

Contemplating Africans in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Chinedu Ogoke^{1*}

¹Department of English and Communications Studies, Federal University Otuoke

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2025.v13i12.007>

| Received: 11.10.2025 | Accepted: 13.12.2025 | Published: 28.12.2025

*Corresponding author: Chinedu Ogoke

Department of English and Communications Studies, Federal University Otuoke

Abstract

Review Article

Their Eyes Were Watching God marks a shift in the style of writing and presentation of the experiences of African Americans, who had just been set free from slavery. The book gives an account of the culture of the people in an African community partially insulated from the larger American society. There comes a storm, when the main character Janie Crawford and her husband relocate to a place called the Everglades. It comes to a point when the people are reminded of their fate in America. It happens as a storm breaks down the walls of a dam, the Okeechobee Dam. While they are subjected to these conditions and, as the storm rages, they look up and wonder if God has forsaken them. There is a reflection of what seemed like the reality of the African American question. This is tied to their experience in America, which goes back to the onset of slavery in Africa. They experience historical and collective trauma. While this study is concerned with this phenomenon, it makes an entry. This entry is the addition of the African continent. It has been an omission this article intends to correct. The correction is a responsibility that should be undertaken by African scholars. The correction is necessary to sensitize the Africans who have disconnected themselves from the slavery discourse. Since this is a literary work, the research was carried out using books, articles and related materials.

Keywords: literature, slavery, anthropology, trauma, colonialism.

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston an African American community is founded at a place called Eatonville. Another rendezvous emerges at Everglades, near Eatonville. Everglades eventually swarms with people from other African American societies, even from the Caribbean. They all engage in agrarian vocations. The writer had really given thought to ex-slaves living in a self-sufficient society within the United States of America (USA). It is perhaps modeled after the Haitian experience, as the novel was written in Haiti. One Captain Eaton was supposed to have acquired the land with the support of some fellow Caucasian Americans and handed over ownership to the African Americans. The opportunity to develop the place is well-utilized, but when Janie leaves with her third husband Tea Cake, we do know of any further improvements in the place. What we know is that the district created an environment of happiness. The acculturation process slows down here. The people's speech forms are unique. It is observed how relieved the people are about the new development, living in an

exclusive African American society, even though there is material insufficiency.

At the beginning, we observe how Janie is compelled to marry an elderly widower called Logan Killicks. Her grandmother thinks the only way can have peace of mind is to make Janie a worthy human through marriage. She wants a change from her slave life, where she was forbidden to get married, and then raped and left with an infant she has to hide from the wife of the father of her child. Collectively, the African Americans are traumatized. They are hit by a storm, with the walls of the Okeechobee Dam crumbling to the ground. The flood throws them into confusion. The experience makes them miserable. In this time of crisis, their eyes watch God.

They have gone through enslavement in Africa; their status changed from being free people to being made bonds men in completely new worlds. They were turned into beasts of burden in those strange lands. Their fortunes hardly change, even with emancipation. The question is if they can make any claim of being exempted from the fate that also befall their tormentors. When they

review their predicament, they realize that the sins of their adversaries have not impacted those negatively. Instead, those people acquire more powers and influence. The Caucasian Americans still occupy positions African Americans only dream of. Many researchers are prompted to examine the traumas experienced by the African Americans. Other forms of human suffering like the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, etc. are being studied; to help the victims get over their experiences. The researchers are willing and began to make a connection between the experiences of these groups and those people's attitudes to life. Africans on the African continent are neglected. African scholars are partly to blame. The gains from such research and fieldwork are immense. This generation of Africans should not detach themselves from this exercise.

What Is Literature?

Literature is meant to be a body of written material. This can be prose, drama and poetry. Its form also can be electronic or print. It is a means of keeping records of events. Popular forms of literature are non-fiction, which can appear as autobiographical writing, records of personal experiences, and essays. In the fictional aspect, writings that mimic life but are not considered to be factual can be written as poetry, play and stories. The most prominent is the novel. The essay and poetry forms held sway for centuries before drama, then lately, the novel, developed highly to take the prime position. Literature has defined the lives of people to a great measure. Each scholar has been affected in various ways by works of literature. Events and life experiences have been captured in very significant ways, making literature to rank with history in the preservation of people's values and worlds. In many ways, several readers have things they can relate to in literary works. It feels to so many people like a replay of their own lives. The list includes textual criticism and literary fiction. In the past, in Europe, books and writings of whatever nature was identified as literature. Eventually, specialized writing was adopted. It is believed to have originated from the word letter. In a clearer designation, it can be said to be written work that involves artistry or being creative (Krystal).

According to Krystal, literary also means "what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form." It follows that "maps, sermons, comic strips, cartoons, speeches, photographs, movies, war memorials, and music all huddle beneath the literary umbrella" (Krystal). He cites the emergence of Bob Dylan as more referenced than "Stephen Crane and Hart Crane combined." The point is made that Dylan ranks among America's greatest poets. The man has the record of being nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature since 1996, winning it in 2016.

Literature's birth year is given as February 22, 1774. It was a time when anyone could be in possession

of works by Addison, Shakespeare, Swift, Pope, etc. and "consumed them. Poets wrote, not just for themselves. Also, seventeenth century English poets were contending with Greek and Latin poets" (Krystal). The influence and presence of Homer, Virgil and Cicero slowed down the shaping of modern poetry. Krystal remarks that [o]ne way around this dilemma was to create new ancients closer to one's own time, which is precisely what John Dryden did in 1770, when he translated Chaucer's into Modern English. Dryden not only made Chaucer's work a classic; he helped canonize English literature itself

Some works qualify as canons. Canon, Krystal informs us, is taken from Greek. It actually stood for "Measuring stick." He posits that it "was used by early Christian theologians to differentiate the genuine or canonical books of the Bible from the apocry.

Krystal submits that the canon formalized modern literature as a select body of imaginative writings that could stand up to the Greek and Latin texts. He observes that it is an exclusive class of writers, with the idea meant to form a national literature. The group of people that suggested the list acted like a governing body. The idea of the canon was rejected after almost 200 years' reign. Krystal adds that, "[i]f books simply reinforced the cultural values that helped shape them, then any old book or any book was worthy of consideration."

Anthropology and Literature Anthropology expresses itself through literature. In this regard, literary forms of formulating and presenting messages are instruments through which anthropology is rendered. Other important aspects that give anthropology form are "reading, writing, performing, sharing and listening, whether by means of ethnographic field work or anthropological notes of textual analysis" (Brandel). A fieldwork can be organized and produced in literary form. This is what we have in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. Literature is the vehicle that delivers the fieldwork of anthropology. The materials obtained remain anthropological materials until they are converted to literature. Literature is used as information dissemination. It takes the shape of a true-life event. That is the closest events get to appearing like true life events. In literature, an author rebuilds the lives and experiences of a people.

Zora Neale Hurston Hurston compiled her collections of African American cultural experiences in her boo *Mules and Men*. Hurston's novel is packaged as a bildungsroman. The general setting of a story of this nature extends beyond what is found in the novel. The writer recreates life in a literary work. Narrative is required after fieldwork has been concluded (Rutsch). This is where literature is necessary. Anthropology studies how humans lived. The writer communicates what anthropology has archived. In anthropology, the

writer carries out a process of delivery. Both literature and anthropology record events. Backe notes thus, “I could apply my understanding of narrative craft and construction to the decentered voice of the anthropologist, the sensory thick description of fieldwork oriented around embodiment and partial integration.” He says further that “[m]y creative studies taught me how form can follow function, facilitating a more meditative and particularized approach to telling stories.”

Backe says that he learned in his studies

the capacity to sympathetically occupy another’s state of mind, cultural and life world, listening and attending to their story wherever it ultimately led. You learn to become a receptive audience, a practice that anthropologists carry into their fieldwork.

Anthropology creates the opportunity for literary work. It generates materials and concepts for literary write up. To launch his story, the writer has to assess the language. Storytelling is a role that anthropology plays. Backe clarifies this by stating that “anthropology is a storied discipline, one that is built upon and made by stories. Stories are an irrepressible aspect of human culture, a narrative instinct.” Literature is an alternative form for telling stories.

Collective Trauma

Collective or historical memory is a lingering torture as traced to an event or events in the past. The victims are dogged by psychological torture and dealing with frustrating, weakened and impaired characters. It is assumed that this development makes the victims to be disposed to be prone to violence. The people are broken and seem to have difficulties in life as they grapple with the reality. Historical trauma spans generations. There is the possibility that the quality of parental guide is one of the results of historical trauma. This is more so if there is a pattern of attitudes observed among the people across generations. It can be violence by individuals against their own people. Being drawn to abuse or aggression can be a fall out of having experiences at the level of genocide or war. It becomes difficult to erase if no attempts are made to address the issue in a satisfactory way. König and Reimann discuss two types of collective trauma. These are identity group level and society level trauma. These are identity group level and society level trauma (8-16). They reveal that “[t]raumatization can occur amongst various identity groups, i.e. race, age, class, caste, religious and/or ethnic groups. Both size and group coherence may differ and different identity markers may overlap” (8-16). At the society level, a nation may be affected. The wider society is not insulated from the effects of this trauma. It might be patriarchal neurosis passed down from one generation to the other. When a certain age or ethnicity has a common traumatic strain, then we can speak of the problem among the youth or elderly. This is the same way ethnicity can be a

marker. The number of individuals affected may determine if the experience may qualify as collective trauma.

Research on collective trauma was first muted by Mania Yellow Horse Brave Heart. The idea was developed as she interacted with communities of the Lakota native group of the United States of America. Heart set to find out how displacement, colonialism, loss of nationhood and mongrelization negatively impact the Lakota people. The research was also connected to the Holocaust experience. There have been other scholars in the area like Rachel Yehuda, Judith Kestenberg, Selma Freiberg, Dori Laub and Susan Socrates. Gross generational trauma is commonly identified with people who have once been through a nightmarish experience. Following community engagement, experts like Daniel Schechter are optimistic that the condition can be treated. They share collective memory of an incident that took place in the past. The studies are restricted to the experiences of Holocaust survivors and Native Americans. People are reminded of what transpired in the past. The remembrance interferes with their lives, constituting obstacles to living normally. The good news is that work is going on how to help victims cope with it or how to eliminate it. There are efforts being made to provide care and reduce the pain (König and Reimann 8-16).

There is also Post Slavery Syndrome. It originates from the work of one Joy Deguy Leary, who wrote a book titled *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. It argues that there are common traits observed about African Americans, some of which are anger, discrimination and hate. The study was further deepened by the work of Alvin Francis Pausaint and Amy Alexander. According to Hicks, victims of slavery “sustained a traumatic injury as a direct result of slavery and continue to be injured by traumas caused by the larger society’s policies of inequality, racism and oppression.” She remarks that it is another aspect of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) anxiety over slavery that has been passed down over many generations. It combines with racial discrimination being experienced in present day America to worsen the situation. Hicks makes reference to Joy Leary DeGruy who examine attitudes of Americans as they relate to the shocks of slavery.

Groups listed as candidates of collective traumas, are slaves in the Americas and in Europe, the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, the Partition of India and Pakistan, Trail of Tears, Attack on Pearl Harbor, Nanjing Massacre, Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Palestinian Nakha, the Halabja Chemical Attack, Covid-19 Pandemic, the MS Estonia in Sweden and the Irish Farmine. Ignored are groups in Africa. Yet, an experience like the Biafra war produces the same

effects as the Holocaust. This is because it ranks so high in human losses and even surpasses others in environmental degradation and prohibitive tendencies by organizations and nations on the issue. Numerous African experiences, though lower categories, deserve to be mentioned. Researchers have to break free from this unintended discriminatory reality (Hiks).

Slavery in Modern History and Collective Trauma

The volume of human populations taken into slavery in the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was indeed large. Captured men and women were taken away in the two directions; at the West African coast, the Sahara Desert and the Gulf of Guinea. People whose regions were affected by the Saharan Slave Trade have been unwilling to share their thoughts about what happened with anyone. While those whose fellow citizens were victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade acknowledge the wrong done to their ancestors, but are detached from the discourse on slavery. The people on the African continent have not developed the characteristics associated with slavery as those whose ancestors were removed from Africa. While the ancestors of those outside the continent of Africa experienced slavery, the ones on the continent, when they were linked to it, only offered their own people and were untouched themselves or escaped while in the process of being taken away. For those whose ancestors were victims, there is a felling of rage. From the point of capture to the final destination, the conditions were deplorable. Slaves were fastened to one another on land and against poles at the bottom of ships and fed like beasts. For those left behind, the thought that their people were missing and never to be seen can only be imagined (Wilsey 80-85).

The persons in bondage were helpless against bites from various insects and terrible weather conditions. Many died before the ships could get to their destinations and were thrown overboard. The infirm flung into the ocean, for a long time; observing the size of the ocean and their end, some obviously feasted on by sharks and other marine creatures, even while alive. They were handled like goods and handed over to waiting buyers, who resold them into eternal servitude. The slave was upset that any possibility of communicating in his native language had been eliminated. He or she also assumed a new identity in an alien land (Zhang, *et al.*, 777-780).

They were used like beasts of burden in plantations and elsewhere. The services rendered were only remunerated through the poor accommodation and food they had on them. Mothers watched their daughters being sold and carried away to unknown places. Any possibility of freedom was closed. The master used the whip at will and, if a slave died, it was merely considered as the master's loss. A slave master who brought a female into his home could do what he chose with the slave over

labor or she might not skip work or may still be needed in other tasks.

Therefore, the females were not protected from abusive masters by the law. Thomas Jefferson forced himself on some of his female slaves while making a case for the inferiority of people of African descent (Johansson). Interestingly, centuries after Jefferson's act, descendants of one of the slave women Jefferson violated want to be recognized by the US state as descendants of Jefferson. Legally, the slaves were prohibited from defending themselves in court. They were denied most of the rights the non-slaves took for granted.

After the emancipation of the slaves, attempts were made to deter them from enjoying their freedom. The Ku Klux Klan and the Democratic Party embarked on murderous campaigns against the freed men. They faced the challenge of integrating into American society in a country where some states practiced segregation along color lines. African Americans reacted through several movements, among which was the Civil Rights Movement. The most vocal personal of the movement, Martin Luther King Jr. put the thoughts of lovers of peace in the right words. The American state made a lot of concessions to the minorities like the African Americans, the Native Americans and the Asians. Sadly, America continues to witness anxious moments. Examples are complaints over the Catharina disaster intervention of the United States government. There have been accusations of racial violence by the police against African Americans (Leibbrand *et al.*, 21-35).

Painful Experience of Colonialism

Colonialism was a painful experience. Europeans opened new sources of livelihood and exploitation of people's labor and resources by going into people's territories in the name of what is termed colonization. It was forceful occupation. Blood flowed and continues to flow as a result. Traditional institutions of the local people were dismantled. The shock resulting from the experiences have refused to heal. People who tried to resist the European march were cut down. It happened during the Ekumeku uprising, the Mau Mau rebellion and in conflicts in the Congo. The Europeans were insensitive to the local people's feelings as people who had nothing in common were made to coexist as one people. It was simply what an unscrupulous occupier would do for self interest and not what a rational thinking being would do. It proved to be a devastating blow dealt to people's identities and values. The occupier offered the local people Western languages; the same captured slaves lost their languages and their values.

The colonizer poisoned the minds of different ethnic groups in every entity that was governed as one so-called independent country. The ethnic groups turned against ethnic groups while the colonizers encouraged them to annihilate one another and seek each the favor of

the colonizer. It was a potent means of survival. The same scenario was replicated across the world, but was worst in Africa. At different times, most of the countries in Africa have experienced religious and inter-ethnic wars. Wars paralyzed countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Central African Republic, Congo, Zaire, Uganda, Angola, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Cameroon, Mali, etc. The wars have not brought peace. They have further complicated the situation. The colonizers have never seen the need to ameliorate these problems. There will always be free natural resources for the colonizers as long as the relationships of various ethnic groups remain fractured (Lowes and Montero).

There has been built up anger among the indigenous people. Many of them have also absorbed the idea of the categorization of Africans and the rest of the world along racial lines. While Africans are black and inferior, the rest of mankind is white and superior. It is a toxic situation that leads to low self-esteem and incapacity to thrive among men. It is a suitable ingredient for resignation and allowing others to lead in technological, economic and traditional progress. The people feel more accepted when they bear European and Middle Eastern names and speak foreign languages. It has put Africans in a very difficult situation. The African is lost and despairs over his people's experience with colonialism. He faces a nightmare as a result of the lingering effects of colonialism (Lewis *et al.*)

Segregation in Colonial Times

When the British were in charge in west and east Africa, they created a class structure that relegated the owners of these places. They assigned special residential quarters termed Government Reserved Area (GRA) to themselves. A little close to the standard of the habitation was the Syrian or Indian or Asian quarters in a lot of the administrative cities. Opportunities were distributed in like manner. This was one of the reasons why the Asians were expelled from Uganda in 1972. There were boys' quarters for native servants, who lived in the premises of their European masters. Africans who build houses currently make provisions for boys' quarters for their relations or servants. Africans linked to the GRAs were people whose labors took them to those places. Every local person must conclude his or her mission at any GRA once it was evening time and leave the places. The colonial governments provided recreational facilities exclusively for the colonists. The facilities in Nigeria include sports arenas, health centers and swimming facilities, among them Ikoyi Club in Lagos, Nigeria. Africans were prohibited from having any access to the places, their presence not tolerated beyond the evening period. The sight of Africans in resorts and amusement centers was offensive (Laura 136-140).

Young Europeans exhibited the same attitudes by Afrikaans children as observed in *Tell Freedom* by

Peter Abraham (Pugliese 450-501, Laura 140 142). Every young European was a potential bully and spared no native; be they young or old. They amused themselves with verbal abuses of the Africans, without any restraint. Oftentimes, the colonial administration applied excessive force while responding to uprisings by the people. In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, it is reported thus, "Have you hear," Obierika, "that Abame is no more" (Mengara 32-36, Nazar 4, Achebe 130). The community has been leveled and burnt to the ground at the order of the British district head. The British were harsh and used the rod often. They were unreasoning and partial. No measure taken was deemed too severe by the home government in London. People protesting over poor working conditions, like the Enugu miners, were shot at with live bullets. There was no outrage at the killings of female protesters, tagged the Aba Women's Riots. They failed to see that, in Eastern Nigeria, women leaving their homes to engage in protest, was a sensitive issue. It is in bad taste to confront women bearing only placards. Every means of engagement must be exhausted before any use of force against women would be considered (Onuoha). The British government tampered with the democratic system they instituted in Nigeria, and even instigated ethnic groups to go to war, in which more than 3 million people were killed. Every attempt to restore sanity in Nigeria has been obstructed by the British, whom the world has come to recognize as the eternal lords of the Nigerian people. The British are unwanted in Nigeria by right-thinking people; but this is not happening because rescue seems not to be coming. In fact, British involvement in the lives of the majority of the people is a threat to those people (Onuoha).

Summary of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Naturally, Janie May Crawford cannot remain at the Everglades as she loses her husband, Tea Cake. She is host now at Eatonville to her friend Phoebe Watson. She looks at her score card and refuses to be intimidated by the gossips about her. People are harsh with their reactions, but she feels they cannot dictate to her with their gossips. They use different devices to make her regret her decisions, especially the unpopular one of running away with the much younger Tea Cake, whom they believe married her because of her wealth; fortune left behind by her second husband, Jody (Hurst 33). Janie gives the reader a peak into her life, even before she was born. It starts with Nanny who, like most slaves, had been deprived of marriage. Nanny was carrying in her arms the baby of her master, who had raped her. The man comes one more time, before setting out to war, to have one sexual act with her. He did not require any consent, and was soon up and bound for the war front. Nanny just had to submit to him. She now has the man's wife to contend with, as the other woman visits in the slave hut after discovering what had transpired. What clearly gave them away and the result of mating was that Nanny's little child also had Caucasian physical features. On that count, the master's wife tells Nanny to expect

some whipping. At dawn, Nanny slips away and hides in the mashes, with her new born baby wrapped very well. Here she stays until any search for her would cease (Hurston 33).

Her journey stops at the home of a family known as the Washburn's. A new phase of life begins for her as a domestic servant; slavery now ended. One day, she discovers that a teacher of Leafy's, her child, had forced himself on the girl. The teenage girl comes home crawling. Leafy eventually gives birth to Janie and does not stay back to be mother to her child, and is never seen again. Nanny now finds herself playing the role of mother to her granddaughter, Janie. Nanny thinks that, if she can prevent a repetition of her experience and that of her daughter, she has to be an exceptional mother, sparing nothing she can afford to give Janie a good life. Janie has to have a place in her life. Due to the fear of Janie being violated by one Johnny Taylor, Nanny decides she has to put Janie on the path of a marital life (Hurston 20).

She decides Janie can be redeemed if she is married to a more responsible, elderly divorcee, a man of fortune called Logan Killicks. After a brief ceremony, even with objections from Janie, Janie goes into Killick's home as a second wife. Janie is unhappy and brooded all the time, as she watched Killicks cut woods with pickaxe. They have exchanges with Killicks accusing her of indifference to his work. The period being spent with him is one of indolence. But Janie has ceased being the girl he married. Her position made her eligible to part ownership of the man's many acres of land. She does not need to uphold any values. She is not a candidate for this type of marriage, but Nanny disagrees with her. Marriage is something that can make her assert her humanity. Since, at this point, the ex-slaves can get married (Hurston 50).

Nanny dies and, shortly after, a young man named Jody Vergible Woods shows up. Janie exercises her freedom of being able to choose between one thing and another, and relocates with Jody to a place called Eatonville. Jody undertakes to lead the people who are moving into the new place. Almost all of them share the African American ancestry and have similar vision. They become partners and associates. Jody assumes leadership and proves capable of keeping pace with his boasts of a rich man. Through industry, a new and thriving town comes to life. The pulse of the development can be measured by the facilities introduced in the town, with a post office, street lights, etc. The mood in the community is a very good one, but Jody systematically silences Janie. He is determined to display her as his beautiful biracial wife while repeatedly reminding her that he is the master in the home. The foundation on which the marriage is built begins to crack. When the right occasion presents itself, Janie declares her readiness to be strong. Jody's reign is over, after two decades of being married

to Jody. What we have now is a new version of Janie. Jody dies and she settles into a new marriage with one Tea Cake. The marriage takes a course that makes the two lovers to relocate to the Everglades. Racism comes to bear in this period. The people who make merry are far removed from non-African Americans – than the reality was at Eatonville. Janie quits her station as the rich woman of Eatonville, even though her wealth is intact (Hurston 171).

They misjudge the weather conditions, just when the walls of the Okeechobee Dam gives way. Their existence is threatened in a manner that rattles them. The significance of their fate is being unwrapped before them. The experiences of the African American, from creation, play out in this period. Their eyes seem to wonder if they should not be given some concessions in life. They want to be sure that they have the same share of all the conditions of life; suffering, poverty and death. If God is the God of justice, then the same people cannot go through slavery and its aftermath, and still face all the known challenges of life and even endure the pangs of death like their oppressors. There is no reprieve for them. The African ancestry is widespread, and the African Americans are just one unit of this family. Hurston simply chose this group to write about. It extends to other peoples of African descent. In the story of the Africans on the African continent, the Europeans withdrew to return as colonialists. The colonialism genie has not been retired (Hurston 198).

Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston had a flair for creative even though she studied cultural anthropology. She “collected songs and folklore in Florida and Louisiana, where she embedded herself in the black communities as a participant, not just an objective observer” (Rutsch). She grew up among seven siblings of hers in Eatonville in Florida. This was an exclusively African American town. Hurston's family premises were a large expanse of land. Caucasian Americans could be seen occasionally in the vicinity. They were visitors, who mostly passed by. She relocated to Baltimore between five and ten years. She studied at Howard University, and worked part time. The school had mostly African American students. She eventually embarked on a trip to the north, during the Great Migration, arriving in Harlem, New York with less than \$2. In 1925, a scholarship enabled her to enroll at Barnard College, where she studied anthropology (Rutsch). Rutsch writes that

Hurston documented what she heard. The dialog of the people she met was packed with slurs, and one word ran right into the next one- and that drew criticism from some black elites. W.E.B. Dubois says the way Hurston wrote language made black people sound primitive – in his estimation – not a great Image for black people looking to improve their standing in society.

With funding from Charlotte Osgood Mason, Hurston took another trip to Eatonville, Florida, where she met a lady named Big Sweet. Big Sweet took her to parties and brought her in contact with people who told her folk stories. At New Orleans, where her search later took her, “she studied the spiritual practices like hoodoo and voodoo” (Rutsch). To gain the confidence of voodoo members, Hurston went without food for days and would later lie without clothes on for 69 hours.

CONCLUSION

We learn from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that slavery created the predicament faced by the African American characters in the novel. The characters discover they need one another to stand. A location is found where the ex-slaves will begin to put their lives together and a change from the frustrations of living marginally. They do not fair badly. The main character, Janie Crawford loses her two husbands to death, after running away from her first husband. The privilege of getting married eluded Janie’s grandmother, Nanny, because the law forbade marriage for African slaves. Generally, the African American characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* fail to find the happiness they sought, even in the Everglades where they congregate from far and near places. When the waters knock down the walls of the Okeechobee dam, the fate of the African Americans in life play out before them. They are perplexed why they are not delivered and why they are not dealt with differently; instead they succumb to all the conditions their oppressors are exposed to. Experts have directed their attention to the collective traumas of these people. There are many unresolved issues experts are plotting to find solutions to. What this research has done is to inform Africans of the shared ancestry they have with the African Americans. Studies like Slavery Posttraumatic Stress should also include Africans. It appears exercises like this one are suspended in the calculations of Africans on the continent. Ancestors of Africans were not exempted from loss of their loved ones who were taken away.

WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Peter. *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994
- Backe, Emma Louise. “Anthropology & Literature.” *The Greek Anthropologist*, January 2, 2015. <https://thegeekanthropologist.com/2015/01/02/anthropology-literature/>
- Bates, Robin. “What Is This Thing Called Literature?” *betterlivingthroughbeowulf*, December 4, 2019. <https://.com/what-is-this-thing-called-literature/>
- Brandel, Andrew, 'Literature and Anthropology' (30 Apr. 2020), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*
- *of Anthropology*. edited by Mark Aldenderfer, New York, NY, online edn, Oxford Academic, 28 Aug. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.85>, accessed 8 Apr. 2026.
- Hicks, Shari Renee. “A critical analysis of post traumatic slave syndrome: A multigenerational legacy of slavery.” 2015. California Institute of Integral Studies, Master’s thesis. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/b122d1adb883975983dcc297e40469a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Hurston, Neale Zora. *There Eyes Were Watching God*. Haper Collins e-books. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. <https://www.kingphilip.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/TEWWG.pdf>
- Johansson, Carley. “Consent of the Governed: Thomas Jefferson’s Relationship Relationship with Sally Hemings.” *Compass: An Undergraduate Journal of American Political Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019. <https://digitalcommons.jsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=compass>
- König, Ursula Cordula Reimann. “Closing a Gap in conflict transformation: Understanding Collective and Transgenerational Trauma.” *Ximpulse*, June 2018. <https://www.ximpulse.ch/wp-content/uploads/1806CollectiveTrauma.pdf>
- Krystal, Arthur. “What is Literature?” *Harper’s Magazine*, March Issue, 2024. <https://harpers.org/archive/2014/03/what-is-literature/#:~:text=Apparently%2C%20E%80%9Cliterary%20means%20not%20only,huddle%20beneath%20the%20literary%20umbrella>
- Laura, Stoler, Ann. “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1989, pp. 134–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178797>.
- Leibbrand, C, Massey, *et al.*, “The Great Migration and Residential Segregation in American. Cities during the Twentieth Century. *Soc Sci Hist*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2020 Spring, 19-55. Doi: 10.1017/ssh.2019.46. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7297198/>
- Lewis, Catherine *et al.*, “Race and Ethnic Categories: A Brief Review of Global Terms and Nomenclature.” *Cureus*, vol. 1, no. 15, Jul 2023
- Mengara, Daniel M. “Colonial Intrusion and Stages of Colonialism in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.” *African Studies Review*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2019, pp. 31–56. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26806361>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2026.
- Nazar, Islam Modassar. “Disintegration of Society and Culture in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.” vol. 6, no. 1, | March 2018. <https://www.ijert.org/papers/IJPUB1801332.pdf>
- Onuoha, Chidiebere and Chichem Ifeoma Duru. “Aba Women’s Riot of 1929: A

- Revolution That Reshaped Colonial Governance in Nigeria.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2026.
- Pugliese, Cristiana. “Two Self-Portraits by Two South African Writers: Peter Abrahams’ Tell Freedom and J.M. Coetzee’s Boyhood.” *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell’Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente*, vol. 59, no. 3/4, 2004, pp. 496–505. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40761766>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2026.
- Ramsey, William M. “The Compelling Ambivalence of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *The Southern Literary Journal*. vol. 27, no.1, pp. 36-50.
- Rutsch, Poncie. “Novelist Zora Neale Hurston Was a Cultural Anthropologist First.” March 2017. WHY? <https://why.org/segments/novelist-zora-neale-hurston-was-a-cultural-anthropologist-first/>
- Watson, Tim. “Introduction: Kinship between Literature and Anthropology.” *Culture Writing: Literature and Anthropology in the Midcentury Atlantic World, Modernist Literature and Culture* (New York), 2018.
- Wilsey, Adam D. “A Study of West African Slave Resistance from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries.” *History in the Making*, vol. 1, no. 7, 2008, pp. 78-92. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1222&context=history-in-the-making>
- Zhang, Yu, Zhicheng, *et al.*,. “The Long-Term Effects of the Slave Trade on Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 49, no. 3, Sep 2021, pp. 776-800. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2021.02.004> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147596721000184>