beast. With his competitive desire to maximize profits from farming, he thinks that he must also maximize labor productivity in the field by increasing the labor volume. In Logan’s competitive outlook to life, Janie ceases to play the role of wife but assumes a new role as a mule. In this new role Janie will, therefore, supply animalized labor to enable Logan to benefit from the already promising domestic agricultural market. Logan does not hesitate to recall Janie from the kitchen to the barn to disclose his plans. He tells Janie, “Ah needs to run two mules this yeah. Taters is goin’ to be taters in de fall. Bringin’ big prices. Ah aims to run two plows, and dis man Ah talking about is got a mule all gentled to so even a woman kin handle him” (27). After his “construction of her as a laborer rather than a lover” (Pines 90), Logan gets Janie to work both in the home and in the field due to his capitalistic mentality that a woman’s domestic labor is not productive labor. In his capitalistic and patriarchal mindset, he feels Janie’s domestic labor is oriented, as Angela Davis says, to domestic use-value as opposed to Logan’s capitalist ideology of appropriating labor purposely for the creation of immediate economic value (Davis 153). This idea of labor largely influences Janie’s oppression in her marriage and underlines the economic foundation of the patriarchal capitalist family.

Logan’s domination of Janie may be further understood in light of Engels’s theory on production relations. Engels, arguing that individual families become the economic unit of the capitalist society, says that even in the family, it matters:

who owns the means of the kind of work which yields the productive surplus. It is access to this surplus that gives the property owner his advantage over others, class dominance in society, and male dominance in the home. (qtd. in Guettel 112)

Engels goes so far as to describe the male as the bourgeois and the female as the proletariat and affirms the rise of the private ownership of property creates a situation in which individual families become the economic unit of the capitalist society (qtd in Guettel 113). Marx is even clearer on this aspect of the patriarchal family. Quoting Marx, Engels says that

The modern family contains the embryo not only of slavery (servitus) but serfdom. . . . It contains within itself in miniature all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state . . . this is the economic base of the “patriarchal family” (qtd. in Guettel 112).

It is, therefore, not surprising that Janie runs away from her marriage with Logan hoping that Jody Starks, her next husband, will grant her a life that is free of servitude. Indeed, Janie’s words and actions express an egalitarian desire that espouses the ideology of the division of labor and a yearning to escape the enslavement in the patriarchal marriage which, as both Marx and Engels argue, enslaves women.

While Logan is invested in “competitive capitalism,” Jody, Janie’s second husband, is invested in “monopoly capitalism” (McGowan 88). These differences in investment interests inform the different manner in which both men dominate and control Janie. Ironically, Jody’s investment ventures represent an elevation in Janie’s class status, from private agricultural landowner’s wife to a merchant-class wife who presumably has relatively more free time for leisure. Just like Logan, Jody is also a prideful materialist with “power . . . property . . . and everything else” (48). This showy image, in both men, is significant for our understanding of the history of the “black bourgeoisie.” This class received scathing condemnation from Franklin Frazer, a contemporaneous social critic, during the period that coincides with the novel’s publication. Jody

fits into Frazer's interpretation of the black bourgeoisie in the manner in which he shows off with his money, his "citified, stylish dress," which as Janie says does not "belong to these parts." In spite of his "seal-brown complexion," Janie notices that Jody acts "like Mr. Washburn," Janie's grandmother's white employer (27), thus foregrounding Jody's aspiration to fit into and be accepted by the white middle class. Frazer made stinging attacks on the black bourgeoisie in the 1930s, discrediting this class of "the select few" blacks who, he said, [a] little education and turn in fortune steered into conspicuous consumption" (Teele 78). This conspicuous lifestyle made the black bourgeoisie less isolated from white middle-class society, but more exposed to their contempt. Consequently, Frazer asserted that since the new bourgeoisie had more money at their disposal, they had to seek compensations, for their full acceptance into the middle class, in the things that money could buy (Frazer 148). Frazer further argued that the making of the black bourgeoisie was grounded in the Negro education system, which he said was devoted chiefly to the task of educating the back middle class by teaching white middle-class social and economic values. Students in this system, Frazer said, seized upon business-oriented courses as a means to rise into the middle class. Many of these people thought that "by becoming money-makers they would help the Negro achieve economic independence" (Frazer 84). Jody also claims to be literate, unlike most of the characters in Eatonville. Since his emphasis in education is not made clear in the text, we may consider his success in business to argue that he is educated in business. For this reason, Jody appears to be Hurston's embodiment for the ideology of the black bourgeoisie. Jody's movement into the exclusively segregated "black-only" town of Eatonville in search of business investment opportunities, in essence, implies lack of similar opportunities in the more cosmopolitan Atlanta.

In order to well appreciate Jody's domination of Janie, we need to have a better understanding of his entry and success in business. We learn that after Jody comes to Eatonville, Jody doesn't own property except the money he has saved while working in Atlanta. On his entry into Eatonville, he measures the viability of the place for commercial exploitation and immediately mobilizes the local inhabitants of the town to "chop two roads." The roads soon open the remote town for his business investment and for the town's growth. While we may say that the inhabitants of the town stand to benefit from more economic prospects, Jody evidently stands to benefit more than they do. After Jody's store opens for business, Janie expresses her astonishment in seeing the money Jody has spent in purchasing and developing the land come back "so fast"(41). With such quick profits, we are not surprised later to learn that Jody, who comes to Eatonville without any property, manages to invest in farming and in real estate. The fact that Jody's profiting from the others constitutes exploitation is given textual validity by the voice of the invisible women characters who, later after Jody's death, ask in monotones what Janie might have done with "all dat money her husband died and left her" (2). While this may also constitute the women's envy directed at Janie's acceptance of the middle-class status that Jody places her, the fact that the women conceive Jody's business as "taking" money away from them is significant. This reinforces and foregrounds the antagonism inherent between the exploited women and the exploitative system.

Although we do not see but feel the presence of the established industrial monopoly enterprises in *Their Eyes*, we should not assume that the effects of these monopolies on the people's psychic are equally totally absent. We feel the presence of other monopoly enterprises if we consider Jody's optimism and eventual success in bringing post office services and electricity into the small town. While the rest of the characters, such as Hicks, express skepticism and think

that “de white folks ain’t going to ‘low him [Jody] tuh run no post office” (39), Jody thinks otherwise. That he finally succeeds in bringing postal services into the town implies that the white ruling elite accept him as capable of managing and running such an important social institution. This is a recognition his elevated social status which, one may say, is part of the effects of Booker T. Washington’s idea of “separate but equal” spheres (qtd. in Frazer 67). Jody’s ideological acceptance and permission to occupy positions previously reserved for the white male, however, has an ideological price to pay; he is ideologically obligated by the system to “aspire to be white.” This is not a simple thing to do, but it is an inevitable “evil,” as Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy say, “of the race relations in monopoly capitalism” (Baran 237). In adherence to this evil, Jody builds an imposing residential house that beats local standards. We are told that “the rest of the town looked like servants’ quarters surrounding the ‘big’ house” (47) like a slave master’s house. He gets it painted “a gloaty, sparkly white—the kind of promenading white color that the house of Bishop Whipple, W. B. Jackson and the Vanderpool’s wore” (7). He buys a desk like “Mr. Hill or Mr. Galloway . . . with one of those swing-around chairs” (47). This conspicuous opulence further makes the village feel weakened and uncomfortable when talking to Jody. Indeed, Jody’s house even recalls the “palatial” residences characteristic of the black bourgeoisie that Frazer was critical about in the 1930s (Frazer 128). Jody goes ahead to buy himself “a gold-looking” spiting vase for himself and “a lady-like” one for Janie. He proudly says that the spittoon is just like “his used-to-be bossman used to have in the bank up in Atlanta.” Jody’s “power and property” (48) makes the populace feel “taken advantage of,” and invites criticism from the other people who recall that Jody “didn’t have all dat when he came” to the town (49). The people feel that Jody has become different from them, and he is like white people. They describe him using animal imagery in a manner that echoes the

parasitic nature of the capitalist system. They say that seeing Jody is like “seeing your sister turn into a ‘gator. A familiar strangeness. You keep seeing in your sister in the ‘gator and the ‘gator in your sister” (49). This transformations mark the “evil beauties” of capitalism (Baran 275).

Jody’s organized monopoly, as the sole supplier of essential goods and as the sole provider of the necessary social services as post master, landlord and mayor (47/48), is fundamentally informed by the experiences he gains from his previous habitation “in and through Georgy” where he has worked “for white folks” (28). That his former employer was associated with a “bank up in Atlanta” is a significant revelation (47). From this revelation, we may deduce that Jody’s tightly-organized structure and control of the town is in keeping with the logic of the nineteenth century monopoly systems of economic control, in which the institution of banking played a leading role. The revelation that Jody’s previous employer was associated with the banking industry might, therefore, be interpreted as Hurston’s way of revealing to readers the source of Jody’s skills of capital monopoly. Jody most likely copies the skills from the economic environment of the banking industry in which his employer was associated. In this new monopoly capitalism described by V. I. Lenin in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, “monopoly reigns” as opposed to “the old type of capitalism, in which free competition predominated” (Lenin 39). This system, which is characterized by a huge shift from the “anarchy of competition” to an “organized system,” (McGowan 90), partly mirrors Janie’s journey from Logan to Jody as well as Jody’s structured system of economic control in Eatonville. Equally, as postulated by monopoly capitalism, Jody does not want competition. When he catches Henry Pitts with “a wagon load of . . . ribbon cane” and goes ahead to “excommunicate” or, rather, to make Pitts “to leave town” (48), Jody seems to suspect a conflict of interest that may later grow into open competition from his victim. While Jody’s severe

punishment of Pitts provokes even more severe condemnation from some of the characters, others support Jody, using comments that promote the indifference of the capitalist system to which Jody supplicates. For example, Sim Jones feels that “the colored folks oughtn’t tuh be so hard on one ‘nother.” On the contrary, Sam Watson reiterates that colored folks should be left “to learn to work for what dey git like everybody else” (48). This later comment is analogous to the capitalist ideology which demands that the wage earner must labor in order to earn wages.

The preceding manifestation of Jody’s capital monopoly greatly influences the manner in which he oppresses and controls Janie. He forces her to work in the store without paying her and denies her the chance to take part in most communal activities. While Todd McGowan points out that Jody “does not dominate Janie by forcing her to labor (as Logan Killicks does) but by turning her into a thing, transforming her into his commodity” (McGowan 89), textual evidence reveals that, on the contrary, Janie actually “clerks” in the shop (113). Further, the narrator reveals that whenever porch sitters talk about Matt Bonner’s overworked mule, Jody “would hustle her [Janie] off into the store to sell something” (54), therefore, turning her into another overworked mule. He overworks her and controls her with impunity in spite of Janie’s wish to take part in the conversations at the porch. Jane’s oppressed status is amplified by the fact that, with time, she comes to “hate the inside of that store” because she is unwillingly compelled to work (54). McGowan points out that in his commodification of Janie, Jody stresses the aspects of domination and control over several aspects of Janie’s life that include her mode of dress, her voice, and the places she can or cannot go (McGowan 89). We see this control manifested when Jody sees Walter “brushing the back of his hand back and forth across the loose of Janie’s braids” without Janie’s awareness, and later in the day Jody goes ahead to order “Janie to tie her hair round in the store.” In Jody’s mind, we may conclude, Janie is only there in the store as he

says “for him to look at, not those other” (55). Jody seems to know that he has a valuable asset in Janie that should be coveted and, because of Janie’s sexuality, one that he cannot do without. Jody is also aware that Janie is a commodity because of her dependence. By forcing Janie to display herself in the store as a symbol of social stature, Barbara Christian argues, Jody utilizes his patriarchal mandate to “forcibly install [Janie] as Queen of the porch,” further making her “his showpiece, his property” (Christian 58). Such excessive patronizing fits into the middle-class white mentality of the angel in the house; a culture that Christian says reduced a woman to simple “visual representation of *her husband’s* power” (Christian 10). This patriarchal mentality oppressively objectified white women and, apparently, found its way into black bourgeoisie families in which, according to Frazer, the men literally copied the white middle-class livelihood (Teele 120). Perhaps Hurston portrays Janie in such a similar idealized situation, intending to give voice to Janie’s critical perspective about the draconian Victorian ideology which apparently domesticates women and renders them passive and easy objects of male oppression. When Jane, therefore, asserts that “sittin’ on porches lak de white madam” (14) makes her feel incomplete, we get Hurston’s scornful attitude. Janie’s negative attitude also carries her dissatisfaction with her romanticized marriage. From the pedestal on which Jody places her, Janie finds herself beyond Jody’s sensual reach as was the case, according to Paula Giddings, with white Victorian women who, hoisted so high on the pedestal, found themselves “beyond the sensual reach of their husbands (qtd. in Pines 91). Jody, therefore, seems to construct Janie as sexually pure while, on the other hand, Janie seeks to reach for a more sensual and comfortable union with him. She voices her desire when she says that she wants to “utilize” herself “all over.” In as much as Janie’s words serve as her call for a more sensually fulfilling relationship with Jody, it might also be interpreted to prefigure Janie’s quest to unfetter herself from male

dominance in search of her full identity and independence. To achieve these twin objectives, Janie realizes that she must descend from the “high chair” (114) on which she says Jody only wants her to “just sit with folded hands” (112) like a “pretty doll-baby” (29). Jody’s idealization of Janie forms part of the socialization that functions to pacify and satisfy Janie in her position. Charnie Guettel criticizes this dehumanizing idealization of women, saying that the inherent lack of independence constituted in idealization denies the woman a chance to “make her mark in the world.” Speaking from a Marxist existentialist position, Guettel goes further to articulate that

woman is always the ‘other’, the immanent (passive) who is dependant on the man and therefore can live only through him: that it is the man who transcends, or plays the creative role in society. The woman is socialized to be satisfied by passivity. (Guettel 21)

Janie’s search for freedom to unshackle herself from passivity is commensurate with Jill Johnson’s even stronger appeal that all bourgeoisie women must of necessity fight to escape passivity. She maintains:

all women are more or less passive . . . passivity is the accommodation of the woman to her oppression at the very level of the . . . male defined society. Passivity is the index to a woman’s proper behavior as a role playing feminine counterpart to the aggressor. Passivity is the dragon that every woman has to murder in her quest for independence. (Johnston 154)

From her marriage to Jody, Jane also recognizes that although white middle-class women are idealized, they equally have some issues of patriarchal oppression to worry about. She tells Pheoby: “dese educated women got uh heap of things to sit down and consider somebody done tole ‘em what to set down for. Nobody ain’t told poor me, so sittin’ still worries me” (112). From Janie’s words, we get the impression that Janie’s awareness about patriarchal oppression and her strategies of dealing with the oppressive situation, unlike the white women outside her social milieu, is individually motivated and comes only from her own lived experiences. Jane’s assertion finds credibility in bell hooks’ assertion that it is individual “social

circumstances” that most shape black women’s feminist awareness rather than black women’s allegiance with the Women’s Liberation Movement (hooks 139). Hooks’ assertion, which finds textual validity in Janie’s words, shed light on similar controversial issues within the feminist debate to the effect that, depending on a woman’s race or her class, she stands to face possibly different kinds of patriarchal oppression. If this is true, we may argue that the woman’s mode of response to oppressive issues may vary depending on her unique experience. Clara Zetkin explains that with the rise of capitalist society, women from each class in the social strata face one or the other form of subjection and that such subjectivity “takes various forms depending on the class situation of each stratum” (qtd. in Vogel 108). Zetkin’s observation, therefore, grounds Janie’s assertion that it is only Janie’s unique oppressive experiences, rather than anybody else’s, that has helped shape her consciousness to oppression. In any case, apart from her grandmother, Janie does not seek advice about her marital oppression from anybody else and when her grandmother dies, she faces more oppression in her marriage to Jody and Tea Cake. In these later oppressive marriages, Janie seeks no outside assistance in questioning and challenging male dominance.

To foreground Jody’s capitalist and patriarchal control of his subjects and the control of his wife, Hurston gives us textual evidence that reflects some of the mechanical aspects of Jody’s control. One of the key demands that Jody has instilled in the people that are under his command is “mechanical” obedience. His emphasis on quick and unquestionable obedience makes some characters feel transmuted into cogs in a wheel that automatically respond to Jody’s command by the press of a button. For instance, Sam Watson says that Jody “loves obedience out of everything under the sound of his voice” (49). Tellingly, Oscar Scott complains that “You can even feel the switch in Jody’s hand when he is talkin’ to yuh” (49). Jody extends this

dehumanizing “mechanical transformation” of his subjects into his own family. We feel his attempt to transform Janie in the same way, if not worse, when she fails to cut, with mechanical accuracy, a plug of tobacco for sale to Steve Mixon (78). Jody goes ahead to ridicule Janie’s age only to be surprised at Janie’s assertive response about Jody’s own old age and his “big bellies” (79). This incident marks the turning point in Janie’s fight against patriarchal domination in her second marriage. As the narrator indicates, Janie’s public confrontation with Jody destroys “his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish” (79) and this symbolically starts Jody’s slow death.

As historical accounts from the Southern plantation farming during slavery indicate, the dehumanizing imagery that equates workers with a mechanical assemblage was not uncommon in the earlier periods. Barbara Christian quotes a letter from William Byrd, an eighteenth century Virginian planter, to Charles Earl of Orkeny, indicating that white plantation owners viewed their slave as a machine network. In this relationship, the slave owner perceived himself as the engine that only drives or commands its subordinate parts—the slaves. William Byrd wrote:

Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my . . . Bond-men and Bondswomen and every Sort of Trade amongst my servants, so that . . . I must take care to keep all my people to their Duty, to set all the Springs to motion and to make everyone draw his equal Share to carry the Machine forward.
(Christian 9)

From this quote, we may see Janie as Jody’s bondswoman and the other men from whom Jody commands unflinching obedience as his bondsmen. On his death-bed, Janie pours scorn on Jody’s material possessions, which she says he has been “busy worshipping,” as she also angrily reminds him how much he has “trample[d]” and “mash[ed]” her down (86). She further complains about her bondage, telling him: “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). The “terror”

(86) in Janie scornful words, the only feminine “arsenal” available to her, accelerates Jody’s demise, and she therefore psychologically and, at least indirectly, physically kills him to get herself out of bondage.

In contrast to the bourgeois character of Janie’s marriages to Logan and Jody, an examination of Janie’s third marriage to Tea Cake reveals that the marriage, though antibourgeois, inherently supports patriarchy and capitalism. Tea Cake, unlike Logan and Jody, is portrayed as a working-class person. Except for an old guitar which, as soon as he meets Janie, he pawns in order to entertain her, Tea Cake owns no other valuable property (123). Before marrying him, Janie carefully vets her suitors in an attempt to avoid, once again, marrying into the bourgeois. This vetting, calculated to denounce bourgeois status, surfaces when Janie refuses middle class suitors who approach her for her hand in marriage after Jody’s death. For example, Janie refuses the “undertaker up at Sanford” who, according to Pheoby, has “a lovely place to take her [Janie] to—already furnished. Better ‘n her house Joe left her” (111). Equally revealing is the fact that once Tea Cake comes into Jane’s life, she chooses to sell Joe’s store. Although Janie has an equal claim in the store, selling it to start a new life “in Tea Cake’s way” (114) may show that she is ready to step down from the class that Jody has placed her. Phillipa Kafka observes that having everybody refer to the store as “Starks’ store” disguises the fact that a share of the store as a commodity is surely a function of the protagonist’s [Janie’s] labor. Kafka says that since Janie works in the store for years without receiving more than subsistence provisions, the surplus value that accrues from her labor as equity is rightfully hers to dispose of as she wishes. When Janie sells the store after Jody’s death to finance her romance with Tea Cake she therefore exercises her freedom and expresses “her contempt for economics,” Kafka asserts (Kafka 157). As if to reveal that she has a claim in the property and as well as show her contempt

for that property, Janie confesses that Jody exploited her labor when she tells Tea Cake that “clerking in that store waz hard” (133). Implied in Janie’s manner of sharing her frustrations with Tea Cake is her wish not to base her new-found love on material considerations like those that guided her grandmother but on mutual love and affection. This is also implied in her words when she tells her friend Pheoby that her engagement and forthcoming marriage to Tea Cake “ain’t . . . no race for property and titles” (114). We may argue that, at this juncture, Jane looks back to her previous marriages only to realize that both were, from the beginning, based on material things. Indeed, as the text indicates, Nanny, Logan’s emissary, attaches Logan’s wealth to his quest for Janie’s hand in marriage. In the same vein, Jody flaunts his capital and his interest to enter the world of business when he proposes, promising Janie that once he becomes “a big ruler of things, she would stand to reap “the benefits” (29). While we may look at this assertion as a patriarchal penchant that articulates the sentiments of “the male rule” (Beasley 55) inside and outside the family, Jody’s words also refer to his property which he later manages single handedly. The fact that Tea Cake is no property owner persuades us to concur with Gates when he says that Janie’s marriage to Tea Cake embodies a negation of the “terms of material relationship of ‘marriage’ ordained by Nanny and realized by Logan Killicks and Joe Starks” (Gates 191). Nevertheless, being a male member of a patriarchal society, Tea Cake equally manifests certain aspects of male domination in his marriage. Tea Cake’s maintenance of the dominant system even after Janie seems to think that mutual love with him will of necessity free her from capitalism and male oppression symbolically suggests that, although capitalism may recede or be defeated, patriarchy still will remain in society. Tea Cake’s working-class status does not guarantee him ownership of any means of production, but his uncontested maleness dictate that he operates to maintain the patriarchal statue quo.

If we further consider the couple's life in the muck, where Tea Cake works and where he takes Janie after they are married, we will also discover how he dominates and oppresses Janie. As soon as they settle down, Tea Cake convinces Janie to get a wage-earning job in order to work along with him. This done, the job distinguishes them as a working class family. At the end of the story when Tea Cake dies, Janie goes back to Eatonville clad in overalls, which identify her before her friends as a working-class woman. She tells her friend Pheoby that "Tea Cake got her into wearing 'em—following from behind him" (7). Revealed in these words is the idea that even in this relationship, Tea Cake occupied a leading position while Jane's was that of an obedient and even passive follower. On the other hand, in spite of Janie's implied inferiority, Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that the overalls are a signification of "equality and sexuality in gender terms" as well as a signification of "double class status as property (petty-bourgeois—local notable) annealed to 'poverty' (agricultural day worker)" (DuPlessis 79).

While it is admissible to perceive the initial stages of the Tea Cake/ Jane relationship as founded on the tenets of freedom, it is also admissible to point out that the relationship is not informed by the domesticity and objectification that Janie was used to in Jody's house. Tea Cake also idealizes Janie and aspires to subject her to passivity. We realize that he dominates her so much so that Janie seems to experience life only from Tea Cake's point of view. This is clearly revealed in Janie's unquestioning acceptance of Tea Cake's decisions which affect both their lives. For instance, when Tea Cake brags and dictates to Janie:

Ah no need no assistance to help me feed mah woman. From now on, yuh goingtuh eat whutever mah money can buy yuh and wear de same. When Ah ain't got nothin' you don't get nothin. (128)

All Jane says in response is "Dat's all right with me." Such submissiveness to take "things the way he wanted her to" (128) reveals relative inferiority in a marriage that many critics have

argued is based on equality. Indeed, we may also agree with Kafka when she says that Tea Cake's boastful assertion to provide for his wife while he demands that she makes no contribution is an aspect of domestication and idealization (Kafka 157). In addition, we may also borrow from bell hooks the argument that "under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in others" (hooks 135). From hooks' assertion we may appreciate the freedom that Janie enjoys in this marriage as well as criticize the limitations she encounters in the same marriage.

Another form of oppression that we find in this marriage is the infringement of Janie's property rights. Tea Cake infringes on Janie's property rights when he takes Janie's "two Hundred dollars" (118) without finding it necessary to seek her consent. While we may trivialize this action, the fact that the money belongs to Janie and Tea Cake takes it without her permission reveals that Tea Cake's action is motivated by "patriarchal-based" assumption that his behavior should not be taken as jokingly as he explains it later to Janie. Unfortunately, when Janie finds her money missing, she becomes traumatized and spends almost the entire day "searching the room . . . turning around in her tracks." In this manner, she recalls to her mind the image of "a horse grinding sugar cane." This image significantly reminds us of Logan's mule and Matt Bonner's overworked mule that Jody buys to freedom. At the same time, Janie recalls the affair between Who Flung and Mrs. Ann Tyler, a rich widow whose husband had died and left her with "a good home and insurance money" (118). She especially recalls that Who Flung had taken Mrs. Tyler to a shabby room where they stayed for two days, only for Mrs. Tyler to wake up and "find Who Flung and her money gone" (119). Indeed, these memories disturb Janie and reveal to the reader that while it may be assumed that she has finally attained freedom in this marriage, on the contrary, underneath the superficial freedom there exists significant reminders that the

shackles of male oppression are still in place. As Janie later resigns to sitting in the room musing, she discovers that “inside the room looked like the mouth of an alligator—gaped wide open to swallow something down” (118). The room and its oppressiveness serve as a metaphorical reminder to Janie’s previous oppressive marriage to Jody, where disgruntled characters use the same metaphor to describe Jody’s predatory capitalism. Janie is here reminded that even in this new marriage, her self-liberation is not yet complete. Janie’s incomplete liberation gets more evident when Tea Cake, in an attempt to assert his authority and ownership of his wife, beats her. This beating extends the argument that regardless of class affiliations, a woman will always be perceived by her husband as his own property. Ironically, Tea Cake beats Janie, not because Janie has done anything wrong, but because he suspects that Mrs. Turner is intending to introduce her light-skinned brother to Janie. After whipping her, he proudly says “Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss . . . Ah jus’ let her see dat Ah got control” (148). Just like Jody, Tea Cake also controls Janie’s movements. When Sop-de-Bottom asks how Janie can have so much money in the bank and still be workin in the muck, Tea Cake dogmatically replies “Janie is wherever Ah wants her tuh be” (148). Even more revealing is the understanding we get that on the nights when the couple attend dances and stay up late, the following day Tea Cake wakes up and goes to work in the fields, but he does “not let her [Janie] go with him to the field” (154). Since it is not Janie who decides to stay behind, the fact that it is Tea Cake who decides may constitute his idealization of her and her limited freedom to control her life.

To understand Janie’s final efforts to free herself, we need to consider the symbolism of the hurricane that destroys life and property at the end of the novel. We can only grasp this symbolism by borrowing from Sondra Guttman’s historical analysis of the novel. In her reading of the novel, Guttman finds a close connection between the muck and the Depression-era

historical Belle Glade, Florida which forms the historical context where the novel is set. Guttman, who reads from Jacqueline Jones's historical account of the real 1930 Belle Glade, observes that in *Their Eyes*, Hurston attempts to portray an artistic picture of the actual migrant labor conditions that existed at the period. Guttman observes that Hurston's portrayal of a migrant community whose members choose to be separate from the white society works in a way to locate Tea Cake and Janie in a place of implicit resistance to the economics underlying white supremacy. The aspects of material deprivation and the economic reality of the workers give a clear image that shows how the owners of capital "capitalize on the labor surplus" (Guttman 107). Guttman goes on to point out that in the real Belle Glade, where migrant workers enjoyed relative freedom from the close watch of the master, the workers formed social relations that enabled them to survive the hard economic life. The fictional Belle Glade workers equally value the cultural ritual of creating "kin networks necessary to supplement a less-than-living wage," Guttman claims. In light of this picture, Guttman observes that the violent destruction of the muck by the hurricane may implicitly function as a protestation of the exploitative conditions there (Guttman 108). In her article, Guttman concludes that Hurston "uses this disaster to make her criticism of migrant worker conditions" and in that case, Hurston presents the hurricane "in terms of a slave revolt" (Guttman 110). While Guttman's argument is without doubt moving and illuminating, a feminist perspective may interpret the destruction of the muck as a feminine uprising against capitalist patriarchy. Such an interpretation borrows heavily from Angela Davis's interpretation of Marx's historical approach to nature and its implications for women's oppression and future liberation. Davis's analysis of Marx within this framework attempts to specify the ways in which the subjection of women "and their ideological relegation to the

sphere of nature was insidiously wedded to the consolidation of capitalism.” Davis invokes the theory that “sexual conflict is the matrix of all other social antagonisms (Davis 148). She asserts:

Alongside awesome but increasingly irrational technological achievement . . . men (i.e., males) have severed the umbilical cord between themselves and nature. They have deciphered its mysteries, subdued its forces and have forged their self-definition in contradistinction to the nature they have conquered. Women are projected as embodiments of nature’s unrelenting powers. In their alienated portrait, women are still primarily undifferentiated beings—sexual, childbearing, natural. (Davis 148)

Davis goes on to posit that since in the bourgeois epoch, “external nature and human nature must be conquered by science, industry, the state—and . . . other social forces,” nature’s destructive force may, therefore, come forth as an “implicit . . . denunciation of social repression and antagonisms of capitalist society” (Davis 149). The muck portrays a clear picture of the appropriation of nature by the landed class. Every little portion of the land and human labor are utilized for the sake of maximizing farm productivity and profits. For instance, Hurston underscores real exploitation of the workers when she reveals that the workers, who cannot find accommodation due to the limitations in housing, have to sleep on the empty ground at night, “to pay the man whose land they slept on.” The land owner has only to “run the fire just like his boarding place—for pay” (132). The Everglades land which, it is revealed, is below sea level, is rehabilitated for agricultural production. The sprawling lake Okechobee is kept at bay by the use of dykes to further contain nature for economic exploitation. In spite of man’s contentment that the lake is fully contained, when the water breaks loose and the dykes give in, nature’s destructive forces are felt by the poor and the rich alike. The wind and the water “seize” the dikes and “run forward,” uprooting the quarters “like grass” to meet the “supposed-to-be conquerors” (162). The hurricane, whose effects are far reaching, echoes the first paragraph of the novel which satirizes the destruction of man along with his dreams by nature’s unrelenting

forces (1). In the muck, similar dreams, this time set upon land and not upon the sea, are mocked to death by the angry sea. Perhaps this destruction of “man” and his dreams functions as Hurston’s symbolic way of denouncing capitalism and patriarchy. This may also suggest that like nature, the feminine spirit of liberation is similarly forceful and unrelenting.

The feminization of the hurricane calls for an interpretation of the destruction as a feministic triumph over capitalist patriarchy. When Tea Cake goes out of the rental room that he and Janie occupy in Palm Beach after the hurricane, he looks at the destruction and becomes horrified. The narrative voice gives us a reflection of Tea Cake’s mental consciousness as he looks at the destruction and is petrified at the extent to which “the mother of malice had trifled with men” (169). On this account, the natural destruction of the muck may be interpreted as a feminine revolution that aims at emancipating Janie and other womenfolk who are similarly oppressed by the system. On the other hand, the fact that Tea Cake romanticizes and idealizes Janie finds relevance in Davis’ argument and further creates the connection between “women” and nature. In spite of his domination of Janie, Tea Cake tells her:

Yuh’s e uh pretty woman outside uh bein’ nice. . . . Everytime Ah see uh patch uh roses uh somethin’ over sportin’ they selves makin’ out they pretty, Ah tell ‘em ‘Ah want yuh to see mah Janie sometime.’ You must let de flowers see yuh sometimes, heah, Janie? (181)

From the preceding excerpt, Tea Cake demonstrates the understanding men have that, just like nature, women need to be dominated and exalted. This is the domain into which patriarchal capitalism relegates women and hypostatizes them as creatures of nature “to blatantly camouflage” their oppression (Davis 149). While Tea Cake’s social status may signify that Marx’s theory about the appropriation of nature and women may not be specifically relevant in interpreting the manner in which he dominates Janie, the fact that he idealizes her, oppresses her, and asserts his superiority over her makes Tea Cake culpable. In light of Davis’ interpretation of

Marx, Tea Cake's murder by Janie would equally signify that the feminine revolution is finally successful. Just like nature, which has an unrelenting "resistance to be broken" (Davis 149), Janie does not relent in her struggle to free herself from domination. Throughout her three marriages, she seems to fight the same war—a war against male domination. This culminates in her physical execution of Tea Cake which, quoting Susan Willis, Hazel Carby says is "a . . . radical response to male domination" (Carby 132).

As Janie is arraigned in court, issues related to patriarchy and social classes emanate from the unique support she receives from the white women. These issues recall our attention to Kate Millet's controversial argument about the absence of class distinctions among women in general. Millet argues that the oppression of women in patriarchal capitalist societies is not mediated by class differences between women. She posits that class differences between women are "transitory and illusory" and that whatever the class of a woman's birth and education, "women have fewer permanent class association than . . . men." She goes on to maintain that economic dependency renders women's affiliations with class only a "tangential, vicarious and temporary matter" (qtd. in Barrett 11). This brief summary of Millet's argument helps to explain the solidarity that Janie receives from the white women. We may confidently say that the white women support Janie because, in a patriarchal setting, all women belong to one oppressed class in which they all identify with one another. Indeed, as DuPlessis points out, the solidarity that Janie receives from white women shows how "these women as women identify with the woman's story of a romantic tragedy no matter the race and the class of the protagonist[s]. Symbolically, therefore, this unique form of interracial feminist solidarity suggests the possibility of forming a singular interracial or multiethnic feminist "coalition" (Beasley 113) between the different groups of black and white feminists as a means of acquiring greater

strength to fight against male oppression. DuPlessis further points out that Hurston constructs the trial to have Janie yearn for the understanding of white women and even wish that she could tell her story to them instead of the white men in the jury, a possibility foreclosed by the patriarchal judicial system represented by the jury (DuPlessis 85). While these two arguments are tenable, they both may be problematic because they fail to account for the absence of Janie's fellow black women. Counter arguments to Millet's position especially from women of color indicate that minority women view as critical class differences between women. For instance, in one of her recent articles Bell hooks argues that black women's "overall social status is lower than that of any other group" (hooks 144). Hazel Carby's argument that white women cannot and should not write black women's "herstory" implies that significant class differences and unique experiences cannot permit white women to do so. Carby says that although "the herstory of black women is interwoven with that of white women this does not mean that they are the same story" (Carby 78). From this understanding, we may conclude that Janie's fellow black women decide not to identify with her because they feel that she belongs to the middle class where Jody had placed her. This class is reserved for white people more than blacks who consider themselves at the very bottom of the social scale. Janie, however, withdraws from the white women to find a fellow black woman who is ready to listen to her and to whom she tells her story with an implied intention of raising feminist consciousness among black women and therefore form a coherent black female identity. This means that the black women have a mistaken perception of Janie as a middle class woman because, as if to correct that mistaken perception, Janie tells Pheoby "Jody classed me off. Ah didn't" (112). One might also argue that Janie withdraws from the white women's support because she foresees racial segregation within the coalition. In any case, as bell hooks argues, within the women's liberation movement, black women "remain unequals,

inferiors” all due to the “paternalist endemic to white supremacist ideology” (hooks 142). In spite of the preceding views, it is important to note that the unique female solidarity witnessed in the court and Janie’s subsequent withdrawal leaves the reader with an ambivalent situation that Hurston does not resolve. Janie’s support, received from white middle class-women, seems to suggest the formation of a universal women’s political body, but her later withdrawal negates this argument and, instead, seems to foreground what D. King calls a “multiple jeopardy” inherent within the existing feminism (qtd. in Beasley 113). This refers to those feminist critics who support universal “sisterhood” and those who advocate for “separate struggles” (Beasley 113).

At the end of the novel, Janie’s self-revelation to Pheoby serves two purposes. Apart from changing her fellow women’s misguided perceptions about Janie’s superior class, her story also serves as a consciousness building endeavor. She equates Pheoby’s attentive listening to “openin’ yo’ mouth and lettin’ de moon shine down yo’ throat” (192). She goes ahead to advise Pheoby that if there is anything that people must aspire to do, they must “find out about livin’ fuh theyselves” (192). She assumes a representational role, telling Janie “Ah been a delegate to the big ‘ssociation of life . . . De Grand Lodge, de big concention of livin’ is just where Ah been dis year and a half” (6). Pheoby responds that, indeed, Janie’s testimony has opened Pheoby’s eyes and enlightened her tenfold:

Ah done growed ten feet higher jus’ listening tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better criticize yuh in mah hearin’. (192)

Jane’s story will possibly touch the other women. She mandates Pheoby to relate it to rest of the “mouth-almighty” (5), saying Pheoby should talk to other women since, Janie says, “Dat’s just de same as myself” (6).

Hurston's figuration of Janie largely reveals the oppressive conditions of women within Janie's black community and this oppression is influenced by patriarchy and capitalism. Janie transcends both ideologies, each of which are manifested in her three marriages. She runs away from Logan to escape being overworked in the domestic sphere and in the farm. She kills Jody with her own words and after his burial sells off some of the property which is rightfully hers to start a new life in her new working class husband's way. In her third marriage, Jane kills her oppressive husband and is acquitted of murder in court in a case that signifies the triumph of the female sex over the male. This court victory symbolizes a union or sisterhood of colored and white women, although, as the text seems to imply, there exist some racial issues that still need to be resolved before such a union can be made possible. Hurston's obliqueness with regards to the unified multiracial feminist union suggests that such a union is necessary and possible. However, Janie's withdrawal from the white women's support to symbolically raise the consciousness of her fellow black women about male oppression suggests a quest to build enough strength through mutual support and recognition of black women within her own society which might later be necessary in the women's unified coalition. Finally, Janie's resettlement in her own house as a fully independent woman, with no man to oppress or patronize her, underscores her ultimate liberation. However, like all other women, Janie desires to dream the truth and "remember everything" she may not "want to forget" (1). She may have nostalgic memories to relive about her marriage to Tea Cake; the man who took her very close to her dream world, the farthest "horizon" (193). In Janie's imagination this is the point where the world ends. Perhaps this was the farthest Janie was fated to reach and she is happy to have gotten there. However, it is important to note that this ending of the novel presents us with a contradiction that leaves us with some questions whose answers the text or Hurston does not

provide. For instance, we may ask ourselves why Janie should keep memories of a marriage in which she did not enjoy all the freedom that any woman or any human is guaranteed. Tea Cake was an oppressive man, and whether his oppression was different and not as extreme as Logan's or Jody's is immaterial. Despite the imaginative limitations Janie may place upon herself at the end of the novel, Hurston's critique is clear. We may say that since patriarchy remains intact even without capitalism, as shown in Janie's last marriage, Hurston seems to conclude that capitalism is a greater social ill whose destruction is more urgent than patriarchy.

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