



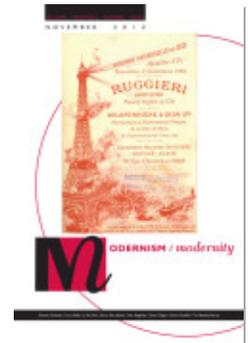
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Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston's
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Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Patricia Stuelke

In the wake of the January 2010 earthquake that killed thousands of Haitians, crushing them beneath the rubble of collapsed cities and towns, international news outlets began to describe Haiti as both “disaster-prone” and “star-crossed,” conjuring up the image of a nation suffering from an ill-defined combination of inherent clumsiness and bad fortune.¹ Perhaps the most explicit (and egregious) elaboration of this trope emerged from televangelist Pat Robertson, who only a few days after the quake offered his Seven Hundred Club listeners the “true story” behind Haiti’s “disaster-prone” past:

Something happened a long time ago in Haiti and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French, uh you know Napoleon the third and whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, “We will serve you if you’ll get us free from the French.” True story. And so the Devil said, “OK it’s a deal.” And they kicked the French out. You know, the Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But ever since they’ve been cursed by one thing after the other, desperately poor. That island of Hispaniola is one island. It’s cut down the middle. On one side is Haiti on the other side is the Dominican Republic. Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc. Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. They need to have, and we need to pray for them, a great turning to God. And out of this tragedy I’m optimistic something good may come. But right now, we’re helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable.²

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756 In this now infamous display of revisionist history, Robertson locates the origins of Haiti's "desperate poverty" in the nation's "deal with the Devil" that enabled a nation of slaves to rise up and win their twelve-year anticolonial revolution against France. His formulation handily combines two familiar racist tropes: that of the mystical Haitian "other" in league with dark supernatural forces,³ and the line of U.S. (neo)liberal reasoning that links the poverty of black communities to their "pathological" moral failings, counseling that they need to turn towards good (patriarchal heteronormativity) and God (given the U.S. government's support for private faith-based initiatives to fill the vacuum of the dismantled welfare state) in order to solve their economic problems.⁴ And just as this domestic line of reasoning elides the United States' history of institutional economic violence against its black communities, Robertson's story effaces the true causes of Haiti's economic distress, causes only hinted at by Haitian ambassador Raymond Joseph's response later that day. According to Joseph, "What pact the Haitians made with the Devil has helped the United States become what it is": "When the slaves rose up against the French and defeated the French army ... the U.S. was able to gain the Louisiana Territory for \$15 million. That's three cents an acre. That's 13 states west of the Mississippi that the Haitian slaves' revolt in Haiti provided America."⁵

Here Joseph adopts Robertson's sketch of Haiti's diabolical contract "that people might not want to talk about" in order to recast the relationship between the two nations: the United States owes its wealth, he argues, to the success of the Haitian Revolution, and thus by Robertson's own argument, to the Devil himself. By arguing that the United States is beholden to Haiti for its imperial prosperity, Joseph stops short of refuting Robertson's argument that Haiti brought its suffering on itself. But his frame of "indebtedness" seems to constitute a rebuttal nonetheless, the recasting of an absent and unspoken narrative in which Haiti is the debtor beholden to the United States for its freedom. And this recasting, in turn, invokes the specter of an even more unspeakable narrative, that of the United States' role in creating Haitian poverty through debt enforcement and military occupation, mechanisms of control it also used on African Americans at home. As Saidiya Haartman has explained, emancipation from slavery within the United States "instituted indebtedness": not only was freedom itself imagined as a relationship of obligation (the freed slave: must always prove himself worthy of the "freedom" he has been "granted"), but debt also served to reinstitutionalize "both servitude and the pained constitution of blackness" in the Jim Crow South.⁶ And even before and as the United States instituted debt peonage in order to continue its subjugation of African Americans, it also helped to construct for newly freed Haiti an "already accrued debt, an abstinent present, and a mortgaged future."⁷

For Haiti, to become free was literally to become a debtor. After its successful revolution, Haiti was forced to borrow money at predatory interest rates from private French and U.S. banks to satisfy France's demand for one hundred fifty million francs in compensation for lost slave property.⁸ By 1914, eighty percent of Haiti's resources were tied up in debt payments, leaving them vulnerable to the greed of U.S. financial elites.⁹ In an attempt to consolidate Haiti's debts in the hands of U.S. private inter-

ests, and wrest control over the Haitian economy away from Europe, U.S. bankers first purchased a controlling interest in the Banque Nationale—in 1914, U.S. marines escorted a gunboat containing fifty thousand dollars from the Haitian Banque Nationale to the National City Bank in New York, after which the Haitian Bank hoisted an American flag—and then forced the Haitian government to default on its payments in order to precipitate Wilson's 1915 invasion.¹⁰ Debt thus became the justification for the United States' nineteen-year occupation, during which, in the name of rescuing Haiti, the U.S. extended the reach of Jim Crow beyond the U.S. South, establishing segregated facilities in urban areas, impressing Haitians into forced labor, and closing down traditional public schools in order to implement vocational education.¹¹ Even after the occupation officially ended, the United States maintained control over Haitian finances, forcing Haiti to repay its debt at rates far in excess of its contractual obligations, leaving the Haitian government and workforce on the verge of bankruptcy and Haiti's infrastructure in disrepair.¹²

My point is not to provide a corrective to Robertson and a corollary to Joseph by correctly identifying the long history of U.S. imperialism as the cause of Haiti's poverty, but to note how the discursive logic of indebtedness contributes to the erasure of this history, and particularly the shared history of African American and Caribbean domination by (and resistance to) U.S. hegemony. For Haiti's state of indebtedness has always been invented: Robertson's fabricated account of how Haitians' revolutionary decolonization begat them as a nation indebted to the devil is no more outrageous than France and the United States making their recognition of Haiti contingent upon Haitians paying France for their bodily autonomy. This indebtedness is no less a violent economic experience than a politics of narration, one that produces the linear temporality and subjectivity of modernity and progress, binding the nation to the conjured past, "since what is owed draws the past into the present," while simultaneously requiring the nation "to be abstinent in the present in hopes of securing the future."¹³ Debt, then, as Prathama Banjaree has suggested, is "*the form of the systemic lack and lag of the not-so-modern in modernity, the mode of attachment of the 'backward' to the 'advanced,' of the 'primitive' to the 'historical,' and even of the present to the past,*" a form and mode whose history is (as we have seen) simultaneously invoked and overlooked in order to secure the teleology of modernity and to consolidate national identity and hierarchy.¹⁴

Since its inception in the 1980s, when it emerged partially out of the "the twinning of antiracist and queer activism" that arose in response to the scapegoating of Haiti during the early days of the AIDS epidemic,¹⁵ Black Atlantic diaspora studies has been invested in disrupting this foundational myth of indebtedness. By theorizing the ways in which the aesthetic and lived practices of diasporic subjects have worked to interrupt the developmental, linear time of progress, modernity, and the nation, the discipline has attempted to stage a temporality that performs the violent ruptures of the Middle Passage, slavery, and colonialism, as well as the continuity of transnational collective memory of those experiences.¹⁶ As this genealogy of the discipline suggests, the reconstruction of the Black Atlantic, and the intimately connected history of Haiti and the United States, has always been something of a queer (and feminist) project,

758 because challenging the temporality and historicity of modernity requires uncovering and contesting the way putting people and nations in debt universalizes and consolidates racialized heteropatriarchy.¹⁷ In the last decade, scholars have begun to interrogate more closely these intersections between black diasporic histories and queer temporalities, exploring how postcolonial and queer theory might inform one another in the course of their shared imperative to “dismantle the chronopolitics of development.”¹⁸ Pervading some of this scholarship is a self-reflexive anxiety about the “twinning of queer and diasporic subjects” or the reification of the analogy between “black” and “queer,” moves that might not only erase subjects who identify as both, but also continue to mobilize the logics of indebtedness that have pathologized both categories. Such scholarship reminds us to historicize carefully the intersections of these categories at particular cultural moments.¹⁹ With this caution in mind, this essay takes up the question: if we take seriously Homi Bhabha’s claim that we require “another time of writing that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic ‘modern’ experience of the Western nation,”²⁰ what would it mean to identify that other time of writing as queer? To what degree have black modernist literary aesthetics been able to mobilize ideas of queer temporality²¹—or queering temporality—in order to write the transatlantic diaspora and unmake the violent temporality of modernity?²²

In necessarily partial answers to these questions, this essay proposes a re-reading of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, arguing that the novel constitutes a remarkable theorization of how the discursive power of queer temporality, and particularly queer negativity, may be mobilized to present a formal aesthetic challenge to the narratives of Haitian and African American indebtedness—and, more broadly, to the teleology of development that infects resistant cultural nationalisms as much as the dominant ideology of imperial modernity. What pours forth from Hurston’s novel is a flood of layered and imbricated histories, U.S. narratives that contain images and traces of Haiti, which themselves call up and re-produce Haiti’s history of decolonization and imperial occupation even as they script U.S. versions of the same story.

In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, when Hurston recounts her experience composing the novel in seven weeks in Haiti, she concludes, “I wish I could write it again.”²³ That Hurston wished to write her novel again indicates the way the novel is always already rewriting its own narratives in an attempt to reclaim history, calling attention to the imperialist tropes that had been used to live and write it through the practice of narrative reciprocity manifest in to “kiss and be kissed,” or putting “mah tongue in mah friend’s mouf,” the acts that frame Janie’s story to Phoebe, her “kissing-friend.” This essay contends that Janie’s telling constitutes the act of putting her tongue in the mouth of Haiti, and vice versa. The narrative produced is not so much a hybrid of Haitian and U.S. history, but a palimpsest of the two, so that in moments such as Nanny’s Civil War story, Janie’s fantasy of the Eatonville mule funeral, or the Florida hurricane, Haitian and U.S. histories are reconstituted in awareness of one another. In this way, Hurston’s text uses narrative strategies she codes as “queer,” deliberately eliding the linear teleologies of debt and nation in order to emphasize shared experiences of imperial domination, suffering, and strategies of resistance.

After marrying Janie off to Logan Killicks, Nanny (with “a stern mien”) chastises Janie for expressing her desire for “things sweet wid mah marriage,” dismissing her granddaughter’s desire for love that isn’t defined by “a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land.” Yet she “dwindles” for the rest of the day, the verb suggesting a reduction of her body and subjectivity that prefigures her experience later that night, when she sinks into deep reverie:

And when she gained the privacy of her own little shack she forgot she was there herself. There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought. Nanny entered this infinity of conscious pain again on her knees.²⁴

Nanny’s entrance into the depths of “conscious pain” occurs through an act of forgetting that “she was there herself,” implying both her dissociation from the physical “there” of her little shack, and from “herself” as an individual. Through this act of forgetting, she sinks past a state of sensory thought-making, a place where thoughts can be verbalized, into a realm beyond language, beyond thought: “a gulf of formless feelings.” That she enters this infinite and conscious space of suffering “again on her knees” suggests that Nanny has fallen away from the individual and the physical like this before, though the referent for this previous experience remains absent and unavailable. In her poetic tracing of Nanny’s mental descent, Claudine Raynaud suggests that possible referents might be slavery, or the rape of Nanny’s daughter Leafy, but that ultimately it is the indeterminacy of the referent that matters, as it defines the experience as collective memory, shared experience. The repetition of Nanny’s meditation, of her entrance into the “infinity of conscious pain” signals the transmutation of Nanny’s singular subjective experience into “communal formless experience, beyond individual consciousness and personal history.”²⁵

Of interest to Raynaud is the way the metaphor of the “basin in the mind” is linked to Hurston’s use of folk language. In tracing how the folk is “conjured up in relation to an impossible act of remembering *and* to the loss of a language of origin,” she explores how the novel’s use of metaphor is shaped against and in contrast to “the formlessness of repressed memory,” that memory “untouched by words,” beyond utterance.²⁶ But if we continue to read the basin as a signifier of the metaphoric process at work in Hurston’s novel, we must also acknowledge that Nanny ascends from the “infinity of conscious pain” back into language: “Towards morning she muttered, ‘Lawd, you know mah heart. Ah done the best Ah could do. De rest is left to you.’”²⁷ “Mah heart,” Nanny calls these shapeless, formless, communal feelings; her image, less resonant than so many in the novel, nevertheless signals the possibility of metaphor to conjure “collective memory” onto the space of the page, to describe it, if not necessarily to communicate it.

There is a sense, then, in which the words “floating” around in the “basin in the mind” might be understood as the text of the novel, a book that documents both Janie’s descent into the South (literally, “down in the Everglades there, down on the

760 muck,” a space which of course is flooded by the end of novel), into community and into grief, and also the recovery of her experience through narrative, into words that “float around on thought”—“Dis house . . . It’s full uh thoughts,” she tells Phoebe at the end of her story.²⁸ This notion of the novel as “floating” words resonates strongly with Haiti, the site of the novel’s composition; it conjures up the text as an island, buoyed upon waves of thought and feeling that connect Caribbean and U.S. space, that have at their depths the shared cultural memory and experience of Caribbean and black Southern communities. Released in her flood of writing—“It was dammed up in me, and I wrote it under internal pressure in seven weeks,” Hurston confesses in *Dust Tracks on a Road*²⁹—Hurston’s novel contains an undeniable Caribbean dimension. It depicts variously what Hazel Carby has called “a stress on a continuity of cultural beliefs and practices with beliefs and practices in the Caribbean that . . . discursively displaces the urban migration of black people in the continental United States”³⁰; what Derek Collins describes as an “overlaying of several black cultures in the representation of a person or community,” such that Janie can be read as “complex pastiche of Caribbean and southern American culture”³¹; and what Martyn Bone has recently described as “a Bahamian presence” that both “maps south Florida’s powerful economic position within an extended Caribbean . . . characterized by transnational migrant labor” and also “exposes . . . a gaping flaw” in critics’ celebration of Hurston’s representation of Southern agrarian community.³² Others, rather than locating the traces of Caribbean beliefs, cultural practices, or characters within the novel, have argued that the novel represents the influence of Haiti on Hurston’s work more generally and dramatically, as it constitutes the product of an epiphanic shift in Hurston’s attitudes towards gender, time, and the folk that she gained during her sojourn there.³³ Recently, Leigh Anne Duck has argued that as Hurston “began to promote modernization in African Caribbean contexts,” she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to “imagine and inscribe a way to manage the losses” that modernization—which we might gloss as the adoption of the temporality of modernity, progress and liberal national subjectivity that I have been marking here as the narrative politics of “indebtedness”—would necessarily entail.³⁴

For Duck, the bourgeois form of the novel allows for the preservation and privatization of folkloric pleasure in the face of encroaching and inevitable modernization. However, I would argue that rather than offering strategies for surviving the inevitable alienation of modernity, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* challenges the narrative and historical trajectory of modernization, offering a formal alternative Nanny comes closest to explaining when she tells Janie, “You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular.”³⁵ Nanny’s metaphor encompasses the dislocation of the African diaspora. Her description of the black community as “branches without roots” suggests how the ravages of slavery unmoored members of the transatlantic black community from the temporality of heteropatriarchal modernity, wresting from them the ability to control their familial or reproductive lives: “Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do,” Nanny continues. Emancipation only compounded the violence of this rootlessness by granting slaves entrance into the

nation only as “expiators of the past,” instilling an “ahistorical and amnesic vision of chattel slavery” that placed “the burden of obligation” upon freed slaves.³⁶ Yet Nanny’s metaphor also refuses “modern” time—a refusal of roots that pre-empts the imposition of a linear historical narrative about original underdevelopment and indebtedness—opting instead for a recurring (re)generative narrative of branches and “things coming round in queer ways.” Hurston defines “queer” here not an identity (or an analogy for blackness), but rather as a means of reorganizing the normative temporal order, an erotics of time and narrative that escapes the amnesiac trap of rootlessness. Trading in “roots” for “routes,” to borrow Paul Gilroy’s pun, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* makes things come round queer through the production of historical palimpsest, overlaying moments in U.S. and Haitian history that diverge historically but resonate in terms of cultural significance. In so doing, it constructs a transcultural, transnational force that undoes the racist, heteronormative, patriarchal temporality of liberal modernity.

Nanny’s mental processes are most directly linked to the dialectic of collective memory and the palimpsest of Haitian and U.S. histories in her narration of her own experiences of slavery, the Civil War, and emancipation. Her narration of her past is framed by a description of the mining of her heart, that collective space of infinite sorrow: “Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart.”³⁷ Once again Nanny’s individual thought process is linked to the collective pain of slavery, to feelings that compel her to relate traumatic episodes of her own life (her “dramas”). But we can read Nanny’s thinking “back and back,” a mental process the first part of the sentence equates with “rocking,” not just as a continuous temporal regression, but also as a movement between two temporally disjunctive points—“back” and “back”—marking the oscillation of her story between Sherman’s 1864 march on Atlanta and the U.S. Marines’ invasion of Haiti in 1915. The absent referent for Nanny “again on her knees” can be traced not only to slavery or the Middle Passage but to a transatlantic experience of imperial domination, staged through the textual overlay of two historically divergent moments.

Nanny is not remembering Haiti per se. Rather, her tale is “coded,” a term John Carlos Rowe borrows to designate Hurston’s discursive “double-consciousness,” her “tendency to ‘code’ messages into narratives she imagined were subject to the unofficial but still powerful censorship of the prevailing white social order.”³⁸ In producing Nanny’s story of her life during the war, the text manufactures irreducible traces of the U.S. occupation of Haiti; in producing a version of one historical narrative, it inevitably produces the other. Nanny’s story begins on a Savannah plantation a week after she has given birth to her daughter, Janie’s mother; her master rides off to fight Sherman marching on Atlanta, stopping to say goodbye in a brief interlude that suggests that he is the father of her baby. His wife shares this suspicion, as she descends on Nanny demanding to know “how come [her] baby look white,” sentencing her to a whipping the following morning—“Ah’ll have you whipped till de blood run down yo’ heels!”—and promising to sell her daughter as soon as she is a month old. Nanny retreats “in de black dark” to “de swamp by river,” “skeered” enough by the plantation mistress

762 to brave her fear of “bitin’ snakes” and other swamp menaces: “De noise uh de owls skeered me; de limbs of the cypress trees took to crawlin’ and movin’ round after dark, and two three times Ah heered panthers prowlin’ round.”³⁹ There she remains until she hears and sees the signs of Sherman’s arrival in Savannah.

This swampland into which Nanny retreats is a wild and primitive place; the landscape, complete with “crawlin’ and movin’” tree limbs seems alive, possessed. In its exoticism, this description of the deep South swampland mirrors U.S. conceptions of “the dark jungles of Port-au-Prince,” to quote a New York newspaper article that further described Hurston’s activities there as “chanting voodoo chants, drinking the blood of the sacrificial goat, and worshipping with the descendants of African slaves whose people were bred in the Congo.”⁴⁰ In Nanny’s narrative, the southern swamp becomes equally foreign, de-nationalized, and in need of reclamation, much like the “exotic renderings of the Caribbean nation” that historian Mary Renda reports “effectively defined Haiti as outside the bounds of the American nation,” and emphasized the cultural dissonance between the two nations in order to justify U.S. political and economic control.⁴¹ By retreating into this (deliberately rendered) exotic realm, Nanny moves into a “primitive” space that seems, in the manner of the Haiti imagined by the United States, ripe for imperial domination, for colonization by Northern power and capital. The depiction of the U.S. South as a colonial space (or as space in need of colonization) demonstrates Hurston’s conflation of U.S. imperialism at home and abroad. Her sense of the mechanisms of the U.S. occupation of Haiti inflects her rendering of Nanny’s Civil War narrative, and in turn the Civil War is repositioned as a practice ground for U.S. imperialist ventures overseas.

Nanny herself, “skeered” and alone with her newborn baby, seems ripe for “rescue” by paternal U.S. forces. Her plunge into this “dark jungle” to avoid being whipped “‘til de blood run down yo’ heels” also startlingly echoes Hurston’s descriptions in her ethnography, *Tell My Horse*, of the political instability that preceded the arrival of U.S. Marines in Cuba, including the slaughter of the one hundred sixty-seven political prisoners on the orders of Haitian president Vilbrun Guillaume Sam: “a new and bloody river shall pour”; “But the dawn discovered a drain from the inside of the prison flowing with gouts and clots of blood.”⁴² These images of running blood evoke a shared history of suffering, diminishing national and historical differences by emphasizing at the level of the image the shared experience of bloodshed at the hands of a corrupt political system. The obvious historical discrepancy—the fact that the brutal threat to Nanny occurs as the result of a system of white enslavement of black people, while Haiti embodies Nanny’s fantasy of “some place way off in the de ocean where de black man is in power” and terror and bloodshed are not practiced in the service of white supremacy—is elided here.⁴³ Nanny’s terror of the brutal slave system and of her swamp surroundings covers and models the exoticized primitivism and politically sanctioned terror that served as paternalist justifications for U.S. imperialist intervention in Haiti; her terror also signifies the displacement of the desire for imperialist intervention onto the black population in question. Like the peasant Hurston quotes in response to the Sam massacre—“They say the white man is coming to rule Haiti again. The black

man is so cruel to his own, *let the white man come!*⁴⁴—Nanny, too, awaits the birth of freedom from the invasion of “needed” and “welcomed” white troops.

All of this anticipates Nanny's emergence from the swamp back into civilization, which she describes as getting “in quotation wid people” and finding a place to stay. Her rescue is signaled first by “big guns boomin' lak thunder” that “kept up all night long” and then by her sighting of “uh big ship at a distance and great stirrin' round,” commotion enough that draws her out of the swamp to hear the news of Sherman's arrival and the emancipation of the slaves. This freedom is finally solidified months later when the Confederate soldiers in gray “bury their swords in the ground to show they was never to fight about slavery no mo.”⁴⁵ The image of “uh big ship at a distance” mirrors Hurston's description in *Tell My Horse* of the arrival of the marines in Haiti in 1915:

They were like that when the black plume of the American battleship smoke lifted itself against the sky . . . The smoke from the funnels of the U.S.S. Washington was a black plume with a white hope. This was the last hour of the last day of the last year that ambitious and greedy demagogues could substitute bought Caco blades for voting power. It was the end of the revolution and the beginning of peace.⁴⁶

Both passages offer hope and freedom in the form of “uh big ship at a distance,” a vehicle of white paternalism and peace that is achieved through the erasure of “swords,” either through burial or the substitution of votes for blades. Again the differing racial politics of these two historical scenarios is elided, and through this image again the promise of black emancipation from slavery is aligned with the arrival of U.S. forces in Haiti. The link between the images suggests the potential, in both cases, for civic democracy to triumph over violence.

However, Hurston's seemingly sincere endorsement of imperialism's potential to liberate blacks from violent oppression is complicated, both in *Tell My Horse* and in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.⁴⁷ The novel quickly overturns its attempt to mask the violence of paternalistic imperialism (its presentation of imperialism as a force that “buries blades”) through Nanny's narration of her seventeen-year-old daughter Leafy's rape by her schoolteacher. The embodiment of the rapist in the authoritative figure of the teacher—who plays the roles of educator, disciplinarian, and economic enabler (Leafy was to have grown up to be a schoolteacher herself), three major roles the United States imagined itself filling in Haiti—mirrors the sexual violence committed against Haitian women by U.S. Marines, violence which contributed to the “discursive construction of Haitian women as exotic and promiscuous.”⁴⁸ After her rape, Leafy “took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights,” refusing “to stay here and nowhere else.”⁴⁹ Such descriptions suggest that Leafy's rape recreates her as promiscuous and unstable, making her a symbol for imperialist paternalism's violent discursive construction of black women at home and abroad.

I have suggested that the palimpsestual layering of the U.S. occupation of Haiti through Nanny's Civil War story enables Hurston to depict and dismantle the discursive structures of U.S. imperialism that were constructing both occupied Haiti and the U.S. South following the Civil War. Hurston's apparent endorsement of imperialism as a

764 potentially liberating activity, a mode of democratic modernization with the potential to erase the violence of the past, is overwritten by her exposure of the manipulative power of imperialist rhetoric and imagery, and her attention to the renewed violence that can occur under the guise of liberation. In the images and narrative progression of Nanny's story, Hurston mirrors and reproduces "the two reigning tropes of U.S. contact with Haiti," paternalism and exoticism, as the primary forces shaping the experience of black Southern life during and after the Civil War.⁵⁰ This historical layering emphasizes the violent betrayal of imperialist promise, and the collective transatlantic experience of that betrayal. These "tropes" of the U.S. occupation of Haiti become a means for her to recast U.S. nationalist narratives like the Civil War, and vice versa: in Hurston's account, the U.S. Civil War is the story of the U.S. occupation of Haiti is the story of the U.S. Civil War. This palimpsestual narration disrupts any totalizing, linear narrative of U.S. nationalism or modernity; that the narrative of the U.S. Civil War is reproduced as the narrative of Haitian occupation suggests that both narratives always remain continually in production. The text upholds this structure of continual, layered transatlantic narrative production of history, as Nanny's narrative is always also narrated through Janie and through Hurston herself.

History is produced and reproduced through the mouths of the black women in Hurston's narrative; the novel allows them both to produce and subvert their own discursive construction through imperialist tropes. Women's control over narrative production, as many critics have pointed out, is signaled in the opening passage of the novel; in contrast to the men whose dreams may be capriciously "mocked to death by Time," 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. Then they act and do things accordingly."⁵¹ Their control over the dream that is truth—over the production of history through their own mental fantasies—is figured as a willful act of remembering and forgetting; this is another way, then, of conceptualizing Hurston's selective imagistic overlay of Haiti and the U.S. South. Another such moment occurs when Janie, forbidden from attending the funeral of the free-mule by Joe, watches the procession leave town from the doorway of the store: "No, the carcass moved off with the town, and left Janie standing in the doorway."⁵² Still within the space of Janie's narrative to Phoebe, the text moves "out in the swamp" to a description of the two funerals that occur there, one in which the townspeople "made great ceremony over the mule" and "mocked everything human in death," the other in which the circling buzzards hold their own call-and-response ceremony before feasting on the corpse.⁵³ Yet Janie cannot see the swamp from the store; we are somewhat at a loss to account for the way in which she is able to account for events she did not witness. This is the embodiment of "the dream is the truth," of her fantasy given the narrative weight of history.

This mule is already woven into U.S. historical mythology through Janie's analogy between Joe Starks's purchase of the mule's freedom and Lincoln's emancipation of the slaves: "Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed de Negroes. You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have the power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something."⁵⁴ Yet Janie's admiration of Joe's

economically-based, “royal” ability to arbitrarily “free” the mule “tuh let ‘im rest” also makes the freeing of the mule into a caricature of imperial benevolence, which assigns itself jurisdiction over the line between property and citizenship. And one can’t help but wonder, if the mule had been female, would she have been freed? Granted “citizenship”?

At this point in the novel, Nanny has already established the mule as part of her national narrative, as her feminist metaphor for the gender dynamics of U.S. racial relations: “So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man to pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is the mule of the world so fur as Ah can see.”⁵⁵ Kevin Meehan observes that this piece of wisdom is already a “folk-inflected distillation of Hurston’s grim commentary on the lot of black women in the Caribbean,”⁵⁶ echoing her previous descriptions of black Caribbean women in *Tell My Horse*: “She had better pray to the Lord to turn her into a donkey and be done with the thing. It is assumed that God made poor black females for beasts of burden, and nobody is going to interfere with providence . . . It is just considered down there that God made two kinds of donkeys, one kind that can talk.”⁵⁷ Even if the scene of the mule funeral is entirely Janie’s fantasy, it is nonetheless influenced by Hurston’s establishment of the mule as part of this cross-cultural symmetry.

But the funeral also reflects a bizarre episode in Haitian history, which Hurston relates in *Tell My Horse*, in which Haitian president Antoine Simon ordered an elaborate Catholic funeral at the national cathedral for his pet goat Simalo. Simalo dies of his grief over the breakup up of his “marriage” to the president’s daughter Celestina—there was a ceremony performed to free Celestina from her vows to the goat, “so that she might marry a man.” Grief-stricken by the goat’s death, Simon and Celestina “could not bear the thought of Simalo being dumped in a hole and buried like any other dead animal”; instead, “He must be buried like a man who had obligations to a god and hopes of eternity.” The president passed Simalo off to the priest as a close relative, and only after the conclusion of the service did the priest discover the goat’s true identity. The scandal provoked laughter all over Haiti, speculation about whether the president had lost his will to lead, whether this was his “first flinching from the price of ambition.” For Hurston, the story also provoked pathos: “It is the story of a peasant who gained the palace but lost his goat. He sacrificed his best friend to ambition which turned upon him and mocked his happiness to death.”⁵⁸

The funerals Janie envisions in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are also imagined as events of mockery: “They mocked everything human in death”; “With that the sisters got mock-happy and shouted and had to be held up by the menfolk.”⁵⁹ They mark another dramatization of a collective diasporic consciousness, in which the U.S. Southern folk share in the Haitian people’s mockery of their political leader, one who (like Joe) was strongly linked to U.S. imperialism: in 1908, Simon signed the McDonald contract, giving a U.S. company the right to build a railroad in Haiti.⁶⁰ But because of the symbolic weight already bestowed on the figure of the mule in the novel, and because Janie narrates this episode not as an autobiographer but as a historian, the mule funeral is

766 also a pointedly feminist commentary on the subjective farce of nationalist belonging. The ceremony mocks the system that could with celebratory pomp and circumstance grant “citizenship” to a mule, but not to a black woman.

As the story unfolds through Nanny’s story, Leafy’s rape, and the mule funeral, the Caribbean continues to symbolically register the collective memory of plantation economies, and black women’s inscription within and resistance to imperialism and colonialism’s oppressive material and psychological orders. In particular, sugar becomes as a medium through which imperialist paternalism and violence diffuse into the text.⁶¹ The impetus for Nanny’s descent to her knees and into the “infinity of conscious pain” is Janie’s complaint that she “wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think”; she dies having advised Janie to “wait awhile” for her mind to change.⁶² But it is in pursuit of “sweetness” that Janie leaves Logan Killicks to marry Joe Starks, “sweetness” that he codes as a trope of imperialist paternalism.

We should remember that the first question Joe poses to Janie is, “Where was Janie’s papa and mama?” His infantilization of her is then further associated with her desire for sugar:

“You married? You ain’t hardly old enough to be weaned. Ah betcha still craves sugar-tits, doncher?”

“Yeah, and Ah makes and sucks ’em when the notion strikes me. Drinks sweeten’ water too.”

“Ah loves dat mahself. Never specks to get too old to enjoy syrup sweeten water when it’s cools and nice.”

“Us got plenty syrup in the barn. Ribbon-cane syrup. If you so desires—⁶³

Janie’s craving for sugar-tits doubly inscribes her: as a child “hardly old enough to be weaned,” and, through the erotic subtext of this exchange, as sexually forward, a woman who “makes and sucks ’em” when the notion strikes her. Like Haiti, and like Haitian women, she is constructed for (and by) Joe through paternalist and exotic rhetoric, echoing the occupation rhetoric that constructed Haiti as “a nation orphaned by parental neglect” and as “a wayward girl, on the road to ruin” due to the absence of proper domestic influence.⁶⁴ Significantly, this passage re-channels Janie’s craving for sweetness, previously associated with her “revelation” of marriage as a state of liberating sexual satisfaction—“that pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid” under the pear tree.⁶⁵ As the passage progresses, her craving is reconfigured into his love, his desire for “syrup sweeten,” rewriting her pursuit of sweetness in marriage as the labor of gratifying his desire for sugar: “Us got plenty syrup in barn. Ribbon-cane syrup. If you so desires.”

This patriarchal revision is borne out in the structure of Janie and Joe’s relationship as soon as they run away together. On the train, he buys her “a glass lantern full of candies,” transferring the locus of the production and the satisfaction of her desire to his control, as well as implicating it into the neo-colonial capitalist economy.⁶⁶ When Janie is next put in charge of sugar, her production of sweetness is further transformed into a public act of hospitality for Joe’s lamp-lighting ceremony, part of the gendered division of labor through which she and the women of community participate in Joe’s

reinstitution of a plantation economy. They fill their assignments, like the men conscripted to drain the ditch in front of Joe's store, as if re-enslaved, despite their nominal emancipation: "Tell yo' womenfolks tuh do 'round 'bout some pies and cakes and sweet p'tater pone. That's the way it went, too. The women got together the sweets and the men looked after the meats."⁶⁷

Joe Starks' little empire, like the colonized Caribbean, is a sugar economy. His control over sweetness manifests itself not only in his incorporation of Janie's desire for sweetness into economic labor, but also in his need for physical control over the supply of sugarcane in the town; despite having "so much cane and everything else," when he catches Henry Pitts with a "wagon load of ribbon cane," he takes the cane away and evicts Pitts from the town.⁶⁸ Even after Joe dies, Janie's desire for sweetness is funneled into the different yet still violent paternalistic dynamics of her relationship with Tea Cake. "Tea Cake! So you sweet as all dat?" she exclaims the first time she meets him and in some ways, Janie's desire for Tea Cake—her "self-crushing love," her desire for him to be "as sweet as all dat"—is about the reclamation of her sugar craving from the imperialism that co-opted it.⁶⁹ At first, this seems possible; if Tea Cake is as paternalistic in his treatment of Janie as Joe ever was—"Come on, baby, papa Tea Cake never could be mad with you!"; "Jes lak uh lil girl wid her easter dress on"—he is much more benevolently so.⁷⁰ Janie credits him with having "done taught me the de maiden language all over."⁷¹

But though he holds the promise of fulfillment of her desires—"Hurry up and come because he was about to turn into pure sugar thinking about her"⁷²—that "maiden language," the language of romance and desire, already exists within a violent and combative system of gender relations. Tea Cake's capricious disappearance with her money leaves Janie "turning round in one place like a horse grinding sugar cane"; her love becomes her labor, paralleled by her entrance into the cane fields to work beside him as a field hand.⁷³ They produce their own successful public sexualities by violently claiming each other's bodies: Janie attacks Tea Cake when she thinks he is "messin' round" with Nunkie, forcibly and sexually obtaining his denial so she can "crow over the fallen Nunkie"; and Tea Cake whips Janie "tuh show dem Turners who is boss" and to prove to Janie that "it's uh man heah."⁷⁴ This entanglement of sex and violence plays out to its conclusion in the scene of Janie attacking Tea Cake, as they finally fall asleep "in sweet exhaustion." The line implies the exhaustion of sweetness through violence: the exhaustion of Janie's initial vision of "sweetness"—the body and soul melding in what she calls marriage—through sweetness's cooptation by imperialist and neo-colonial versions of labor and gender politics.

Through its use of the tropes of sugar and sweetness, the novel offers a discursive, palimpsestual history of the economic exploitation of African American and Caribbean women's labor within the neocolonial economies of occupied Haiti and the post-emancipation South. But it also argues that black women's heterosexual desire is always articulated in relation to the violent frameworks of U.S. imperialism and modernity, and cannot be extracted from them. Nanny articulates as much early on in the novel, when she tells Janie that love is "just what's got us uh pullin' and uh haulin' and

768 sweatin' and doin' from can't see in de mornin' till can't see at night."⁷⁵ Scholars have often critiqued Nanny's position for its alignment with the bourgeois ideology of racial uplift, arguing that Janie's "great journey to the horizons in search of people" poses a redemptive valuation of erotics that belies Nanny's repressive, oppressive "pinch[ing of the horizon] in to such a little bit of thing that she could tie it around her grand-daughter's neck tight enough to choke her."⁷⁶ But Janie's search for the horizon—for the fulfillment of her craving for sugar—reaches a dead end. The exhaustion of the sweetness of her heterosexual desires signals the novel's acknowledgement that both Joe Starks's modernizing, neo-imperial black capitalist nationalism, and Tea Cake's rebellious, itinerant black cultural nationalism, are mutually invested in gender and sexual regulation, in sexist ideologies and practices that normalize modern heteropatriarchal citizenship.⁷⁷

In contrast, Janie finds fulfillment in private, homoerotic storytelling and non-procreative self-gratification: she "pull[s] her horizon like a great fishnet, pull[ing] it from around the waist of the world and draping it over her shoulder."⁷⁸ Hazel Carby understands this ending as a privileged, privatized vision of sexual and narrative autonomy that locates the black subject outside of history, and that elides the oppression faced by Hurston's black contemporaries (particularly rural Southern communities).⁷⁹ Others see it as a resolution that conveys Hurston's ambivalent anti-colonialism while anticipating her political disengagement in the 1940s.⁸⁰ But what if we read this, not as a moment outside politics, but as one that challenges "the very structures of meaning and temporality that make politics intelligible"? What if this is a moment of *jouissance*, a joyful rejection of the "reproductive futurism" that characterizes both the politics of imperialist modernization and the "progressive" liberal and nationalist ideologies that profess to oppose it?⁸¹ In the spirit of the novel's larger embrace of the politics of queer negativity, Janie's destruction of the horizon represents the radical culmination of novel's palimpsestual drive to negate the ideologies of progress and modernization. Understanding "queer" in Lee Edelman's anti-relational, yet revolutionary terms—as "the refusal to sacrifice the present for the sake of the future"; the refusal to enter into the state of indebtedness that marks modernity—Janie's ending is one of the "queer ways" the novel comes round.⁸²

It should come as no surprise that the movement from Joe Starks's neocolonial sugar town to the erotic, violent space of the sugar cane fields feels like a temporal regression: a movement backward in Haitian history to the time of the 1804 Revolution, when sugarcane was widely, profitably, and brutally cultivated; and a movement even further back in time to the Biblical flood, when "the peevish world on a grumble" affects a similar act of violent devastation.⁸³ In the Bible, the flood serves as a moment of simultaneous historical erasure and creation; it resets time without entirely obliterating old inhabitants, but provides a means of getting rid of a thoroughly polluted world and starting again with a clean, well-washed one. This is also the novel's approach to history: moving "back in time," it gyrates towards a destructive havoc that is also the moment of its own creation. Symbolically and narratologically (since this where Tea Cake meets his fate, even if he does not suffer it until later), the hurricane clears space for the historical (re)productions of the novel.

After the hurricane, the text makes its way back towards the present, having cleared for itself a landscape and a narrative space in which to construct the layered, palimpsestual history of U.S. imperialism in Haiti and the United States. The novel alludes to this strange temporal progression through the fact that, though only a day seems to pass between the hurricane and their arrival at Palm Beach, Tea Cake and Janie sense a much different calendar at work upon them: "It was years later by their bodies. Winters and winters of hardship and suffering. The wheel kept turning round and round. Hope, hopelessness, and despair. But the storm blew itself out as they approached the city."⁸⁴ The storm weakens as they approach the city—the center, the metropolis, the bastion of imperialism where Tea Cake is conscripted, "pressed into service," to bury the dead. The weakening of the storm and the movement towards the city (towards the imperialist present that can now be made manifest in the novel) is figured as the acceleration of time: "It was years later by their bodies . . . the wheels kept turning round and round."⁸⁵

Perhaps in the notion of the "monstropolous," we can consider one final time Hurston's sense of the thickness of history: of the concurrent production of its many layers through cultural tropes that "inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place." A word of Hurston's own coinage, "monstropolous" meshes two recognizable elements: the "monstrous" and the "metropolis." In melding these words together, monstropolous-ness seems to merge the paradigmatic poles of imperialism this essay has suggested *Their Eyes Were Watching God* both dramatizes and interrogates: paternalism and exoticism, Joe's sweet economy and Tea Cake's sweet violence, the "metropolis of the state" that is Eatonville and the "senseless monster in his bed" that is the Okeechobee.⁸⁶ Introduced just as the narrative frame of the novel ends and Janie's storytelling begins, monstropolous-ness is the function not just of the passage of time, but of the passing on (or passing away) of history: "Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked."⁸⁷ Monstropolous-ness comes about through the historical production of narrative; the book itself (Janie's telling) produces the "monstropolous old thing" that is darkness, darkness that is both the atmosphere of the telling, and, more obliquely, the transnational racial community the novel reflects and inflects.

The word reappears once more towards the end of the novel, to describe the lake's flooding of the muck: "The monstropolous beast had left his bed."⁸⁸ The "monstropolous beast" embodies imperialism itself, that force that combines monstrous and metropolis to upend indigenous history in order to rewrite it in its own image. Equally powerfully, the "monstropolous beast" represents the narrative force of the novel, that in turn unwraps nationalist imperialist histories and recodes them to expose not only the contiguous experience of a transatlantic racial community, but the common tropes, devices, and consequences of U.S. imperialism, at home and abroad: "[h]e seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass and rushed on after his supposed-to-be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in the houses along with other timbers."⁸⁹ As the "supposed-to-be conquerors" and the manifestations of their presence are rolled up and away, space is

770 cleared for new histories to be spoken: “Havoc was there with her mouth wide open.”⁹⁰ Janie, too, has her mouth wide open, talking, producing that “monstropolous old thing,” participating (as is Hurston through her) in that Haitian “national pastime of blowing up a hurricane with [her] tongue.”⁹¹ Her tongue’s hurricane blows the debris of Caribbean history into her U.S. novel, erasing purely nationalist myths and histories with versions that are “lak de sea”: “uh movin’ thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it’s different with every shore.”⁹²

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. See for example: “Haiti Earthquake: Buildings Collapse, Thousands Feared Dead,” *New York Daily News*, 22 January 2010; Associated Press, “7.0 Earthquake Causes Destruction in Haiti,” *Jakarta Globe*, 13 January 2010, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/70-earthquake-causes-destruction-in-haiti/352410>; Associated Press, “Haiti’s Earthquake—Latest Coverage,” *The Washington Post*, 15 January 2010; Simon Romero and Marc Lacey, “Fierce Quake Devastates Haiti; Worst Is Feared,” *The New York Times*, 13 January 2010, late edition; Glenn Kessler, “Tragedy may give ‘uneasy neighbors’ chance for fresh start” *The Washington Post*, 15 January 2010, Met 2 edition; and Katie Couric, *The Early Show* (New York: CBS Network), 7:00 AM EST, 14 January 2010, television program.

2. Pat Robertson, *The 700 Club*, (Virginia Beach: CBN Network), 13 January 2010, television program.

3. See J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1997).

4. See Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965). For incisive critiques of the Moynihan Report, see Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1978; reprint, New York: Verso Classics, 1999) and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

5. Raymond Joseph, Haitian Ambassador to the United States, *The Rachel Maddow Show* (New York: MSNBC network), 13 January 2010, television program.

6. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.

7. *Ibid.* 131.

8. See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 303.

9. Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti 1915–1934*. 1971. (Rutgers University Press, 1995), 43.

10. See Schmidt, 47–56 and Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 50–3.

11. See Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights* (New York: Norton, 2008), 21–26.

12. See Schmidt, *United States*, 34 and Paul Farmer’s recounting of this history and the more recent aftermath in “Who Removed Aristede?” *London Review of Books*, 15 April 2004, 28–31.

13. Hartman, *Scenes*, 131.

14. Prathama Banjaree, “Debt, time and extravagance: Money and the making of ‘primitives’ in Colonial Bengal,” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 37 (December 2000): 423–445. My emphasis.

15. Rinaldo Walcott, "The New Black Queer Theory," in *Blackness and Sexualities*, ed. Michelle Wright and Antje Schuhmann (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 30.

16. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003); Michelle Ann Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005); and Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

17. See for example Wright, *Becoming Black*; Stephens, *Black Empire*; and Walcott's conclusion that "feminist of color interventions in politics and scholarship . . . underpin the arrival of contemporary black diasporic positions, a black queer diaspora, and a resulting black queer diasporic theory" ("New Black Queer Theory," 38).

18. Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds or Erotohistoriography." *Social Text* (Fall–Winter 2005): 58. For recent work on the intersections between queer temporalities and postcolonial studies, see Rebecca Fine Romanov, *The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006); Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, and Temporality* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009); and Kara Keeling, "LOOKING FOR M—Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, No. 4 (2009): 565–582. For recent work on the intersections between black and queer studies, see Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000); Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006); Omise'eke N. Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, No. 2–3 (2008): 191–215; *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke UP, 2005); *Plum Nelly: New Essays in Black Queer Studies*, ed. Jennifer DeVere Brody and Dwight A. McBride *Callaloo* 23 (Winter 2000).

19. See Meg Wesling, "Why Queer Diaspora?" *Feminist Review* 90 (2008): 30–47; Somerville, *Queering*, 7–8; and Rohy, *Anachronism*, 67–72.

20. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 202.

21. For recent debates around queer temporality, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies and Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); *Queer Temporalities* ed. Elizabeth Freeman. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, No. 2–3 (2007).

22. See for example Shane Vogel's recent study on the cabaret scene in the Harlem Renaissance, in which he analyzes Langston Hughes' inscription of "queer time consciousness" through his use of the tropes of "closing time" and "after hours." Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 104–132.

23. Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. ed. Robert Hemenway (1942; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 212.

24. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (1937; reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 29.

25. Claudine Reynaud. "'A Basin in the Mind': Language in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 222.

26. *Ibid.*, 223.

27. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 29.

28. *Ibid.*, 225.

29. Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 212.

30. Hazel V. Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," in *Culture in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 173.

31. Derek Collins, "The Myth and Ritual of Ezili Freda in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Western Folklore* 55 (Spring 1996): 151. Collins's reading of Janie as a manifestation of the

772 goddess Ezili Freda is representative of recent scholarship that traces the novel's evocation of Haitian myth and voodoo, suggesting that book was shaped by Hurston's research on Voodoo cosmology. See also: Daphne Lamothe, "Voudou Imagery, African American Tradition, and Cultural Transformation in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 165–189; Pamela Glenn Menke, "'Black Cat Bone and Snake Wisdom': New Orleanian Hoodoo, Haitian Voodoo, and Rereading Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in *Songs of the New South: Writing Contemporary Louisiana*, ed. Suzanne Disheroon and Lisa Abney (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 123–39; Kirby Olson, "Surrealism, Haiti, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Real: The Journal of Liberal Arts* 25 (Fall 2000): 80–93; and Edward Pavlic, *Crossroads Modernisms: Descent and Emergence in African American Literary Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2002).

32. Martyn Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk: Intra-regional and Transnational Migrant Labor in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *American Literature* 79 (December 2007): 773, 769.

33. See Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2006); and Lief Sorenson, "Modernity on a Global Stage: Hurston's Alternative Modernism," *MELUS* 30 (Winter 2005): 11.

34. Duck, *Nation's Region*, 131–2.

35. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 20. My reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* owes much to the growing body of literature on Hurston's ethnography *Tell My Horse*. In particular, my reading of the novel benefits from Duck's earlier reading of *Tell My Horse*, in which she traces the book's seemingly ambivalent stance towards U.S. imperialism in Haiti to a growing disillusionment with both U.S. civic democratic nationalism and Haitian cultural nationalism; to Annette Trefzer's argument that *Tell My Horse* stages a kind of double writing, performing the public transcript of U.S. imperial nationalism that is always undermined by Hurston's staging of subversive anticolonial transnational black communal practices; and to Patricia Chu's recent attempt to reframe modernist primitivism as a fetishization of "natives" who occupy the enviable political position of being able to see and resist the mechanisms of the modern state. In this context, Chu argues that in *Tell My Horse*, Hurston valorizes her Haitian subjects as possessing "hyperawareness of modernity, knowledge of the modern state's tricks and... the ability to challenge these tricks born out of a history of colonial revolt and oppression" (160). Here I read the novel through the prism of these perspectives, suggesting that Hurston's experience of Haiti resulted in the narrative tools and desire to deconstruct the shared normative assumptions and temporal trajectories of U.S. imperial nationalism and oppositional militant cultural nationalisms. See Leigh Anne Duck, "Rebirth of a Nation': Hurston in Haiti," *Journal of American Folklore* 117 (Spring 2004): 127–46; Patricia E. Chu, *Race, Nationalism, and The State in British and American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006); and Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*," *African American Review* 34 (Summer 2000): 299–312.

36. Hartman, *Scenes*, 133.

37. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 20.

38. John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 256.

39. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 22.

40. Quoted in Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 293.

41. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 209.

42. Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938; reprint, New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 65, 68.

43. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 17.

44. Hurston, *TMH*, 68.

45. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 22–3.

46. Hurston, *TMH*, 114.

47. Critics disagree about whether Hurston's representation of U.S. imperialism in *Tell My Horse* reflects straightforward support for the U.S. occupation or a more ambivalent or even subversive

stance. See Carby, "Politics of Fiction"; Chu, *Race, Nationalism*; Rowe, *U.S. Imperialism*; Trefzer, "Possessing the Self"; Duck, "Rebirth"; and also Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, "An Island Occupied: The U.S. Marine Occupation of Haiti in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and Katherine Durham's *Island Possessed*," in *Holding Their Own: Perspectives on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States*, ed. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Raphael-Hernandez (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 2000), 153–68; and Kevin Meehan, *People Get Ready: African American and Caribbean Cultural Exchange* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009).

48. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 234.

49. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 19.

50. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 209.

51. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 1.

52. *Ibid.*, 71.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 69.

55. *Ibid.*, 17.

56. Kevin Meehan. "Decolonizing Ethnography: Zora Neale Hurston in the Caribbean," in *Women at Sea: Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse*, ed. Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romere-Cesareo (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 279.

57. Hurston, *TMH*, 58.

58. *Ibid.*, 97–8.

59. *Ibid.*, 71, 72.

60. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 52.

61. Similarly, Kevin Meehan notes that Hurston's use of sugar cane as "a metaphor for dehumanization" in her short story "Sweat," in which Delia is likened by her husband to a thrown-away cane chew ("Decolonizing Ethnography," 279).

62. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 29.

63. *Ibid.*, 34.

64. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 16.

65. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 13.

66. *Ibid.*, 40.

67. *Ibid.*, 52–3.

68. *Ibid.*, 57.

69. *Ibid.*, 116, 151.

70. *Ibid.*, 137, 117.

71. *Ibid.*, 136.

72. *Ibid.*, 137.

73. *Ibid.*, 139.

74. *Ibid.*, 162, 173, 196.

75. *Ibid.*, 28.

76. *Ibid.*, 106, 107. For critiques of Nanny's argument, see Duck, *The Nation's Region*. For an alternate reading of Nanny as a militant feminist, see Cara Kaplan, "The Erotics of Talk: 'That Oldest Human Longing'" in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 137–164.

77. As Duck points out, Joe Starks' rule signifies upon U.S. puppet regimes of Haitian president Stenio Vincent and Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, adding another layer to the novel's sketch of transnational black nationalism's investment in gender and sexual regulation. See Duck, *Nation's Region*, 138.

78. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 227.

79. Carby, "Politics of Fiction"; see also Duck, *Nation's Region*.

80. For discussions of Hurston's politics in her later life, see the conclusion of Duck's "'Rebirth of a Nation'"; and Annette Trefezner, "'Let Us All Be Kissing-Friends?': Zora Neale Hurston and Race Politics in Dixie," *Journal of American Studies* 31 (April 1997): 69–78.

81. C. Heike Schotten, *Nietzsche's Revolution: Décadence, Politics, and Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Annette Trefzger advances a similar reading when she suggests we read Hurston's defense of the South in *Dust Tracks* and elsewhere as "a process of negation aimed to decenter visions of the black, the national, or the southern community as totalizing concepts" ("Let Us All Be Kissing Friends," 78).

82. See Edelman, *No Future* and Schotten's gloss of Edelman in *Nietzsche's Revolution* (202–6). Edelman's book has been the subject of much debate and critique within queer studies, challenged for narrowness of its white male archive; its disregard of the queer and racialized kids who already live the politics of "no future"; its call for queers to abandon politics, hope, and collective struggle; and its willful ignorance of the body of radical feminist critiques of reproductive politics. See for example José Esteban Muñoz, "Cruising the Toilet: Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Black Radical Traditions, and Queer Futurity," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 13, No. 2–3 (2007): 353–367; Jennifer Doyle, "Blind Spots and Failed Performance: Abortion, Feminism, and Queer Theory," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (Fall/Winter 2009): 25–52; and Andrea Smith, "The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 16, No.1–2 (2010): 41–68. Muñoz in particular objects that one can give up on reproductive futurity without giving up on "concepts like politics, hope, and a future that is not kid's stuff," arguing for a "queer futurity like the blackness of a black radical tradition is a relational and collective model of endurance" (360–1). However, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, if Janie's ebullient horizon is a vision of queer temporality, it is both anti-relational and private, a vision more in line with Schotten's gloss of the kind of radical negativity that Edelman advocates: "The future of queer politics is no future at all—it is the very narcissistic, future-sacrificing, self-indulgent *jouissance* to which all queers are condemned anyway" (204). For Schotten, Edelman's theory is not apolitical, despite his own insistence, but rather embraces an intensely revolutionary position, "one bent on undermining and in fact *undoing* the entire social order" (205).

83. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 48; Hurston, *TEWWG*, 185.

84. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 195.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*, 50, 185.

87. *Ibid.*, 9.

88. *Ibid.*, 189.

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*, 195.

91. Hurston, *TMH*, 86.

92. Hurston, *TEWWG*, 226.