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Source: *American Literary History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Summer, 2001), pp. 265-294

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3054604>

Accessed: 09/04/2008 16:20

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“Go there tuh *know* there”: Zora Neale Hurston and the Chronotope of the Folk

Leigh Anne Duck

In his 1936 *Opportunity* review of *Mules and Men* (1935), Zora Neale Hurston's collection of southern African-American folklore and hoodoo practices, Alain Locke raises a concern still prevalent in the criticism of her work. Praising her knowledge of the “rare native material and local color,” he nonetheless complains that the locale, as she presents it, is “too Arcadian,” even “extinct” (“Deep River” 9). An influential and prolific critic, Locke called often for the artistic representation of “folk traditions” and the “folk-spirit,” which he viewed as the “deep resources of the past.”¹ Hurston's work violated this dictum, however, by suggesting that the “folk” existed not only in history and in the realm of the aesthetic, but also in the present and in the social space of the southeastern US. For this reason, the critical reception of her work exemplifies the challenge of contemporary African-American vernacular theory, which, in configuring the historical rural South as a space of cultural heritage and authenticity, often struggles to negotiate its relationship to the modernizing nation (Dubey; Favor 5–9). Though she is generally celebrated as an artist whose work resisted racism by emphasizing the holistic, communal values of traditional African-American culture, she has also been widely dismissed as a writer whose representations of the “folk” accommodated the racism of a nation quick to exploit “undeveloped” peoples. Despite their divergent political and aesthetic positions, these readings tend to share the premise that the worlds inscribed in her work must be mapped outside of national modernity, and mapped, instead, in a space characterized as “mythic,” “spiritual,” “nostalgic,” or “anti-historical” (Wall, “*Mules*” 667; Baker 300–05; Carby 174; Gilroy 91).

This essay seeks to intervene in this debate by considering the difficulty Hurston faced as a writer who endeavored to map

the relationship between national and regional African-American cultures. Though much African-American writing from the 1920s and 1930s suggests that “folk” culture offers the attraction of an authentic, racial community, that allure itself is often represented as uncanny—a dangerous nostalgia for an experience inaccessible to modern subjects and inextricably linked to racist exploitation. *Mules and Men* addresses this problem, to some extent, by representing the possibility of reconciling “folk” and “modern” cultural forms in individual experience. However, in suggesting the viability of the “folk” within modernity, Hurston devotes no attention to the fact that, for participants in that culture to receive political and economic justice, the region’s social structure would need to change, a process that might alter its autonomous African-American communities. This tension in Hurston’s treatment of the “folk” emerges in her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which suggests that segregated southern African-American communities were increasingly influenced by the values of modern bourgeois ideology. In representing this transition, Hurston provides for the preservation of folkloric values by incorporating them into the modern self-fashioning of her individuated protagonist. Through this logic, however, the novel displaces the enforced racial segregation of the South with the voluntary isolation of folkloric practice.

1. “Folk-Time” and the “New Negro”

In the foreword to his influential *New Negro* anthology (1925), Locke claims that the “essential forces” responsible for “social change and progress” are to be found “in the very heart of the folk-spirit”; he thus mobilizes the concept of a traditional and stable population—the “folk”—in order to suggest the depth, or “inner life,” of an “emergent nationalit[y]” (xxv). Despite his interest in the “folk,” however, his teleology is resolutely focused on contemporary and coming changes—the increased demand and opportunity for African-American “self-expression” and “self-determination” (xxv, xxvii). In describing this national movement, the volume, as a whole, demonstrates the temporality of a capitalist modernity in which time is understood as the dimension of progress (Osborne 70–75; Castoriadis, *Imaginary* 207).² From Locke’s description of the “New Negro”—a “new figure on the national canvas” (“Foreword” xxv), with a “new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom”—to W. E. B. Du Bois’s account of the “modern black American” leading the efforts to “give black folk a knowledge

of modern culture" ("Negro Mind" 413), writers emphasize that African Americans are experiencing a "hectic period of transition" (C. Johnson, "New Frontage" 278), a "constant growth of group consciousness" (J. Johnson 301), a "rapid development . . . of the race life" (Miller 312), and the increasing influence of the "typical spirit and push of modern industrialism in America" (Frazier 340). Furthermore, in depicting the simultaneity of these developments across distinct spaces, such as Harlem, Durham, and Tuskegee, they inscribe a modern national community, in which individuals, though unacquainted and spatially distanced, recognize themselves as working together in homogeneous time to pursue shared goals (Anderson 6–7, 26–27).

In describing the rapidity of this modernization, however, *New Negro* writers also demonstrate the paradoxical nature of modern time: though it may be understood to be uniform across space, not all subjects in all spaces are understood to participate in it uniformly. One feature of late modernity is the fascination of modernizing societies with their own newness and speed and their tendency to understand cultures in which change occurs more slowly as fundamentally different from their own (Fabian 23–31; Osborne 75). In his contribution to *The New Negro*, for instance, Charles S. Johnson depicts the Great Migration as a movement toward modernity by persons bearing the "marks of backward cultures" (294). He argues that the space of the South is characterized by both a different developmental era and a different experiential temporality: in contrast to the ever-modernizing city, where life is experienced as "feverish struggle" (278), rural life is constituted by "slow move[ment]" and a lack of change (291). This account understands certain spaces to exist outside modernity and outside the progress described elsewhere in the volume. Even Locke, though he sought to describe a national, unified African-American community, could not avoid the inscription of temporal distance: he argues that "[t]he migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap" (4), a leap that signifies "a deliberate flight . . . from medieval America to modern" ("New Negro" 6).

Such analyses reflect an anxiety that Kenneth Warren has detected in African-American writing of this era—the difficulty of maintaining an "imaginative contemporaneity" between urban, educated elites and rural, relatively isolated societies (393). This problem is exemplified in Du Bois's *New Negro* study of transnational capitalism and imperialism, which single out for exploitation cultures characterized by both a slower tempo—allowing time for "leisure" and "contemplation"—and an ab-

sence of Western science and technology—an education “far behind modern knowledge” (410). Suggesting that transnational economic and social analysis supports efforts to redress the injustices facing colonized peoples, Du Bois also points to a factor that mitigates against such inquiry—the sense that “the modern black American” and the global “black folk” inhabit different temporalities (385, 413). His emphasis on the importance of spreading “a knowledge of modern culture” seems motivated not only by the belief that such knowledge is useful in challenging capitalist exploitation but also by the understanding that this shared temporal reference is necessary for the construction of the global racial community from which such defiance might arise—a “great human force,” “reaching out hands toward each other to know, to sympathize, to inquire” (412–13). In contemporary theoretical terms, we might say that, for this sharing to occur, participants must be able to imagine a community of contemporaries, one “moving steadily” through linear “history” (Anderson 22–36).

Many writers were unable to imagine such a racial community extending across the US because they perceived a temporal distance separating the North and the South. George S. Schuyler, for example, complained that African America could not be articulated strictly through reference to the “folk” precisely because such formulations elided the modernity of northern African Americans. Arguing in a 1926 essay that the culture of the “peasantry of the South” is “foreign” to other members of the diaspora (51), he anticipates present-day theories of nationalism by explaining that northern African-American life is not only similar to, but also simultaneous with, that of northern white Americans: “The Aframerican” turns off his “Connecticut alarm clock” and sits down to “a breakfast similar to that eaten by his white brother across the street,” before going to work “in mills, mines, factories, and commerce,” responding “to the same political, social, moral, and economic stimuli . . . as his white neighbor” (53). In his representation of a racially integrated imagined national community, however, Schuyler is unable to include members of the “southern peasant class,” who, in his discussion, exemplify temporal alterity (52).

It is not surprising that these writers would find it difficult to imagine that the South participated in national modernity: during this period, white southerners vigilantly enforced laws and social practices that perpetuated a pre-Civil War social structure, a policy which further contributed to the region’s notorious economic stagnation. Nonetheless, these formulations of northern modernity and southern medievalism are notable for

their rigidity. In contrast, Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) argues that all African Americans experience multiple temporal forms, "swept on by the currents of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century" (142). He explains that this experience of anachronism occurs both because African Americans are restricted from participating in political and economic modernity, and because, particularly in the South, many African Americans maintain traditional cultural forms. But while Du Bois represents this doubled temporal identification as a painful result of racist oppression, he also suggests that it offers some benefits—most notably, for him, a perspective from which to critique the excesses of modernity (8, 57). As the century progressed, however, writers seem increasingly to have doubted that individuals could productively manage the experience of temporal difference.

Rather, many of them believed that the differences between "folk" and modern culture were so great—in terms of values, practices, and experience—that the shift between them could prove confusing, or even devastating, to the individual subject. Such concerns are manifest in the "social pathology" explanation of migrant difficulties, which held that southern African Americans engaged in criminal and self-destructive behaviors because they could no longer rely, in Charles S. Johnson's words, on the "packets of stored up memories marking out channels of conduct" that had served them before they moved to northern cities ("New Frontage" 288). Johnson's explanation that "folk" behavior is derived from "memories," as well as "assorted heritages and old loyalties," demonstrates the way in which understandings of "folk" cultural alterity relied on perceptions of temporal distance: because he understands southern African-American identity to be constituted by the continuing influence of individual and cultural pasts, he imagines that, once separated from the visible marks and social reminders of these pasts, migrants will be overwhelmed by their "totally new experiences" (291, 293).³ Not only are migrants separated from the signs of their individual and cultural heritage, in Johnson's argument, but they are also forced to experience the flow of time differently: "Temperament[ally]" adjusted to rural life, southern African Americans are newly exposed to the "tension of city life," which produces "growing nervous disorders" even among those accustomed to urban culture (285).⁴ He fears that "disillusionment" must "inevitably" result (288).

Historians have since argued that northern African-American elites overstated their own differences from migrants (Dubey 298–99), a choice often thought to be motivated by their

bourgeois elitism or racial assimilationism,⁵ or by their concerns that, in a white racist logic of association, their own identities would be devalued by proximity to persons who had suffered southern forms of oppression and who maintained regional cultural practices often distorted and mocked by minstrel stereotypes (Grossman 140–55).⁶ But, in addition, it seems plausible that, in developing theories of migrant “pathology,” urban elites were expressing anxieties that emerged from their own encounters with cultural differences. The Great Migration placed both African-American migrants and northern residents in contact with a regional difference that seemed, on occasion, difficult to negotiate—not least because it was so often subsumed under the banner of “racial similarity.”⁷ As southern African Americans began to reshape northern cities, long-time residents may have feared the loss not only of their social position, but also of the cultural and temporal frameworks through which they understood both self and society. In certain fictional representations from the 1920s, at least, “folk-time” seems dangerous, not only as one component of a white supremacist regional temporality, but also as an uncannily pleasurable experience of time, one which compensates so precisely for the alienating effects of modern individualism and urbanization that it might lure northern African Americans into temporarily overlooking the more alarming aspects of southern life.

Even Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, a 1923 work which celebrates “folk” culture as a medium through which to glimpse African-American heritage, suggests that too deep an immersion in this contemporary manifestation of the past must prove destructive to a modern, urban subjectivity. Ralph Kabnis, recently arrived in Georgia from New York, is both fascinated by the time of the South, which he understands to be infused with a religious and historic African-American culture, and troubled by its experiential difference from that of the northern cities he knows: “Hours, hours north, why not say a lifetime north? . . . New York? Impossible. It was a fiction” (86). He attempts to forestall his confusion by arguing that the difference between contiguous regions cannot be so great, but learns he is mistaken from the story of Mame Lamkins, a pregnant woman, whose lynchers, removing her fetus and finding it still alive, “stuck it t a tree” (92). Situated in a society marked by white supremacist violence, Kabnis is doubly alienated because he believes himself immersed in a temporality incommensurable with his own. When he fears that he, too, has been threatened by white supremacists, Kabnis first loses his understanding of measured, calendrical time, be-

lieving that he has been transposed into a nineteenth-century scene (94). Soon his sense of social time is displaced by a subjective, imaginary time: he begins to see the South itself as a “dream” (105). Ultimately, Kabnis is trapped in his own subjectivity, in which he is tortured by the sense of both stagnation and incessant craving; fixated on a form “burned int [his] soul” and demanding endless attention, refusing to “stay still unless [he] feed[s] it” (111), he identifies himself with both Mame Lamkins and her lynched fetus. Unable to withstand this metaphorical pregnancy which can never come to term, Kabnis “wish[es] t God some lynchin white man ud stick his knife through [his soul] an pin it to a tree. An pin it to a tree” (111).

A similar danger, emerging within Harlem, is represented in Nella Larsen’s 1928 novel *Quicksand*, in which the modern, cosmopolitan Helga Crane is paralyzed by her encounter with “folk” culture. At the moment when she encounters a “folk” religious service, Helga has reached a crisis: having suffered a “tantalizing oppression of loneliness and isolation” all her life (77), she has recently been rebuffed by a man whose presence had always produced in her a “longing for sympathy and understanding” (82). Wandering the streets of Harlem until a storm drives her into a migrants’ revival (137), she is initially repulsed, but becomes fascinated by the way the migrant women’s bodies seem to evoke past temporalities. She is first greeted by a “mammy”-like “grotesque ebony figure” who “croon[s]” over her, saying “Yes, chile, yes, chile” (140). This figure constitutes an “Old South” stereotype, but as the service progresses, a “wild, ecstatic fury” develops (140), until the women’s “writhings and weepings” become “almost Bacchic” (141); at the peak of the service, they seem “like reptiles” (142). These women embody not only the “racial” past Kabnis sees in the soil of *Cane*, but that of all evolution. Observing these “folk,” whose songs remind Helga of a song she heard “years ago—hundreds of years, it seems” (139), Helga fears she may become entangled in, or infected by, their atavism: “She remained motionless, watching, as if she lacked the strength to leave the place . . . with its mixture of breaths, its contact of bodies, its concerted convulsions, all in wild appeal for a single soul. Her soul” (141). Both her fears and her desires for a communal experience are realized: “She felt herself possessed . . . time seemed to sink back into the mysterious grandeur and holiness of far-off simpler centuries” (142). Losing her sense of self in her attraction to this promise of serenity, Helga abandons the independence and love of “nice things” previously so important to her (41); she marries a southern minister she meets

at the service, and returns to the South where she is “used up” by childbearing, housework, and the duties of a minister’s wife (150, 148).

Critical writing from the early 1930s suggests that Northern African-American anxiety concerning “folk” culture was impeding efforts to theorize a politically active national-racial community. Sterling Brown complained that African-American intellectuals avoided “folk” topics (“More” 189), and Locke called for representations that would enable readers to understand rural Southern African Americans as commensurable within a modern temporality (“We Turn” 42), work that would represent “a common denominator between the old and the new Negro” (“Sterling” 92).⁸ Concerns about “folk” culture were fueled by the many sociological reports on southern sharecropping released in the 1930s. Charles S. Johnson, for example, argued that the “Black Belt” constituted a peasant society, and described “folk” “accommodation” to both their economic status and to local white supremacist practices as “fixed” and “complete” (*Shadow* 6). Faced with such representations, African-American periodicals located in New York began to wonder whether the southern “folk” were prepared to seek social and political equality, or whether the circumstances of their lives had rendered them “too apathetic to condemn and rend apart the system which has kept them shackled” (Lamont 283).⁹ In this context, Richard Wright argued for using the traditions of “folk” culture, the “channels through which the racial wisdom flowed,” to mold “the lives and consciousness of [the African-American] masses toward new goals”: though he valued the democratic appeal of folklore, he sought to use it to modernize and transform the culture from which it came (“Blueprint” 99).

2. Negotiating Temporal Distance in *Mules and Men*

Hurston, notoriously, abjured Wright’s approach; in much of her work from the 1930s, she seems determined to defend southern African-American culture against modernization.¹⁰ Suggesting that existing representations of the “folk” were misleading, even “overwrought,” she sought to represent folkloric practice as a viable aspect of contemporary life (qtd. in Hemenway 184). But while, for example, her musical *The Great Day* (1922) and its later variations represent rural southern African Americans incorporating folksongs and tales into everyday life, these performances did little to persuade audiences that this “folk” shared the time of the modern nation. On the contrary,

program notes for these productions praise their “authentic[ity],” their understanding of “the native instinct of the negro for art expression,” and their procurement of the “pure undiluted folk-forms that for generations have been in the shrewd and disarming custody of the common people.”¹¹

In an influential article, Hazel Carby has argued that this allochronic understanding of the “folk” is central to Hurston’s project, which “attempt[s] to stabilize and displace the social contradictions and disruption of her contemporary moment” by “privileg[ing] the nostalgic and freez[ing] it in time” (172, 174).¹² A number of Hurston’s contemporary critics were similarly concerned both that her work lacked awareness of the period’s racial politics and that it seemed disconnected from the time of the nation. Sterling Brown, for example, complained that Hurston’s work lacked the “bitterness” inescapable in southern African-American life and labeled the work “pastoral” (*Negro* 160–61). It is true that *Mules and Men* avoids the topic of race relations by representing an implicitly segregated community; though Hurston’s subjects often, through their folktales, describe the impact of white supremacist oppression on their lives, the narrator herself engages in no discussion of this issue. But while political commentary within the text might have indicated to readers that Hurston herself sought to connect “folk” culture with modernity, it would not necessarily have altered the way critics interpreted Hurston’s Floridians. In a nation fascinated with its own modernity, the “folk” seemed, to many, to belong inherently to another temporality. Though Harold Preece, for example, criticized Hurston for representing a “backward” people which had too often been exploited by and for the “patronizing interest” of a “cult of sophisticates” (35), his insistence that folklorists “cast their lot with the folk” (38), teaching them to transform their “archaic” cultural forms for political activism, precludes consideration of the “folk” as coeval—already not “archaic” (37).¹³

Much of *Mules and Men*, however, directly challenges the depiction of the “folk” as “backward.” Despite the narrator’s stated interest in “old-time tales” (8), Hurston represents “folk” cultural forms as flexible and vital. Of the songs included, one, “John Henry,” is noted to be relatively recent in origin and continually changing (3), and another, “Ella Wall,” is so new as to be based on a character in the text itself (150). Many of the tales are hotly contested, as audience members accuse the tellers of creating the “lie” themselves, or indicate that they heard it differently (30, 69, 96, 98, 105). Because these tales are framed in a context of conflict, interchange, and alteration, they cannot be taken as finished artifacts. On the contrary, examining the frames

and the tales themselves, David Nicholls argues that Hurston depicts folklore “as an everyday form of resistance in the Jim Crow South” (91).

Compared to Johnson’s representation of a stagnating peasantry in *Shadow of the Plantation* (1934), in fact, Hurston’s “folk” appear surprisingly modern: where Johnson focuses strictly on the sharecroppers and tenant farmers of a county in the Alabama cotton belt, Hurston’s folklore comes mainly from wage laborers in a lumber mill. Nor are her “folk” strictly rural: the second section of the book takes place mainly in New Orleans, and Hurston’s narrator claims that her subjects in central Florida come from “all over the South,” moving often between city and country (60). Hurston’s southern African Americans differ further from Johnson’s in that they do not rely on the “paternalism” of a “protecting white family” (*Shadow* 27): Hurston’s sawmill workers recognize the white “boss” as wielding undue legal and economic authority, and find it “noble” when one of their number stands up to “dat cracker” (152). Perhaps most importantly, this “folk” is linked to the national economy through both production—the log train around which labor in the Polk County lumber mill is organized (69)—and consumption—the “mail-order dresses” worn by southern African-American women at social events (63).

And yet the text does not emphasize the modernity of these southern African Americans; on the contrary, the opening frame of the narrative implies that Eatonvillians themselves would deny the coevalness of other regions. Hurston, as narrator, suggests that if she were to flaunt her college education, the townspeople she had known from childhood would criticize her inauthenticity, sending her “word in a match-box that I had been up North there and had rubbed the hair off my head against some college wall, and then come back there with a lot of form and fashion and outside show to the world” (2). In many ways, this statement seems typical of Hurston’s approach: always scornful of those who prefer the “Glee Club style” of spirituals to that sung in “some unfashionable Negro church,” or Broadway productions with African-American casts to the “real Negro theatre” in the “Jooks and the cabarets” (“Characteristics” 845), she here represents a community that turns such values on their heads. However, this formulation from *Mules and Men* also seems to place the “folk” in a different typological time from that of the North—rejecting its “sham-polish” and uninterested in education, they seem isolated from the modernizing nation (2). This suggestion is further emphasized, as Carby points out, by the fact that the text ignores the Great Migration, at a time when

movement to the North and to cities constituted one of the largest factors of change in African-American life (172). As it is, *Mules and Men* contains no mention of the many residents of Eatonville who had probably left; on the contrary, Hurston's narrator expresses "delight" on crossing the township line into Eatonville and seeing that "the town had not changed" (7).

And yet, while positing a mutual denial of coevalness, the text nonetheless models possibilities for "intersubjective time," that alignment of seemingly different temporal frameworks which enables communication and mutual understanding (Fabian 30–31). Indeed, Hurston's text is structured to emphasize her own experiences of coevalness—the ways in which she and other Floridians share in the same time. Though much of the early narrative represents the attempts of Hurston the anthropologist to fit in with the communities she is studying, the later "lying sessions," framed in the context of work, relaxation, or fishing, are rendered with a nearly transparent narrator, so that the reader can experience a sense of intimacy with Hurston's ethnographic subjects.¹⁴ Through representing her participation in the lives of the "folk," Hurston shows the intersection of multiple temporalities in her own experience. In viewing the narrator, we see the temporality of the "folk" mapped onto that of the highway—the simultaneous, cross-space time in which Hurston "speeds" from New York to Eatonville (4). In addition, we see the unclocked time of the "lying session," which ends only when one participant has "mumbled down into his shirt bosom and [gone] to sleep" (7); the ambivalently marked time of the "shack rouser," who gets paid to see that workers do not miss a minute of labor and yet announces, instead of the time of the clock, that of the breaking "day," the "hoe-cake," and the "rooster" (66–67); the clearly transregional clock time of the laborer "half hour behind schedule" (68); and the exaggerated "lying" time of "forty o'clock" (10). Most notable, perhaps, is Hurston's juxtaposition of clock time with the transcendent timelessness of hoodoo, when she lies naked, face-down, on a snakeskin, waiting "sixty-nine hours" while her "spirit went wherever spirits must go that seek answers never given to men as men" (199).

Here, Hurston describes the spectacle of herself in what seems an incommensurable intersection of temporalities—the modern social scientist in a hoodoo trance. She does not allow the reader to discount either of these temporal frames: her prose here is particularly detailed and objective, yet she assures us that, during this episode, she had "five psychic experiences." This moment exemplifies her project in the larger work, which recounts her process of insinuating herself into the community of the

“folk,” and her own experience of “folk-time.” Such narrative is largely absent from “Hoodoo in America,” her 1931 *Journal of American Folklore* article on which the second part of *Mules and Men* is based: this earlier work includes more anthropological commentary—comparing, for instance, hoodoo and obeah—but far less of Hurston’s own experience with hoodoo, describing even the ceremony of the Black Cat Bone as if she had never seen it. In *Mules and Men*, Hurston represents this ceremony as the most uncanny experience of her study—producing “[i]ndescribable noises, sights, feelings”—but she is not so overwhelmed as to reject the results—“a small white bone for me to carry” (221). Depicting her own reconciliation to even this “unearthly terror”—a reconciliation impossible to imagine in, for instance, the work of Toomer or Larsen—Hurston suggests that the widely perceived temporal distance between northern and southern experience is not, in fact, such a radical disjuncture. Though the unclocked time of the lying session and the transcendent time of hoodoo may not be common in northern, urban experiences of modernity, they cannot be incompatible with such modernity, because Hurston is able to negotiate all these temporal forms in her experience.

The significance of this representation of intersubjective time can perhaps best be demonstrated through comparison with the work of Wright, who often represents “folk” consciousness as unable to accommodate the forms of understanding needed to communicate with a “modern.” In “Long Black Song” (1938), for instance, he depicts time as the central element in the contrast between a southern African-American woman and a white traveling salesman: after hearing that the woman, Sarah, has no clock, and that her family “get[s] erlong widout time,” the salesman, shocked, exclaims, “[T]his beats everything” (108). He then shows her his graphophone clock, and on hearing, from the graphophone, that “*time shall be no more*,” Sarah’s body begins to enact a radical compression of her own temporal framework, such that she experiences the seasons of the year in a heartbeat: “Her blood surged like the long gladness of summer. . . . Her blood ebbed like the deep dream of sleep in winter” (109). This reaction prefigures her helpless response to the salesman’s sexual predation and to the apocalyptic violence that follows, destroying her husband and home (110–11).¹⁵ By representing national commerce in a heterogeneous local setting, Wright indicates the connections between regional and national culture, but only to suggest that, however corrupt the ambassadors of capitalism may be, they will inevitably overcome those dependent on “folk” consciousness; in Hurston’s account, he offers only “the solution

of the PARTY . . . And march!" ("Stories" 913). In his autobiography, Wright presents the contrast in even starker terms: describing his reunion with his "peasant" father after Wright has migrated North, Wright realizes that they are "forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly distant planes of reality" (*Black Boy* 40). Wright forgives his father for his past mistreatment, seeing that his father's behavior is "chained . . . to the direct, animalistic impulses of his withering body" (40). Implicit in his forgiveness and pity, however, is the understanding that his father cannot share his world.

It is this notion of an unbridgeable southern temporal alterity which Hurston's work quietly disrupts: in *Mules and Men*, both the region and "folk" consciousness are shown to be accessible to modern subjects. Hurston does not stress the political possibilities opened up by this understanding of a permeable "folk" culture which is already influenced by and commensurable within the framework of modernity, choosing instead to focus on the sharing of folkloric pleasures. However, by contradicting earlier representations that suggested such pleasures must necessarily unsettle the temporal framework of modern subjects, and offering in their place a model of subjectivity that allows for the interaction of multiple cultural forms, she provides an understanding of southern African-American culture that could enable readers to imagine transregional interaction and, accordingly, transregional political activism.

This reading of *Mules and Men* is not easily reconciled, however, with Hurston's 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which often seems to represent modernization as inimical to folkloric practice. In the following section, I place this novel in the context of a shift in Hurston's thinking, as demonstrated by her anthropological writings. Where in *Mules and Men* she represents communities which participate in modernity while deriving pleasure and sustenance from "folk" culture, two years later, in *Tell My Horse* (1938), she represents societies which, in her account, must modernize, even through imperialist intervention, in order to procure justice, economic opportunity, and an acceptable standard of living. Unlike the former work, the latter often associates folkloric practice with isolation and the lack of political and economic resources. As Hurston's anthropological work began to promote modernization in African-Caribbean contexts, her fiction explored the shifts and alterations this process could effect in the folkloric aspects of southern African-American culture. Combining a narrative investment in folklore with an account of "folk" modernization, *Their Eyes* suggests that the two may be incompatible within the public sphere of

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the community and paradoxically seeks to preserve a vision of folkloric pleasure within a bourgeois form given to individual consumption—that of the novel.

3. Modernization, the “Folk,” and the Chronotope of the Self

Where *Mules and Men* can be said to represent a chronotope, or time-space, present in the larger US, the chronotope of *Their Eyes* is relatively allotemporal, existing outside the time of the nation and its economy.¹⁶ This is true, in part, because the novel imagines such a limited space: in pursuing the horizon, as Carby points out, Janie, the protagonist, consistently goes south (181). The communities in which she lingers are discrete and somewhat insular (Wainwright 234): for example, the residents of Eatonville, in central Florida, seem utterly uninformed of the disastrous effects of the hurricane on southern Florida. Even more than the spaces in which Janie resides, her cyclical conception of time seems removed from the linear time of the nation: at the beginning of her story, for instance, she waits “a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time” (43). Janie’s distance from modernity is most noticeable in her intimacy with nature, which is so powerful that she discovers her sexuality from observing a pear tree in bloom (23–25).

Thus the novel seems strenuously to separate “folk” culture from that of the larger nation, a move for which Hurston has often been criticized. Wright, for example, argued that Hurston’s characters “swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears” (Review 17). In other words, to the extent that readers accepted the novel as a realistic representation of southern African-American life, they would see a culture utterly removed from that of the nation and so focused on its own interactions (and, in Wright’s account, emotions) that it might have little interest in such modern national concerns as political and economic justice. Despite her folkloric ideals, however, Janie is not uninterested in either her own rights or the larger world: after waiting a year in an oppressive marriage, she “look[s] up the road” (44). In her search “for far horizon . . . change and chance” (50), Janie’s story seems to follow the traditional pattern of the bildungsroman, in which protagonists must overturn their early belief-systems as they discover that the communities of their youth were unaware of the changes affecting the larger world (Bakhtin 234). But even as the novel depicts Janie’s travels

to the “big ’ssociation of life,” it isolates the wisdom she has gained from the community to which she returns (18): though she tells her story to her friend Pheoby (and, in part, to the reader), Janie ultimately avows that “you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there . . . nobody else can’t tell yuh and show yuh” (285). Although Janie’s knowledge might assist the community in challenging its peripheral status in economic, social, and political realms, her final speech suggests, in Carby’s argument, that the “folk” might be incapable of learning about “what is outside of its social consciousness” (180).

Janie’s isolationism at the close of the novel cannot be questioned: eschewing the communities of both Eatonville and the “muck,” she creates a chronotope of the self, one in which she negotiates time and space to her own satisfaction, “pull[ing] in her horizon like a great fish-net,” creating an individualized, imaginative space in which events from her past return to “sob and sigh, singing and sobbing” (286). And yet I wish to reconsider Carby’s argument that this emphasis on “the pleasure of the self displaces the folk as community,” chiefly because, as Janie returns to town, she seems to be rejecting not a “folk,” but a community shaped by a bourgeois, class-conscious ethos. The novel represents Eatonville’s simultaneous rejection of Janie not simply as a result of her relative wealth and experience, but, more explicitly, as a function of her divergence from the community’s social codes—her “muddy overalls” and “her hair swingin’ down her back” (11, 10). Though the novel clearly differentiates Janie’s access to material resources from that allotted other members of her community, these differences must be read alongside the conflict of values exemplified in Janie’s return to Eatonville. Her regret that other Eatonvillians refuse to “come kiss and be kissed” suggests that her difference from these “sitters-and-talkers” parallels her earlier conflict with her grandmother (18, 284), who also valued “sittin’ on porches,” specifically “lak de white madam” (172).¹⁷

Hurston’s novel depicts a southern African-American culture in which bourgeois ideology was vital even at the turn of the century. Janie’s grandmother, Nanny, wishes her to be distinguished by class and property, to claim, for example, the “onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks” (41). Nanny’s narrative mirrors Kevin Gaines’s analysis of “uplift ideology’s romance of the patriarchal family” (5–6): speaking from the knowledge of her own and her child’s sexual victimization, Nanny argues that Janie needs “protection.” But Nanny believes this safety best achieved through property and class differentiation, both of which are inimical to Janie’s own desire, which dictates a “great

journey to the horizons in search of *people*,” a quest based on a folkloric understanding of the nature of humanity (172–73). The novel represents Nanny’s determination to procure a bourgeois class identification for her granddaughter as an oppressive reification of Janie’s more folkloric desire: Nanny “pinch[es the horizon] in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter’s neck tight enough to choke her” (138). Furthermore, the novel explicitly links this reification and discipline of individual desire to capitalist values and practice: Nanny’s efforts commodify Janie herself, as she is “set in the market-place to sell.” In short, Nanny obtains property and status for Janie through the discipline of Janie’s own body. Because critics correctly think of Hurston as an artist devoted to the representation of “folk” culture, they often overlook the extent to which her critique of patriarchy connects it with bourgeois, as well as “folk,” ideology.¹⁸ But Nanny’s bourgeois understanding of gender and desire shapes, to some extent, every community that Janie encounters in the novel.

The linkage between bourgeois and patriarchal values is particularly clear in the portrayal of Janie’s second husband, Joe Starks, whose eventual conflict with Janie emerges not only from his sexism but also from their opposing views of modernization and “folk” practices. Joe is Eatonville’s most explicit proponent of modernization: on his arrival, he buys land to create a larger housing market, begins construction of a store, and establishes a post office—an official connection between the town and the nation (58–61).¹⁹ “[U]h man that changes everything,” Joe creates a committee for the construction of roads, and argues that the town must incorporate (79, 65–66, 69). Helping Eatonville conquer nature, he procures a street lamp for the town, arguing that, faced with the limitations of natural light, “us poor weak humans . . . [must] make some light ourselves” (73). Throughout this process, Joe limits Janie’s interactions with the community in order to assert the couple’s bourgeois social status: in Janie’s words, “Jody classed me off” (169). Under these restrictions, Janie feels isolated and “lonely”; though Joe tells her that he wants to make “uh big woman” out of her, to her mind, his incessant activity keeps them in a “kinda strain” (74). Their differing evaluations of capitalist and folkloric practice affect even their understandings of how everyday life should be spent. Joe criticizes the more folkloric, less acquisitive, conceptions of time common in Eatonville when he first arrives, arguing that those in the community who “don’t want nothin’ but uh full belly and uh place tuh lay down and sleep afterwards” are merely “playin’ round de toes of Time” (98, 85). Janie, on the other hand, finds Joe’s insistence

on precise mathematical calculations in trade to be “a waste of life and time” (86).²⁰

Though the narrative suggests that bourgeois and folkloric values could be “so different it put you on a wonder,” it goes on to demonstrate that the two can be reconciled when capitalist modernization puts folkloric forms to its own use. Joe’s insistence on his own class status initially alienates others in the community as well as Janie: observing Joe’s “golded-up” spittoon, as well as the “little lady-size spitting pot” he buys for Janie, they note their resemblance to the ostentatious objects of “white people,” and feel a mixture of “respect” for Joe’s ability to procure such items and “hate” for his investment in them (76–77). Ultimately, however, Joe is able to acquire the affection of the community through his participation in folkloric entertainment. First, inspired by Janie, he buys Matt Bonner’s mule, an overworked and underfed animal who has become the star of many original folk performances. Eatonvillians respect Joe’s intention to let the mule rest and eat well for his remaining years; as a “free-mule,” the animal is an even more celebrated figure (92). The community also “love[s]” Joe’s eulogy for the mule after its death, a performance that makes Joe’s reputation “more solid than building the schoolhouse had done” (95). Joe explains that he must participate in the mule funeral because of his gender—“Ah’m uh man even if Ah is de Mayor”—but argues that his wife, unlike the other women of the town, should not go near such a “mess uh commonness” (94); in this way, Joe is able to participate in, and even dominate, a folkloric activity while still signaling his own elevated class status (77). This imbrication of “folk” activities in the development of a bourgeois hegemony is further suggested by the emergence of the store porch as the site of folkloric performance.²¹ Joe builds the store both to profit and to define the space of the town as a civic entity (65), as opposed to “a raw place in the woods” (56), but he allows members of the community to conduct their “eternal” arguments there (99). Though he disapproves of these activities, they further both his causes: the store becomes, in the perception of the community, “the center of the world” (100), and when the talk turns flirtatious, his business increases dramatically (105).

The corruption of folkloric values by Joe’s bourgeois ideology is made clear in the townspeople’s changing attitudes toward class and gender from the turn of the century to the 1920s. When Joe and Janie arrive in Eatonville, Sam Hicks and Lee Coker argue about whether women are attracted by “money” or “co-talkin,” “pleasurin’ and givin’ pleasure” (58–59). By the time of Janie’s romance with the “co-talkin” Tea Cake, however, the

townspeople are united in their belief that women should “stay in their class” (10). Even Tea Cake, though he invites Janie to violate this restriction, seems to enjoy her transgression less because it challenges the dominant ideology than because it increases his status within that ideology: he assures his friend Sop-de-Bottom that Janie is a “high time woman,” and that he “got her outa uh big fine house” (219). His admiration for such signs of wealth is shown to be misguided as the hurricane approaches: he ignores the advice of the Indians who urge others to leave, following instead the example of the “white folks” (231), the “people in the big houses” (234). As Eric Curren argues, the muck workers’ “modern dismissal of tribal lore” suggests their own incorporation into a “modern American” hegemony (19, 21).

Representing a southern African-American culture that has already embraced much modern bourgeois ideology, *Their Eyes* also denigrates that development through the figure of its protagonist, who repeatedly demonstrates her determination to prioritize folkloric pleasure over social status. Violating class and gender restrictions in her marriage to Tea Cake, Janie enjoys the fact that, on the “muck,” she is allowed to participate in “woofing” and dice games (200). Exceeding even other members of the Everglades community in her enthusiasm for folkloric entertainments, she is the first to seek out the Bahaman “Saws,” who are “laugh[ed] . . . to scorn” by other muck workers for their drumming and dancing (207). Most notably, when she joins the beanpickers in the field, she is the one who gets “the whole field to playing off and on” by setting an example of “romping and playing” with Tea Cake as she works (199). This combination of play and labor, as opposed to the strict separation of work and leisure, is, according to Victor Turner, one of the chief differences between the “expressive cultures” of preindustrial and industrializing societies (30–33), and it is also the source of one of Janie’s chief dissatisfactions in her marriage with Joe (85–86, 98–99, 109).

But as Janie is linked ever more closely to folkloric values, her communities are increasingly distanced from them, particularly during the trial scene, in which the narrative relentlessly separates Janie from the other muck workers. Janie briefly ponders the fact that she is being tried for murder by an all-white jury—a critique of Jim Crow injustice that Depression-era readers would remember for its centrality in the political outcry over the Scottsboro trial (274–75). She displaces that critique, however, with her observation of “all the colored people” in the courtroom, who are standing “packed tight like a case of celery, only much darker than that” (275). This objectification of the workers, though it seems to unite Janie’s perspective with that of

the court, could be understood as sympathetic in its acknowledgment of the dehumanizing aspects of segregated Southern courts, which do not allow African Americans to sit in the courtroom of their friend's trial, and isolate them in a white supremacist juridical system. The narrative undercuts such a reading, however, by immediately describing Janie's conviction that the black community is against her, "pelting her with dirty thoughts." Triangulating the scene so that the workers' community is understood to be restricted in "the presence of white folks," and is suggested to be in favor of Janie's "[h]anging," the narrative insists on Janie's belief that she should fear not a sentence of "death" from an unjust white court, but rather the "lying thoughts" already attributed to the African-American community (278). Though the narrator's perspective shifts between that of Janie and that of the community, it momentarily assumes the perspective of the state, precisely as the court disciplines Soped-Bottom for his attempt to participate in the trial: he is said to speak out "anonymously from the anonymous herd" (277). Speaking of a character for whom Janie has previously demonstrated only affection, the narrator expresses surprising hostility.

The extraordinary energy exerted in this scene to effect Janie's isolation from the community of workers suggests that it must be crucial to any interpretation of the novel. Observing that previous accounts of the novel "again and again try to return Janie to her community," Carla Kaplan has suggested that this critical move may signal "our own nostalgia and longing for forms of communal life" (134–35); she, like Carby, argues that the novel questions the possibility of communication across differences of race, class, region, or gender. But while I appreciate the importance of these interventions, I hesitate to accept that a writer who so convincingly portrayed her own ability to negotiate cultural differences in *Mules and Men* could two years later deny the possibility of intercultural communication, or that the writer who so vigorously argued for the recognition of "folk" culture as a viable way of life would aestheticize that culture, and isolate it in time, strictly for the pleasure of bourgeois subjects (Carby 174, 180).

Rather, by emphasizing both Janie's engagement in folkloric practice and her separation from the community of workers, Hurston seems to be shifting the definition of such practice—from a public cultural enactment to a private cultural engagement. Understood as social categories, neither "folk" nor "modern" seems sufficient to account for Janie: though she seems, in many ways, the most folkloric of the novel's characters, she is also a bourgeois individualist. When, for example, Pheoby claims

that she “growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin” to Janie (284), Janie resists her model of shared experience, arguing, “you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there . . . nobody else can’t tell yuh and show yuh” (285). Although in her early days in Eatonville, Janie found it “nice” that “people sat around on the porch and passed around the pictures of their thoughts for others to look at and see” (81), by the end of her travels she rejects such forms of communication, in part because the porch talk has become so hierarchical: “Mouth Almighty” seeks only to judge whether others’ actions are “done right or not” (16, 17). Upon her return, Janie chooses to contemplate only the mental pictures from her own past, conducting an activity that was once communal and discursive in a private, imaginative fashion: “Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. . . . She called in her soul to come and see” (286). Uniting modern individualism with a folkloric ethos, Janie overcomes the alienation so typical in accounts of modern subjectivity by experiencing, in isolation, a folkloric sense of oneness with the world. As Carby points out, Janie is unique in the novel because she has sufficient money in the bank to enjoy extended periods of such contemplation. But the novel, in its opening paragraphs, goes so far as to suggest that this “chronotope of the self” is a vital element of each individual’s experience.

These paragraphs explain that, because individuals can only locate the objects of their desires in the realm of their own imaginations, they have little control over whether they will ever possess those objects in actuality. The men described in these paragraphs lack any agency in procuring their goals: forced to wait for their desires, which can be seen at a spatial distance, some of these “Watcher[s]” are gratified by “Time,” and others are “mocked to death” (9). Women, on the other hand, look for their desires in the temporal dimension, arranging their pasts to suit themselves, so that “the dream is the truth.” Such configurations inherently obscure the sociality of space and time, and are thus poorly suited to the building of communities or to political action. Hurston herself makes this point in *Tell My Horse* (1938), the anthropological study of Jamaica and Haiti that she was researching at the time she wrote *Their Eyes*: arguing that a focus on past glories can inhibit needed political change in the present, she distinguishes “dreamer[s]” from “heroes” (341), arguing that the latter are “m[e]n of action” (345).

In this sense, *Tell My Horse* seems almost antithetical to *Their Eyes*: here, Hurston argues directly for political action, suggesting that it will be effected not through folkloric forms, but

through modernization. In this account, the peasantry of Haiti must learn to read and write in order to participate in their government and alleviate their suffering (340); she describes the peasants themselves as admiring Trujillo, the leader of Santo Domingo, for his success in procuring an “advancement” unseen in their own “practically static” country (356, 357). Even when visiting the Maroons at Accompong, whom she described elsewhere as “exactly the kind of isolated community many folklorists hope to discover” (qtd. in Hemenway 229), she asks about their attitudes toward “education, transportation, public health and democracy” (295). She describes their government as “very primitive,” and explains that the leader “wished to bring things up to date”; she then describes her own contribution to this process, as she builds the society’s first stove (296). Invoking a rhetoric recognizable from Locke’s contributions to *The New Negro*, she speaks of societal problems as holdovers from the past, not yet removed: hence, the US Ku Klux Klan and the Haitian Sect Rouge “still” linger (483).

Given Hurston’s apparently increased interest in modernization in *Tell My Horse*, we might read *Their Eyes* as a venue through which she explores her affection for aspects of southern African-American life that might be altered in the course of societal changes she did not altogether oppose. Critics often tend to treat Janie as a mirror for Hurston—either a relatively bourgeois mirror, possessing more property and education than the “folk” community (Carby 177–79), or an enthusiastically folkloric mirror (McKay 55). This move is supported by Hurston’s own claim, in the autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), that in the novel she had “tried to embalm all the tenderness of [her] passion” for a man (188–89). But as Kathleen Davies points out, the term *embalming* suggests ambivalence: in her reading of Tea Cake as a version of A. W. P., Hurston’s own beloved, Davies finds him to be both honey-coated and killed off, celebrated and punished. It is possible to read Janie’s character as similarly embalmed, representing Hurston’s ambivalence concerning an aspect of her own life.

Certainly, the novel embraces Janie, and it usually persuades its readers to do so as well. But it seems to promote sympathy in the main for Janie’s desire to “romp” and to “show her shine,” her wish to seek “*people*” rather than “*things*”—in other words, her attempt to maintain a folkloric ethos despite the increased influence of modernization on her society (199, 138, 139). Once Janie is isolated from the community, her yard and bedroom become a site of folkloric values to be enjoyed with Pheoby, or by herself. Restricted from public space in this way,

Janie's folkloric understandings are also separated from a community that has embraced bourgeois values despite its relative lack of political and economic power (16). And while the boundaries of this space are defined by property, I would like to consider it also through the anthropological concept of the liminoid, a "quirky" space existing "apart from the central economic and political processes" (Turner 54), and which may incorporate "a plurality of alternative models for living" or "freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior" (Turner 33).

This is a text, after all, that figures the liminoid directly through the funeral of Matt Bonner's mule, the ceremony in which the community leaves the space of their everyday life and work to engage in play at subverting the social structure. "[O]ut in the swamp," Eatonvillians talk of a world in which "mule-angels would have people to ride on," a rhetorical subversion echoed in the performative elevation of women—"the sisters got mock-happy . . . and had to be held up by the menfolks" (93–94).²² This moment serves to sustain the community in the face of cultural changes paradoxically enabled through the practice itself, and also to liberate the narrative, which, though it presumably relates information from Janie's perspective, moves from telling of an event she did not attend, but could have heard of, to telling of an event not witnessed by anyone in the community—the buzzards' ritualistic consumption of the mule body. Embedded in the text in this way, the buzzard funeral suggests the vitality of folkloric knowledge while also signaling its marginal role in the community: outside the space of the town, buzzards dance and "stand" funerals for men, ritualistically mocking human pretensions to immortality such as Joe's characteristic expression "I God," but the sign of this folkloric wisdom is "gone from the town except for the porch talk, and for the children visiting his bleaching bones now and then in" a perhaps liminoid "spirit of adventure" (97). But while the folkloric understanding forged by the memories of the mule funeral may be marginalized on the return to Eatonville, its continued relevance can be gathered not only from the momentary expansion of Janie's narrative, but from the change in Janie herself, as she becomes increasingly skeptical of Joe's authority.

It is possible to see the novel, a form generally experienced in isolation, as providing a similarly liminoid site for its readers. In other words, rather than seeing Janie as a figure for Hurston, who argues repeatedly for her own ability to communicate across differences, we might see Janie, and her final chronotope, as a figure through which Hurston inscribes a realm of difference that is not meant to be incorporated into the public sphere, but to be

preserved as a kind of understanding which originates not from the center, but from the margins, of a community. Thus, even as Hurston argues for economic and political modernization for the “folk” communities of *Tell My Horse*, *Their Eyes* models a strategy for the preservation of folklore in changing southern African-American communities. Suggesting that public folkloric practices are too easily made to serve the agendas of bourgeois ideology, Hurston chooses, instead, to celebrate an individualized experience of folklore. In doing so, she also makes such an experience accessible to her readers: the space of Janie’s bedroom is, after all, not unlike the spaces in which *Their Eyes* may be consumed, and Janie’s experience of manipulating space and time to create an imaginative chronotope of the self is similar to what Hurston’s readers experience, with Hurston’s help, in visualizing Janie’s world. Thus the novel enables its readers to create the imaginative space in which to enjoy and experience folkloric alterity, and to incorporate multiple forms of cultural knowledge into their own subjectivities.

Rather than aestheticizing folkloric culture for the pleasure of the bourgeois subject, then, Hurston may have done so as a way to preserve aspects of that culture at a time when bourgeois ideology seemed already to be broadly ascendant. But this difference is, in effect, a small one. In considering the way in which readers might imagine their connection to Janie’s world, it is also important, as Wright urged, to consider the way in which they might map that world in relation to their own. And though *Mules and Men* tacitly encourages readers to understand that southern African-American communities are accessible to modern subjects, *Their Eyes* hints at such a possibility only to efface it: though these communities are represented as being increasingly permeated by national modernity, the novel privileges, in their place, the world of the imagination, isolating folkloric practice for individual pleasure. But this is a move to which only the fictional Janie and privileged readers have substantial access: the actual residents of southern African-American communities were often forced to interact with others in particularly oppressive circumstances. In celebrating Janie’s ability to preserve a folkloric selfhood, the conclusion of the novel evades a problem that the narrative, nonetheless, does not deny: however much the citizens of Eatonville and the workers on the muck may regret the decreasing prevalence of folkloric practice in their own communities, they suffer much more directly from the abuses they encounter through their labor in neighboring white communities, where Tea Cake, for example, is forced to dig graves at gunpoint (251–54) and where Eatonvillians are reduced to “earless, eyeless

conveniences all day long” (10). In the face of such problems as these, Janie’s chronotope of the self may provide individual sustenance, but it is not readily conducive to thinking about social or political solutions for the community. And though Janie’s rejection of the community may indicate her disapproval of the values they share with the white bourgeoisie, Hurston’s narrative cannot imagine a way to combat the spread of these values in public space.

In short, the close of the novel displaces the enforced racial segregation of the South, which denied African-American economic and political rights, with a voluntary segregation of the self, which preserves African-American folkloric culture. It is largely this self-segregation which allows Walter Benn Michaels, for example, to mistake a novel that often seems skeptical of group affiliation as a “rewriting of the people as the race” (94): Janie’s autonomy, at the end, is so marked that she seems to figure the “race” in herself (Barbeito 389). And it is this insistence on Janie’s autonomy that so frustrates Carby, who urges readers to remember the impact of systematic racial apartheid on the communities of the novel, the South of the 1930s, and contemporary US metropolises. Hurston herself remained ambivalent in her treatment of racial segregation, complaining vehemently, in later essays, about both the denial of political and economic rights to African Americans under racial segregation and the efforts of the federal government to enforce integration (“Crazy”; “Court Order”). This seeming contradiction mirrors the ambiguities concerning political and social change recorded in these works from the late 1930s. Even as she argued that communities would receive economic and political benefits from modernization, she expressed concern over the ways such modernization threatened the autonomy of segregated southern African-American culture. Despite her talent for negotiating cultural differences, she found it difficult to reconcile the conflicting claims of cultural maintenance and societal change.

Notes

1. See, for instance, “Negro Youth Speaks” (1925), “Black Truth and Black Beauty: A Retrospective Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1932” (1933), and “Sterling Brown: The New Negro Folk Poet” (1934).

2. This account of modern time—or the time in which the form of the nation is developed—corresponds closely to the “homogeneous, empty time” often cited in Benedict Anderson’s model. Though Anderson considers the concept in terms of its importance in configuring a nation of dispersed people as a

community, and does not link this temporality with a devotion to incessant “progress” (24–26), that linkage is clear in the work of Walter Benjamin, from whom Anderson derives this phrase (260–61).

3. For a similar theoretical account of the importance of temporality in constituting individual subjectivity, see Castoriadis, who defines “socialization” as the process through which “the psyche absorbs or internalizes the time instituted by the given society. It henceforth knows public time—and has to go on living, coping with the difficult cohabitation of the various layers of its own, private time with instituted, public time” (“Time” 49).

4. Johnson’s social constructivist account is influenced also by racial essentialism, as he argues that “probably . . . the Negro is a rural type,” and attributes to “the Jew”—all Jews—“a neurotic constitution traceable to the emotional strain of peculiar racial status and to the terrific pressure of city life” (279–80).

5. For an account of uplift ideology, see Gaines. For a famous critique of its aesthetic criteria, see Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926), a reply to Schuyler’s essay.

6. Louise Venable Kennedy demonstrates how the “backwardness” of southern migrants was used to justify racial segregation in northern, urban areas: when migrant children from underfunded, segregated schools were placed in lower grades to catch up with urban schoolchildren, “principals, teachers and school boards . . . maintained that separation of school children on the basis of race is a necessity because of the high rate of retardation among Negro children” (196–97).

7. For a discussion of the tendency during this period to define racial “authenticity” through reference to the southern “folk,” and the resistance to this definition inscribed by several African-American intellectuals, see Favor.

8. Locke often used the phrase “Old Negro” to refer to stereotypical figures (“New Negro” 3). That does not seem to be the case here, however: in his 1930s essays on “folk” representations, he vacillates uneasily between criticism of clichéd figurations of the “pure soil peasant”—the existence of which he, nonetheless, does not refute—and his desire to know more about “the real Negro peasant” (“We Turn” 42).

9. See also “Scottsboro” (1933); “Recovery in the South” (1934); Dabney; and Pickens.

10. See, for instance, Hurston’s “Spirituals” 869–70 and “The Sanctified Church” 901.

11. See Lynda Marion Hill, who provides reprints of a program for *From Sun to Sun* performed at New School Auditorium, 29 March 1932 (22); Locke’s program note to *The Great Day* performed at John Golden Theater, 10 January 1922 (18); and Edwin Osgood Grover’s program note to *All de Live Long Day* performed at Rollins College Recreation Hall, 4 January 1934 (27).

12. For a discussion of “allochronic discourse,” which places the “other” outside the temporal and cultural frameworks of the speaker, see Fabian 20–35.

13. Fabian uses the term “coeval” to connote a sharing of time—not only simultaneous existence but also common participation in an era or epoch (31). The term is useful for its resistance to the tendency of more modernized societies to define the “era” strictly according to their own experience.

14. Hemenway notes this technique as well: “Hurston creates a self-effacing persona inviting the reader to participate in collective rituals” (166). He criticizes this technique because, in indicating the book to be “about” folklore, as opposed to “about” the author, it suggests “a need for folklore analysis” (167). On the other hand, Benigno Sánchez-Eppler argues that Hurston’s “dialogical mode” allows her “informants [to] remain strong interlocutors” (477, 479).

15. See Sollors 122–23 and Nicholls 124–25 for similar readings of this story.

16. For an account of allotemporality in fiction, and in the cultural imagination, see Bill Brown 212, 220, 232. For the importance of the chronotope, or how the interpretation of a literary work is affected by the representation of the spatial and temporal qualities of its setting, see Bakhtin.

17. Carby’s readers may question this difference, remembering her vivid argument that Janie “can speak on a porch because she *owns* it” (179). But while that point is important, the text also carefully distinguishes between various positions on porches. While other Eatonvillians sit on front porches (9), and Nanny sought a “high stool” for Janie (172), Janie relates her story to Pheoby while sitting on the steps to her back porch, suggesting a desire to withdraw from the community, but not to exalt herself (14). This distinction exposes the irony of Lulu Moss’s view that Janie “sits high, but she looks low” (12).

18. See, for instance, Hemenway 238; Carby 86; and Kodat 321.

19. The following references to modernization ideology are based largely on Lears 8–12.

20. This moment suggests the fictional pattern, noted by Bakhtin, in which the “idyllic world,” notable for the “humanity of [its] human relationships,” is contrasted to a world in which “people are out of contact with each other . . . [and] greedily practical” (233–34).

21. Here, I rely on Raymond Williams’ definition of *hegemony* as a process that links persons from “high” and “low” social hierarchies in consensus (112–13).

22. Dalgarno, too, notes the importance of the “liminoid” in the novel (527). The novel also links mules and women in terms of labor (29).

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