



Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston

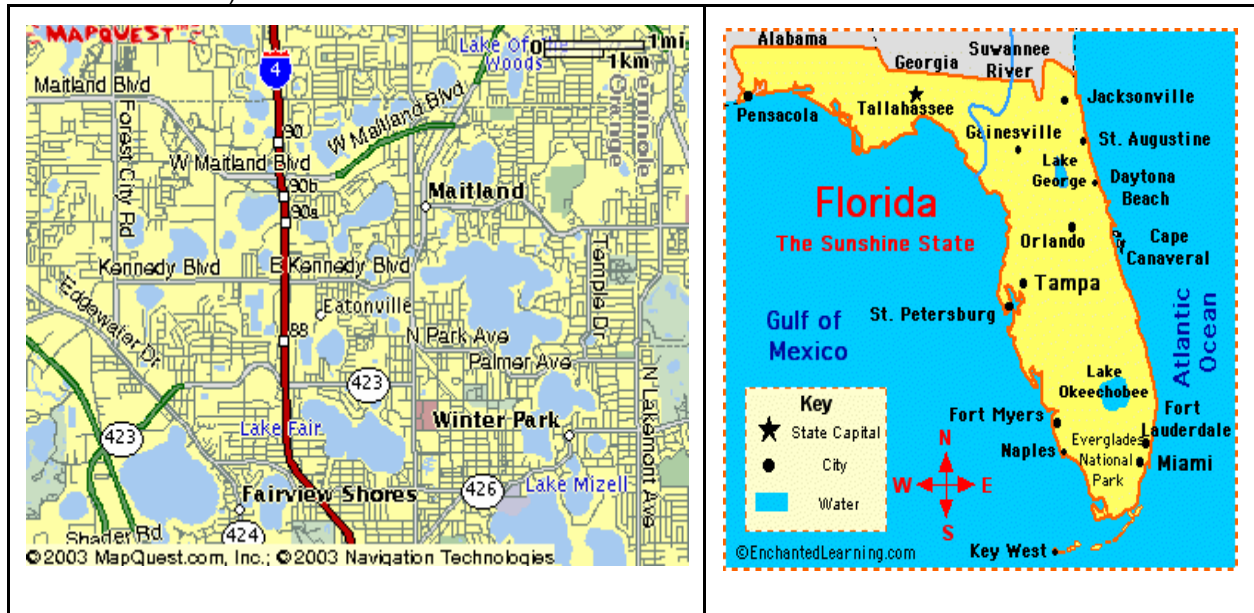
a brief fact sheet compiled by A.R. Dixon

<http://www.flheritage.com/magazine/eatonville.html>

Publication Date: 1937, but the book languished for years before its popularity was revitalized by the poet and author, Alice Walker, in the 1970's. Tidbit: wrote the book in 7 weeks, inspired by her "perfect" (and unidentified) love, "P.M.P." – may explain the romantic tone of the book.

About the Author: Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960). Born Notasulga, Alabama. Degree in anthropology from Barnard College. After a life filled with creativity, conflict and disappointments in love and career, she goes into a kind of exile in small-town Florida. Dies penniless and is buried in an unmarked grave in a segregated cemetery in Ft. Pierce, FL.

Setting of the Novel: Eatonville, FL, a small community near Winter Park, FL (just north of Orlando off of I-4).



Main Characters:

Janie Crawford - heroine of the book

Her three husbands: Logan Killicks, Jody Stark and the love of her life, Tea Cake

Pheoby Watson - Janie's best friend

Nanny Crawford- Janie's grandmother

Leafy Crawford - Janie's mother

Mr. & Mrs. Turner - restauranteurs; Mrs. Turner looks down on darker-skinned people

"porch sitters" - all the gossiping neighbors who act as a kind of "Greek chorus" in the novel

Brief Description of the Novel:

The novel explores the lifelong search for love and independence by a beautiful black woman, Janie Crawford. Over three decades, Janie marries for escape, for money and success, and finally, for love. Though tragedy marks her life and others constantly criticize and gossip about her, Janie's story ends with a woman who is able to live independently and at peace with herself.

Central Questions Posed by the Novel re: some of our WHGC Themes

1. What is "freedom" to Janie? How does she pursue freedom, and how does her idea of freedom change over the course of the novel?
2. What role does gender play in relation to power (internal/external as well as personal/public) in this novel? What sort of power does Janie have compared to her various husbands? Other black people? White people?
3. How does Janie attain power?
4. Why is Janie so different from others in this story, particularly the "porch sitters" who watch and criticize her every move? What symbolism does Hurston use to show the dichotomy between people who are willing to grow and change vs. those who wish to keep the *status quo*?

Some "telling" Hurston Quotes:

Hurston on Hurston:

"...I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all."

"Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me."

A Few Additional Resources:

Boyd, Valerie *Wrapped in Rainbows* (2002). A new biography that has been well-received by critics.

Historically-black towns in Florida:

<http://www.soulofamerica.com/towns/fltowns.html>

<http://www.thecentralgeorgian.com/ntlnews5.html>

A review of *Wrapped in Rainbows*:

<http://www.bookmagazine.com/issue26/tteachout.shtml>

More on Zora Neale Hurston:

http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/biographies/Hurston_Zora_Neale.htm

The Harlem Renaissance:

http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/harlem_intro.html