Salam Alali

Black Joy and Afrofuturist Visions: Exploring Race, Space, and Womanhood in Zora Neale Hurston's Selected Short Stories

Pro&Contra 7

No. 2 (2023) 51–75

https://doi.org/10.33033/pc.2023.2.51

Abstract

This study explores the intersection of race, space, and womanhood in Zora Neale Hurston's short stories through Black joy and Afrofuturism frameworks. Drawing on Lindsey Stewart's concept of Black joy, the analysis highlights how Hurston interweaves these themes to emphasize joy as a transformative and resistant force that preserves Black people's psychic and psychological wholeness. Focusing on selected stories from the posthumously published *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick* (2020), this paper investigates how Hurston uses narratives of joy not as escapism, but as a deliberate strategy for overcoming systemic double oppression. Through a close reading of the chosen short stories, the study demonstrates how Hurston envisions joy as a form of resistance, deeply intertwined with race, space, and gender. By pairing Black joy with an Afrofuturist perspective, Hurston articulates a vision for African Americans' collective freedom and cultural wholeness. This analysis positions Hurston's work as a blueprint for navigating constraints while envisioning a future grounded in empowerment, resilience, and joy.

Keywords: Black Joy, South, Afrofuturism, Womanhood, Space, Race

Introduction

That black women experience a distinct form of identity-based oppression that is intersectional and not sufficiently framed or addressed by the feminist or Black rights movements has long been articulated from various perspectives. This is the notion of intersectionality, which, as postulated by Kimberle Crenshaw, is premised on an insistence that "systems of race, gender, and class domination converge… in the experiences of battered women of color."[1] Denise Lynn (2014) describes "a long tradition of black American women that regarded their oppression as unique from other women and from black men, [which in]… its various manifestations… identified black women's oppression as "double jeopardy," Jane Crow, triple exploitation, or triple oppression."[2] Hurston, on various occasions, thematizes this double jeopardy in her writings, as has been established by various scholars (Spencer,

[1] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1246.
[2] Lynn, "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression," 2.

2004;[3] Marcucci, 2017;[4] Brooks, 2010[5]) who, above all, have concerned themselves with dispelling the dominant perception of Hurston as politically naïve and apathetic, while highlighting her incisive depiction of intersectional oppression. For instance, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, black women are referred to as the mule of the world, highlighting the weight of sexist and racist oppression.[6]

However, the concatenation of Black joy and Afrofuturistic envisioning in Hurston's short stories, in view of race, space, and womanhood, has not received enough critical attention. Although relatively less studied than her novels, Hurston's short stories are very influential. This is reinforced by Henry Gates noting, in the introduction of *The Complete Storie*s, that "as early as 1931, Zora Neale Hurston's capacities as a master of the short story were widely acknowledged."[7] These short stories, many of which are located in the Black-only town, Eatonville, showcase how Hurston, a brilliant and complicated trickster, situates the self-respect and self-preservation of Black people within the context of race-based spatial and gender dynamics.

Six short stories, namely "John Redding Goes to Sea," "Black Death," "Drenched in Light," "Magnolia Flower," "The Eatonville Anthology," and "Spunk," were selected from *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*, edited by Genevieve West, and with a foreword by Tayari Jones, two highly respected authorities on Hurston. *Hitting*, a recent and widely circulated anthology, is a collection of short stories written by Hurston between 1921 and 1937. The selection aligns with current academic trends and perspectives on Hurston, reflecting contemporary academic interests in intersectionality. According to West, each story in *Hitting* is newly transcribed based on the first documented publications, with great care taken to not disturb the original style, including stylistic conventions that depict the evolution of Hurston's style.[8] The stories were selected because they center Black joy, with Tayari Jones explaining in the foreword that "although racism and "white folks" present real challenges to the characters that people [the] collection, oppression is not the center of their lives"[9] Furthermore, the setting of the stories and the portrayal of gendered conflict are conducive to the exploration of the intersection of race, place, and womanhood through the frameworks of Black joy and futuristic envisioning.

---

[3] Stephen, "Racial Politics," 111–126.
[4] Marcucci, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Brown Debate,"13–24.
[5] Brooks, "Sister, Can You Line It Out?," 617–627.
[6] Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 47.
[7] Gates, *The Complete Storie*s, x.
[8] West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 6.
[9] Jones, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, vi.

"John Redding Goes to Sea" and "Drenched in Light" depict racialized spatial confinement and longing for self-actualization. In both stories, the persistent longing for self-actualization and a penchant for dreaming illustrate Black joy and a refusal to placidly live a constrained life. As Redding defiantly declares, "Oh, yes, I'm a dreamer. I have such wonderfully complete dreams, Papa. They never come true. But even as my dreams fade, I have others."[10] Thus, John Redding in defiantly making up new and complete dreams actualizes himself, "sharpening his oyster knife,"[11] like Hurston, in readiness to take on the world despite his circumstances. John's unyielding desire to travel polarizes his parents, Matty and Alfred. Following a life spent struggling with the drudgery of traditional life and spatial limitations, John drowns in a flood and his father instructs that his body be left to float on the sea, John's chance to finally travel the world. "Drenched in Light" offers a female foil to the themes of identity and self-actualization through dreaming explored in "John Redding Goes to Sea." Isis' character offers a gendered perspective that underscores Hurston's vision of womanhood about Black joy. The protagonist, Isis Watts, brimming with joy and dreams, is at constant odds with her grandmother, her guardian. Isis, described by the narrator as Isis the Joyful, constantly pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior as she seeks avenues for pleasure in her daily life, while always fondly gazing on the road and waving gaily at travelers. One day, she is saved from trouble with her grandmother by a lost white couple whom she helps by showing them the way. The story ends with the triumph of Isis, as the white woman requests for her to come and dance for her in the hotel, a request Isis' grandmother proudly grants.

"Black Death" and "Spunk" explore Black spirituality, emphasizing root work as an inscription of Black joy and self-determination. Both stories have elements of speculative storytelling that center Black people as custodians of alternative and important spiritual knowledge. They are about deception, revenge, and supernatural justice. In "Black Death," the young handsome Beau impregnates a widow's only daughter, Docia, and scorns her. Annoyed and heartbroken by Beau's careless disregard for her daughter's feelings and honor, Mrs. Boger seeks supernatural justice, which she attains by killing Beau via a mirror. In "Spunk," Spunk, a strong and intimidating black man, parades his affair with Joe Kanty's wife all over town. Joe, a timid man, becomes the subject of mockery, which drives him to confront Spunk. Spunk kills him and is exonerated by the court. In what is considered perfect justice, Spunk dies, in what appears to be at the hands of Joe's ghost.

---

[10] West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 178.
[11] Hurston, "How It Feels," 324.

"The Eatonville Anthology" was selected because of its portrayal of Eatonville, a black-only community where black people determine their path unconstrained by racial oppression. Thus, it offers an opportunity to study spatially foregrounded self-determination as Black joy. "The Eatonville Anthology" is made up of vignettes of various black characters. Hurston chronicles the joys of everyday life in the community. Rather than a linear plot, Hurston fondly presents a collage of different Black people and their interesting quirks and foibles.

"Magnolia Flower," similarly to "Drenched in Light" and "Black Death," was selected for its portrayal of Magnolia, a Black woman in resistive and refusal modes grappling with intersectional oppression and exhibiting admirable self-actualizing agency. It is a folkloric story narrated by a river to a young brook. Black joy is inscribed in the story through the folkloric elements. Bentley, the larger-than-life protagonist is a strong Black man who, by his strength and willpower, flees captivity and becomes very successful. He rules his community with an iron fist and surrounds himself with the blackest people he can find. His agenda is to perpetuate blackness around him to the maximum extent, including by having the blackest grandchildren possible, a wish that is thwarted when his daughter falls in love with a light-skinned man. Bentley dies broken and his estate crumbles when his daughter and her lover, John, escape their prison.

Hurston's stories, which, according to Gates, are pervaded by a "concern for justice beyond race, class, or gender,"[12] have been celebrated for the depiction of the complexities of black life which provides an opportunity for the study of race, space, and womanhood through the prism of Black joy and Afrofuturism. Jones' postulation in her foreword to *Hitting* also provides crucial justification for the inclusion of these stories, concerning which she notes that "although racism and "white folks" present real challenges to the characters that people [the story], oppression is not the center of their lives."[13] Alongside Lindsey Stewart's *The Politics of Black Joy*, references are also made to Hurston's essays, "How it Feels to be Colored Me," "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," and "High John de Conquer," a folkloric essay that may be considered as Hurston's manifesto of Black joy owing to the detailed explication of the spiritual, political, and psychological of Black joy, even as Hurston acknowledges racial oppression.

[12] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xxi.
[13] Jones, *Hitting*, viii.

Hurston's Black Joy as Afrofuturism

Hurston's Black joy, according to Lindsey Stewart, is a refusal of the abolitionist mandate to prioritize Black sorrow in their representation of Black people, conflate blackness with dejection, and uphold Black suffering as "the truth."[14] It is a response to the political tradition that diminishes Southern Black life due to the traumatic past of slavery. Gates' explanation is crucial in this aspect, as he posits that Hurston considered the "idea that racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is 'deprived'… and whose psyches are 'pathological'" degrading and constricting.[15] Hence, Hurston rejected the portrayal of black people as objects of sorrow with existence limited to reactive entanglement with oppression and racism. In this diminished representation, Blacks are portrayed as existentially stranded in oppression, with the hope of the restoration of their humanity being restricted to railing against subjugation and amplifying their objection. Hurston's writings refused this abolitionist mandate, as she insistently refused to center oppression in her depiction of the lives of Black people. Although her writings predate the concept of Afrofuturism, Hurston's politics of Black joy and core aspects of Afrofuturism are mutually reifying as her joy politics are inscribed within a framework that prioritizes an agenda for a black future: "winning in a permanent way… with the soul of the black man whole and free."[16] Hurston's politics of Black joy is not merely an emotion but an intentional affirmation of Black agency within a futurist framework. Her politics of Black joy, rather than being mere escapism, is a refusal of pain, although an overwhelming presence in Black life, as the sole definition of blackness. It is a rejection of black abjection sharpened by a refusal to centralize the white gaze.[17] It is premised on an insistent contemplation of the future of black people even in the struggle for complete freedom while honoring the African heritage in the form of root work, a spiritual practice based on African American folk magic, also known as hoodoo. According to Stewart, root work refers to "practices of conjure" and "is a touchstone of West African religious practices that persisted even as slavery sought to erase… cultural ties to the continent."[18] Hurston puts forward as equal to science and technology, wherein lies the interplay of her politics of Black joy and Afrofuturism.

---

[14] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 16.
[15] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 288.
[16] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 141.
[17] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 32.
[18] Ibid., 9.

The term "Afrofuturism" was coined by Mark Dery in 1993 to describe speculative fiction that explores "African American themes and concerns in twentieth-century technoculture—and…African American signification that appropriates the images of technology" within an imagined future.[19] Afrofuturism presents a space for Blacks to envision a future devoid of structural racism "to contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy" and to wield diverse aesthetics to speculate and loop the past with the present and claim a Black future that is free from white supremacy.[20] This aspect of Afrofuturism is integral to Hurston's politics of Black joy which affirms the potency of joy for transforming the future of black people by interweaving the black past with the present. Hurston herself emphasizes the futuristic aspect of Black joy especially in "High John de Conquer" where Hurston discusses how Blacks had knowledge of emancipation long in advance through High John and "knew something better was coming."[21] This knowledge reflects an/the Afrofuturist vision, as it entrenches a mythical, alternative system of knowing that counters Western epistemology, specifically rationalism and empiricism, while insistently representing Black people as agents from their future through their past.

Ensconced in Black joy is a celebratory honoring of blackness and an anticipation of Blacks' desired reality which Hurston foregrounds in different ways. Hurston's Eatonville, as a black Utopia, is one of the ways Hurston foregrounds her envisioning of the desired future for Blacks. In this black-only space, there is a complete justice system, as demonstrated by the supernatural justice in "Spunk" and "Black Death." Honor, integrity, and community accountability are sacred values that matter more than materialism. Here, Hurston refuses the absolutes of black enchantment and abjection, grounding black joy in a balanced appraisal. For example, Spunk and Lena's love affair counters the spectacularization of black abjection denounced by Stewart[22] and Hartman,[23] celebrating black beauty and joy instead. The sight Spunk and Lena provide is beautifully described thus: "A giant of a brown-skinned man sauntered up one street of the Village and out in the palmetto thickets with a small pretty woman clinging lovingly to his arm… All the loungers in the store tried to walk to the door with an air of nonchalance but with small success."[24] On the other hand, their beautiful sight notwithstanding, they are in disfavor with the townspeople owing to the perversion they flaunt.

---

[19] Dery, "Black to the Future," 180.
[20] Taylor, "Introduction to Co-Futurisms," 2.
[21] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.
[22] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 16.
[23] Hartman, *Scenes of Abjection,* 32.
[24] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 159.

Hurston's Afrofuturistic Black joy goes beyond technoculturality, inviting a deviation from the Western definition of technology as hard and verifiable facts solely based on Western-accepted logic. Hurston's Afrofuturism is a push against the limits of belief, as exemplified by the story of Morgan and his mysticism that enables him to be a pillar of retribution and judgment within the community. The exclusive knowledge of root work grants Blacks access to a space of Black joy from which whites are excluded. According to the narrator in "Black Death:" "…if a white person were halted on the streets of Orlando and told that Old Man Morgan, the excessively black hoodoo man, can kill any person indicated and paid for, without ever leaving his house or even seeing his victim, he'd laugh in your face and walk away, wondering how long the Negro will continue to wallow in ignorance and superstition."[25] The mysticism of Uncle Morgan constantly invites the juxtaposition of belief and skepticism, especially as the details of his exploits grow more fantastic. All of these are things black people ought to know, according to the narrator. As Womack explains:

> …Afrofuturism is a home for the divine feminine principle, a Mother Earth idea that values nature, creativity, receptivity, mysticism, intuition, and healing as partners to technology, science, and achievement… [and] in Afrofuturism, technological advancement is not enough to create a free-thinking future. A well-crafted relationship with nature is intrinsic to a balanced future too.[26]

Thus, Hurston's telling of the spiritual might of Uncle Morgan in a matter-of-fact manner inscribes root work as a vital knowledge of potent power that is as real as science and technology, serving as a space of Black self-determination and, by extension, Black joy. This follows Stewart's assertion that "for Hurston, root work is an important site for working out the politics of joy."[27] This is because root work exists as a phenomenon that decentralizes whiteness.

In affirming root work, Hurston elevates the humanity of black people whose testimonies are considered the final words on the legitimacy of root work. According to the narrator in "Black Death,": "All of these things can easily be proved by the testimony of the villagers. They ought to know."[28] By validating this belief system, Hurston inverts the order of power, especially in the account of the death of Old Lady Grooms who "was

---

[25] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 267.
[26] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 103–104.
[27] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 10.
[28] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 269.

sent to her death in the Lake"[29] by Morgan, upon which "the white coroner from Orlando said she met her death by falling into the water during an epileptic fit."[30] According to the narrator, "the villagers *knew*. White folks are very stupid about some things. They can think mightily but cannot *feel*."[31] In this framework where root work is elevated, validating black people as custodians of knowledge beyond the realm of conventional understanding is the realm of the concatenation of Afrofuturism and Black joy. This concatenation is spatially inscribed, for standing right there in Orlando, as depicted in "Black Death," the white man is excluded from belonging to the space the way the black people do. What has occurred here is similar to what the servants, tutored by High John, did, hiding in plain sight.

Hurston's work, like those of the Afrofuturist women writers described by Womack, "links science, nature, and magic as one," [32] as is very apparent in the description of the killing of Beau in "Black Death": "…the mirror grew misty, darker, near the center, then Mrs. Boger saw Beau walk to the center of the mirror and stand looking at her, glaring and sneering."[33] Thus, Afrofuturism connects the black diaspora experience with their African ancestry to reimagine and recreate the future on the foundations of the past and present.

Based on the foregoing, I contend that the intersections of race, space, and womanhood in Hurston's short stories are grounded in Afrofuturistic joy because they "contest white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy"[34] while representing an example of black women creators with powerful imaginations shaping the future.[35] According to Womack:

> Afrofuturism is a free space for women, a door ajar, arms wide open, a literal and figurative space for black women to be themselves. They can dig behind the societal reminders of blackness and womanhood to express a deeper identity and then use this identity to define blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier in whatever form their imagination allows.[36]

This unrestrained imagination of the black woman creator engenders the development of "theories, characters, art, and beauty free of the pressures of meeting male approval, societal standards, color-based taxonomies, or run-of-the-mill female expectations. The

---

[29] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 269.
[30] Ibid., 271.
[31] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 271.
[32] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 102.
[33] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 281.
[34] Tylor, "Introduction to Co-Futurisms," 2.
[35] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 101.
[36] Ibid., 101.

results are works that some critics call uncategorizable."[37] Hurston's contestation of white supremacist narratives of exclusion and technological illiteracy is most palpable in her exploration of root work. First, she inverts the basis of Western empirical and rationalist traditions to uphold belief and intuition. Thus, Hurston juxtaposes belief and skepticism in stories such as "Black Death," and "Spunk." Noteworthily, an Afrofuturistic veneration of nature inheres in the folkloric dimension of "Magnolia Flower."

Hurston, as Sheree Thomas explains, "was well versed in the spirit of her people… reach[ing]back and preserv[ing] vital folk knowledge that may have been lost through the ages in the rush to assimilate whatever current ideal of blackness persisted,"[38] thus creating "works that evoke the past, critique the present, and challenge us to imagine a greater, more possible future."[39] Hurston's Afrofuturism connects the past to the present and future through the politics of joy inscribed through her black characters' defiant refusal of spatial constraint, insistent connection with their spiritual roots in Africa, and insistence on finding that spaces of self-determination and self-actualization.

The Afrofuturist link with the past is particularly pronounced in "Black Death," specifically when the enraged Mrs. Boger approaches the house of Morgan, "three hundred years of America passed like the mist of morning. Africa reached out its dark hand and claimed its own."[40] Thus, Hurston uses root work to inscribe a connection between the present and the African past, as Mrs. Boger aspires to orchestrate her desired future and achieve justice. This knowledge, embodied in High John de Conquer, empowers black people to be agents not just in their future but in America's future. The link to the future is further established by the metaphor of the characters' eyes on the horizon, like Isis in "Drenched in Light" and John Redding in "John Redding Goes to Sea." This agency is evident in their ability to envision themselves on the horizon and aboard ships, like John Redding, or within the timeless grandeur of myths, as seen with Isis. Hurston's views on Black joy, in a futurist framework, are well articulated in her 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" where she denounces black abjection and the "sobbing school of Negrohood" while declaring her preoccupation with "sharpening [her] oyster knife."[41] In the essay, Hurston frames Black joy as psychological resilience, a source of fortitude, while refusing to consider blackness as an inherent disadvantage rooted in nature. She chooses to confront the rigors of life directly, holding that life is fundamentally hard. She assumes

---

[37] Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black,* 112.
[38] Thomas, "Dangerous Muses," 42.
[39] Ibid., 37.
[40] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 279.
[41] Hurston, "How It Feels," 324.

agency, metaphorized in the act of sharpening her oyster life, which hints at her futuristic perspective and her view of the necessity of preparedness on the part of Black people to be able to take on the future. This infers that her rejection of a state of sorrowfulness as a response to blackness is a rejection of passiveness and her definition of Black joy is agency over escapism. The sharpening of her oyster knife underscores her insistence on playing the long game with the fortitude and black consciousness forged by joyful and thriving blackness.

Race and Space: Black Joy and Black Utopia in Zora Neale Hurston's Short Stories

The subject of displacement is central in African American history, especially as it is at the core of the pathos of the transatlantic slave trade, Middle Passage, enslavement, and Civil Rights Movement. African American history begins with displacement, a tragedy whose marker continues to permeate the continued agitation for belonging and identity construction. Hurston's writings, especially in their emphasis on Black joy and refusal, across the lines of race and gender, centralize the subject of space both thematically and aesthetically. Her unique engagement with Black spaces has its basis in her formative years which were spent in the Black-only Eatonville. According to Gates: "Hurston is concerned to register a distinct sense of space- an African American cultural space."[42]

Hurston's stories, like her stance on segregation, tie space to the integrity and self-determination of Black people. Spaces, where black people are free to carry out their joy, are crucial because they fortify them and ensure their wholeness. As she explains in her 1955 open letter to the *Orlando Sentinel*, as a reflection on the question of court-mandated desegregation following the Brown v. Board of Education (1952-1954) Supreme Court Case, space dynamics is intricately bound with the self-respect of Black people: "It is well known that I have no sympathy nor respect for the "tragedy of color" school of thought among us, whose fountainhead is the pressure group concerned in the court ruling. I can see no tragedy in being too dark to be invited to a white school affair."[43] This declaration captures the correlation Hurston draws between space and Black joy, as well as the self-respect she considers as integral to wholesome blackness. Hurston proceeds to opine: "…I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honoring my race. Since the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently-deplored Reconstruction, there has been the

[42] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xi.
[43] Hurston, "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," 958.

current belief that there is no greater delight to Negroes than physical association with whites."[44] The triumph Hurston envisioned was not legalistic desegregation. It was for the preservation of Black joy, which she considered a vital asset that should be carried intact to the envisioned future of Black people. This was essential to ensure the completeness of their victory. As she puts it in "High John de Conquer," the laughter and joy High John embodies are essential to "really winning in a permanent way, for he was winning with the soul of the black man whole and free."[45] This is the centrality of space in her worldview. Black-only spaces that are not defined solely by interaction against relentless racism are strongholds in preserving Black joy, which is not only important to the survival of Blacks but to that of America itself, as she further expresses in the essay: "Maybe, now, we used-to-be black African folks can be of some help to our brothers and sisters who have always been white… We have given the nation song and laughter. Maybe now, in this terrible struggle, we can give something else—the source and soul of our laughter and song. We offer you our hope-bringer, High John de Conquer."[46] Thus, Hurston upends the power dynamics between whites and blacks. Rather than conflating blackness with a desperate need to be accepted into white spaces, Black people are depicted as being custodians of heritage and a secret (joy) that can benefit whites and Americans as a whole.

Eatonville, as the setting of Hurston's short stories, is therefore very significant in terms of the futures of Blacks and America. Hurston, in "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," describes Eatonville as a little Negro town, exclusively colored in Florida, a town in which, growing up, "the only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando."[47] As an all-black town and the setting of the majority of her stories, it allows Hurston to, as Barbara Christian says concerning the focus of African American women's writings in the 1970s, "escape one of the plagues of Black literature—the handicap of having its most passionate feelings directed at 'The Man.'"[48] The effect of this fixation is a failure to, in the words of Christian, show that "Black people are more than simply reactors, that, among ourselves, we have laughter, tears, and loving that are far removed from the white horror out there."[49] The result is a reduction of Blackness to a reactiveness to suffering, humiliation, and degradation.

Thus, situating her stories in Eatonville enables her to assert a blackness not defined by or against whiteness and craft a complete and unrestrained depiction of Black joy. Eatonville,

---

[44] Hurston, "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," 958.
[45] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 141.
[46] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[47] Hurston, "How it Feels," 322.
[48] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.
[49] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 138.

as a representation of black Utopia, is a futuristic place intimating a future where blackness can be expansive and self-defining without being inhibited by antiblackness, a framework that positions blackness as social death.[50] It is an inscription of Black Utopia founded on a value for justice. To illustrate, in "Spunk," justice is based on the supernatural. It exists beyond the law of the white man, under which Spunk faces no punishment despite killing Joe. His death, at the hands of the ghost of Joe, as the village and the dying Spunk believe, is perceived as true justice. This Eatonville is near-mythical in the clockwork way justice is always obtained.

Eatonville, as depicted in "The Eatonville Anthology," disrupts what Stewart refers to as "schemas of devastation or nostalgia, or tragedy or enchantment." [51] It proves that Black people, like all other human beings who are not defined by oppression, are capable of joy and self-determination that is not captured by the inherent paradoxical stereotype of the South as "the site of Black tragedy, bearing the brunt of the nation's sin of racism… [and] a land of Black enchantment."[52] Recollecting scenes of Black joy from her childhood in the south, Stewart describes "sinful spread of crawfish, corn, and potatoes under the oaks my grandfather's yard as my extended family ate and ate until the cicadas chimed in with our music late in the evening… the seriousness with which my *maman* delivered a bit of wisdom when I was frightened by her beloved horror films."[53] What Stewart depicts here is the simple enjoyment of community and Blackness with no self-consciousness or restraint induced by the burdens of racial tensions. These scenes of joy come alive in the diverse characters in Hurston's short stories, especially in the character-based "The Eatonville Anthology," which spotlights blackness and black life with a vibrant portrayal: "Sweating bodies, laughing mouths, grotesque faces, feet drumming fiercely. Deacons clapping as hard as the rest."[54] In addition to such scenes of overt joy in the short fiction, she celebrates the joy found in their regular lives.

In the worlds depicted in her short stories, white people exist vaguely in the periphery. For instance, in "Black Death," the Blacks of Eatonville, as Hurston describes them,

> …know a number of things that the hustling, bustling white man never dreams of… For instance, if a white person were halted on the streets of Orlando and told that the Old Man Morgan, the excessively black Negro hoodoo man, can kill any person indicated and paid for,

---

[50] Wilderson, *Afropessimism*.
[51] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 2.
[52] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 2.
[53] Ibid., 3.
[54] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 453.

> without ever leaving his house, or even seeing his victim, he'd laugh in your face and walk away, wondering how long the Negro will continue to wallow in ignorance and superstition. But no black person in a radius of twenty miles will smile, not much. They *know*.[55]

This knowledge of root work is one of the things that protect their space from white intrusion and one of the pillars sustaining their community. It is integral to their justice system, which does not center on the sheriff or the American legal system. This is one of the ways they keep their spaces of Black joy pristine.

Furthermore, Hurston emphasizes the link between joy, manifesting as black wholeness, and space. In "Magnolia Flower," Hurston depicts Bentley, one of the "slaves who did not weep,"[56] as "large and black and strong" with a strong heart that "thudded with an iron sound in his breast."[57] His strength, based on his refusal to be sorrowful, is manifested in the dominance of his spatial context: "The forest made way for him, the beasts were afraid of him, and he built a house."[58] Spatial metaphors are abundant here. By building a house, Bentley establishes his agency. His strong determination compels the forest, nature, an intimation of Afrofuturistic veneration of nature, to make way for him. Bentley's blackness, like Old Man Morgan's "excessive blackness" is emphasized in a celebratory manner as a vision of strength.

Similarly, in "Drenched in Light," Isis channels High John, "making a way out of no way."[59] Isis does this through her joyful dominance over space, sitting atop the gate post where she has a commanding view of the road. Isis' spatial dominance is further apparent when she is approached by the lost white couple for directions. Even though they own the car, they are dependent on Isis for direction. It echoes Hurston's position that America needs to look to Blacks for a well-calibrated compass to a wholesome future.

Various other spatial metaphors abound in the selected short stories. The white man in "John Redding Goes to Sea," Mr. Hill, approaches the black people to save his bridge. Having spent so much money building the bridge, he is anxious about the impending storm destroying his time- and capital-intensive project. Therefore, he reaches out to John Redding and other young black men in a last-minute effort to preserve his project. Mr. Hill, like the couple in "Drenched in Light" recognizes the importance of the contributions of Blacks, as ensconced in the spatial metaphor, the bridge. Thus, he declares, when John agrees to

---

[55] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 267.
[56] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick,* 249.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 249.
[59] Ibid., 139.

come along to work on the bridge, "Now, if I had a few more men of your brawn and brain, I could build an entirely new bridge in forty-eight hours. Come on, jump into the car." [60] Mr. Hill, inviting John into his car, recognizing the important contributions he has to make, mirrors the experience of Isis, who, like John, has always had her eyes on the road. Their High John de Conquer-like ability to gain some mastery over their space and make a way out of no way makes them useful, affording them a space in the car, riding alongside white Americans and sharing the same goal, and most importantly, being the source of hope and not an emblem of social death. However, Mr. Hill seeks the Black community's help too late, and nothing can be done to salvage the bridge.

Not only are these characters portrayed as occupying their spaces, but they are also portrayed as dominating them. This confidence in their space and of their right to belong there exemplifies the resilience inherent in Black joy. This is the idea Hurston espouses as well in "High John de Conquer," as she declares: "But nationally and culturally, we are as white as the next one. We have put our labor and our blood into the common causes for a long time."[61] The whiteness Hurston refers to here is a metaphor for confident belonging. This confident belonging is also metaphorically inscribed in "Magnolia Flower." The connection to nature imbues the short story with a folkloric essence and spatial authority, grounding it in African worldview, while affirming the centrality of Blacks to the present and the future, with nature in the form of the river bearing testimony to the triumphant love of Magnolia Flower and her lover, John. The recognition ascribed to the enslaved Blacks by nature in "Magnolia Flower," in the form of the river and the Wind carrying their tears counters the displacement black people experience after nature bestows timelessness on their realities.

The Blacks in these narratives do not jostle to belong to white spaces, nor do they vie for whiteness. Rather, they treasure their black communities, one of the inscriptions of Black joy. Bentley goes out of his way to ensure he secures a place away from the white gaze or presence. Old Man Anderson in "The Eatonville Anthology" has never boarded a train and does not wish to; as written about him, "He doesn't know yet what a train looks like and he does not care."[62] These various scenes of Black joy represent a self-contained sanctuary. The Blacks leave the oppressor in the dark about this joy. They do not offer it up as spectacle; it is not a performance aimed to prove their humanity to the oppressor, neither is it offered up to disbelieving Blacks carelessly, as exemplified in the encounter recounted by Hurston in "High John de Conquer," in which Aunt Shady

[60] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 128.
[61] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[62] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 451.

asks, "I hope you ain't one of these here smart colored folks that done got so they don't believe nothing."[63] The custodians of root work protect their special knowledge and keep it from undeserving eyes.

However, for all her preoccupation with Black joy and the literal and figurative spaces of Black joy, Hurston was not entirely silent on the oppression in the South. Hurston did not ignore or downplay the realities of quotidian oppression. The argument that the stories focus on black lives and joys constituting an act of refusal draws its validity from the evidence that Hurston was not blithely ignorant of place and its constraints for Blacks. The refusal argument is based on the presumption that Hurston is aware of racial tensions and antiblackness but refuses to center it. Therefore, as is done subsequently, instances of Hurston's thematization of constraints based on race and space are worth examining in the selected short stories to emphasize that Hurston's short stories are predicated on a politics of joy grounded in refusal, as against racial naiveté.

Hurston's short stories recognize how space and its dynamics are interwoven with racial dynamics, which bolsters her politics of refusal. Hurston's perception of spatial oppression and its insidiousness is clearly shown in most of her short stories. The river in "Magnolia Flower", like Isis' grandmother, rebukes the young brook for its joyfulness expressed through its lively interaction with space: "Why, O Young Water, do you hurry and hurl yourself so riotously about with your chatter and song? You disturb my sleep."[64] John Redding's tragic life is punctuated by a relentless bristling against spatial limitations. His refusal to center tradition and spatial constraints in his life, defying them by dreaming and pining to get away is a form of Black joy that is stifled by superstition and the women in his life, his mother and his wife. As described in the narrative, "The little brown boy loved to wander down to the water's edge, and casting in dry twigs, watch them sail away downstream to Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world and John Redding wanted to follow them."[65] John Redding's thwarted pining for the horizon underscores the place-related tragedy experienced by Black people who for various sociological issues are constrained to places. In the words of John Redding: "This indolent atmosphere will stifle every bit of ambition that's in me." [66] In this regard, his mother, like Isis' grandmother, embodies intra-racial obstacles to the quest for Black joy, metaphorized through spatial ambitions, like the opposition Hurston experienced from the school of the "sobbing Negroes."

---

[63] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 142.
[64] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 246.
[65] Ibid., 101.
[66] Ibid., 112.

The foregoing shows that far from being complacent or displaying naiveté, Black joy is hard-won. The brook, in "Magnolia Flower" "when it encountered hard places in its bed… hurled its water in sparkling dance figures up into the moonlight… sang louder, louder; danced faster, faster with a coquettish splash! At the vegetation on its banks, upsetting the hyacinths who shivered and blushed."[67] All these examples highlight the resilience necessitated by Black joy in the face of oppressive intra- and inter-racial obstacles. Black joy, especially in its form in Hurston's fictive worlds, like High John, begins as a "whisper, a will to hope, a wish to find something worthy of laughter and song."[68] Black joy, as Priya Chhaya puts it,[69] is perseverance, which is exemplified in the resilience demonstrated by Bentley as he flees his place of oppression, by Isis, as she continues to defy the boundaries of acceptable behavior, by John Redding's continued dreaming and unrepressed wanderlust, and by Hurston, in her persistent amplification of Black joy and refusal. Ultimately, Hurston's short stories present space and the intentional resistance against displacement as central to Black joy.

Womanhood and the Concatenation of Black Joy and Liberatory Futures in the Selected Short Stories

Like her portrayal of Black people generally, Hurston brings on nuanced complexity in the depiction of her women characters, rejecting single stories of oppression. Hurston's gender vision is often inscribed through a juxtaposition of her male and female characters as foil to one another, as will be explored in this analysis. According to Doris Davis, "the respective strengths and talents of women as compared to those of men… is a subject Zora Neale Hurston considered throughout her distinguished career."[70] Davis further describes Hurton's works as "a recording… of the promoting of the beauty of the black voice and particularly that of the female voice."[71] Some of the women in the selected short stories are vibrant, resilient, and determined such as Laura Crooms and Isis. However, some of them are small-minded, petty, and vindictive such as Daisy in "The Eatonville Anthology" who is described as "the town vamp."[72] Yet, others are active antagonists, such as the grandmother

[67] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 245.
[68] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 139.
[69] Chhaya, "Finding Black Joy."
[70] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 269.
[71] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 270.
[72] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 453.

in "Drenched in Light" and Matty in "John Redding Goes to Sea" who actively stand in the way of the dreams of Isis and John Redding, respectively.

However, generally, the women in Hurston's short stories are assertive, with their "vitality of spirit" contrasting strongly with the depiction of women as victims in the writings of her contemporaries, Jean Toomer and Richard Wright.[73] In the short stories under consideration, women are custodians of spaces of Black joy and demonstrate a greater knowledge of root work and intuitive knowledge, which Hurston references in "Black Death" as one of the strengths of Black people: "White folks are very stupid about some things. They can think mightily but they cannot *feel*."[74] Matty takes the lead in this native knowledge in "John Redding Goes to Sea." This thinking-male vs feeling-female binary is presented in the conflict between Alfred and Matty and their disposition towards John Redding's intense wanderlust. Although Matty believes John Redding has been cursed with restlessness, Alfred pragmatically opines that John Redding's tendency to wander is the natural male disposition. The gendered perspective difference is metaphorically foregrounded when "Matty and Stella sat on the deep front porch, but Alfred joined John under the tree. The family was divided into two armed camps."[75] The men and women are divided by the women's desire to own the men who resist this bondage. Thus, Alfred vituperates about "women wanting to settle men down to own them", to which Matty retorts, "dat's all we po' wimmen kin do. We wants our husbands an' our sons."[76] Matty and Stella's positioning on the porch is significant as a metaphorical indicator of protectors of the house, the space of conducting Black joy. Their roles as protectors of the house mirror. When the owl cries ominously the night of John Redding's death, Stella, in keeping with her role as the protector, is the one who rises to pour salt on the fire to scare the owl off, exhibiting an ingrained understanding of root work. Similarly, Mrs. Boger, in "Black Death" looks to root work for justice instead of formal legality. Mrs. Boger is dared by the scoundrel, Beau, who dishonors her daughter and drags her into disrepute, to "do whatever you feel big enough to try—my shoulders are broad."[77] Overwhelmed by ferocious anger, Mrs. Boger draws on root work, one of the ways of channeling Black joy. As Gates emphasizes in the introduction to *The Complete Stories*, it is necessary to note that the story is about "justice outside of the white man's law."[78] In both instances, the women embody the all-knowing divine feminine energy that inheres in Afrofuturism and root work as Black joy, thus decentralizing whiteness. The

[73] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 271.
[74] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 203.
[75] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 118.
[76] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 122.
[77] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 276.
[78] Gates, *The Complete Stories*, xvii.

moment of Mrs. Boger's moving triumphant scene metaphorizes the concatenation of Black joy and root work. In the moment, "three hundred years of America pass[ing] like the mist of morning… Africa reached out its hands and claimed its own." [79] Power over powerlessness Mrs. Boger exerts psychic dominance over the place in a moment that is a profound celebration of the joy of black spirituality. Empowered by this joyful blackness, she triumphantly executes her vengeance upon Beau. This tallies with Stewart's assertion that "For Hurston, root work is an important site for working out the politics of joy."[80] The politics of black joy manifested by Mrs. Boger is a decisive spiritual subversion of her place of oppression, which she transforms through the joy of root work.

These female characters, through the joy they exhibit, achieve various victories over their oppressors, often the men in their lives. The sexist oppression they experience ultimately serves as a metaphor for subjugation and triumph over it. Even Mrs. Clarke whose husband "used to beat her in the store when he was a young man" before he became patient enough to "wait until he goes home" [81] makes a point to extend a handshake of fellowship to everyone but her husband in church, excluding him, even when her eyes are shut. This action can be construed as an act of refusal and exclusion wielded as a deliberate act of power, much like Laura Crooms' silent wielding of the Stetson in "The Eatonville Anthology."

As an embodiment of a joyful refusal to centralize oppression, these women, owing to their intuitiveness, feeling, and spirituality, attain victory over oppression. Matty in "John Redding" represents a triumph of *feeling*, which Hurston considers the preserve of Black joy. This manner of knowing how things are and being able to narrate it without embellishment, as juxtaposed against book learning, is one of the forms of Black joy, as celebrated by Hurston in "High John de Conquer," in Aunt Shady Anne's account:

> High John de Conquer… had done teached the black folks so they knowed a hundred years ahead of time that freedom was coming. Long before the white folks knowed anything about it at all. These young Negroes reads they books and talk about the war freeing the Negroes, but Aye, Lord! A heap sees, but a few knows. Course the war was a lot of help, but how come the war took place? They think they knows, but they don't.[82]

In this foregoing excerpt, there is an interweaving of mythic knowledge, foresight, and the Afrofuturist emphasis on historical and futuristic representations of Black people with a

[79] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 279.
[80] Stewart, *The Politics of Black Joy*, 10.
[81] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 164.
[82] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 142–143.

black woman centralized as the custodian of this knowledge. Black people are depicted as having a knowledge of their freedom beyond the agitation of the abolitionists. Aunty Shady Anne inserts Black people as agents in the emancipation, averring that the civil war helped, but the impulse to fight the war was placed in the emancipationists by High John, thus inscribing Black joy, in the form of root work, as crucial to the emancipation.

Another character that emphasizes the intertwining of womanhood and Black joy is Isis in "Drenched in Light." Instructively, Isis and John Redding are very similar in their wanderlust and their intense desire to transcend spatial restrictions. They even exhibit joy in similar ways, having dreams of freedom that counter the limitations they experience in real life. Their envisioning of a more fortuitous future is similar, as shown by their descriptions of their fantasies. John Redding: "sometimes in his dreams… was a prince, riding away in a gorgeous carriage. Often, he was a knight best-ride a fiery charger prancing down the white shell road that led to distant lands. At other times, he was a steamboat captain piloting his craft down the St. John River to where the sky seemed to touch the water."[83] However, John Redding's envisioning is described as a dream. He invokes it to underscore the dreariness of his reality. In contrast, Isis' trips are not dreams. Although they have no basis in her material reality, they are still valid. She narrates them as real experiences. By doing so, she defies restrictions and creates her own reality. These journeys are not somewhere in the future for her. They are her lived reality, even if other people cannot see it. As the story is told, "she told them about her trips to the horizon, about the trailing gowns, the gold shoes with blue bottoms. She insisted on the blue bottoms—the white charger, the time when she was Hercules and had slain numerous dragons and sundry giants."[84]

Therefore, whereas John, merely longs to depart, and, having been thwarted becomes immersed in deep sadness, Isis is joyful, as she frequently departs without actually leaving like John de Conquer teaches the servants to do in "High John de Conquer": "Oh, Old Massa don't need to know you gone from here. How? Just leave your old work-tired bodies around for him to look at, and he'll never realize youse way off somewhere, going about your business."[85] Thus, Isis can experience the joy of psychologically fortifying inner journeys that infuse her with joy and resilience. This equips her with the joy that the white woman hungers for and the ability to direct the white couple, thus finally earning herself a place in the vehicle—a metaphor for triumph. Thus, whereas John Redding weeps at all the things tying him down, Isis is so buoyed up by joy that even when wades into the water on her own to die, joy fills her up so much that she "saw no longer any reason to die… and she

[83] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 110.
[84] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 220.
[85] Hurston, ed. Gates, *The Complete Stories*, 145.

splashed and sang, enjoying herself immensely,"[86] until she is approached by the white couple. John Redding, on the other hand, dies in the water, a juxtaposition spotlighting the power and understanding of Black joy by black women. Isis' success, where John fails, is even more remarkable because she bears the double burden of race and place, experiencing gendered suppression. Isis lives under greater constraints than John does, having to conform to rules such as no whistling, "settin brazen, whistling, playing with boys, crossing her legs."[87] Isis' triumph is a celebration of the potency of Black joy in thwarting racist and gendered oppression. Most importantly, Isis' success represents success at establishing a "psychic space to exult spiritually." [88] Her achievement is as spiritual as it is physical, with significant implications for her well-being beyond physical survival. Similarly, Magnolia Flower's love affair with John underscores the ridiculousness of Bentley's close-mindedness and obsession with having very black grandchildren so much that he wants to marry his daughter off to Crazy Joe. Magnolia Flower's success is a psychic and spiritual triumph earning her complete freedom. Similarly, Laura Crooms, in "The Eatonville Anthology," having run out of patience with her husband's affair with Daisy, wields the ax-handle. Likewise, Cal'line Potts, tired of being disrespected by her philandering husband, Mitch Potts, dons a Stetsons, grabs an axe and determinedly pursues redress. These women's boldness in the face of disrespect and infidelity offer a stark contrast to the timid Joe Kanty in "Spunk," who approaches Spunk with an insignificant razor and dies from his Stetson.

Therefore, black women are important in Hurston's oeuvre, exhibiting a natural leadership ability and affinity for root work and Black joy. In this regard, we observe the playing out of Davis' observation that Hurston juxtaposes men and women in her stories to highlight and compare gender-specific strengths and weaknesses. Her character's confrontation of conflict spotlights Hurston's gendered vision. An intertextual foil characterization can be observed in her stories, with Magnolia Flower and Isis and Laura Crooms/ Cal'line Potts serving as foil characters to Bentley, John Redding, and Joe Kanty, respectively. These women achieve triumph over adversity, circumstances, and intersectional oppression, a message resounds throughout the collection of stories, in Magnolia Flower's defeat of Bentley, in Isis's ascension. Beyond the stories, the portrayal of Black womanhood as Black joy in the form of determined agency is driven home in the vindication of Hurston and her restoration to her rightful place of honor in the history of African American literature.

---

[86] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 218.
[87] Hurston, ed. West, *Hitting a Straight Lick*, 206.
[88] Davis, "The Creation of Psychic Space," 276.

Conclusion

Hurston's short stories centralize the intersectional oppression Black women experience based on race, space, and womanhood. Rather than focus on the pathos of Black suffering, Hurston deviates from the dominant perception of Blackness as unmitigated suffering. However, this was not naïve escapism. Instead, as this analysis of Hurston's selected short stories through the lens of Afrofuturism and the politics of Black joy reveals, Hurston's profound engagement with triumph over intersectional oppression through Black joy and Afrofuturist envisioning aimed at securing the complete psychic and cultural wholeness of Blacks, in addition to their freedom. Both frameworks show that race, space, and gender can occasion constraints that can be overcome through the strategic imbibing of transformative joy. In weaponizing joy to secure freedom, Hurston makes a way out of no way, advocating the necessity of preserving the wholeness of black people while wielding a veritable weapon fashioned solely from laughter and joy against the suppression of black people. This feat ultimately facilitates the pairing of Afrofuturism and Black joy in a mutually enriching dialogue that decodes Hurston's racial vision and presents a roadmap toward the optimal future Blacks should envision.

References

Brooks, Daphne A. "Sister, Can You Line It Out?: Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood." *African American Literary Studies: New Texts, New Approaches, New Challenges* 55, no. 4 (2010): 617–627.

Chhaya, Priya. "Finding Black Joy in the Power of Place." National Trust for Historic Preservation, 12 June 2024. https://savingplaces.org/stories/finding-black-joy-in-the-power-of-place, accessed December 15, 2024.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299.

Davis, Doris. "'De Talkin' Game': The Creation of Psychic Space in Selected Short Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 26, no. 2 (2007): 269–86.

Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel A. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994.

Gates, Henry Louis, Sieglinde Lemke. Introduction to *The Complete Stories*, by Zora Neale Hurston. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008: ix–xxiii.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Abjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Court Order Can't Make Races Mix," in *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings,* ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New York: Library of America, 1995): 956–58.

———. *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories from the Harlem Renaissance*. Edited by Genevieve West. Foreword by Tayari Jones. New York: Amistad, 2020.

———. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," in *I Love Myself When I am Laughing and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, ed. Mary Helen (New York: Feminist Press, 2020): 322–329.

———. *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* U.S: Lippincott, 1937.

———. *Zora Neale Hurston: The Complete Stories*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Sieglinde Lemke. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

Jones, Tayari. Foreword to *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories from the Harlem Renaissance*, by Zora Neale Hurston, edited by Genevieve West. New York: Amistad, 2020: vii–xiii.

Lavender, Isiah III, and Lisa Yaszek, eds. *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020.

Lynn, Denise. "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 1-20.

Marcucci, Olivia. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Brown Debate: Race, Class, and the Progress Empire." *The Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 13–24.

Spencer, Stephen. "Racial Politics and the Literary Reception of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." *Multiethnic Literature and Canon* Debates (2004): 111–126.

Stewart, Lindsey. *The Politics of Black Joy: Zora Neale Hurston and Neo-Abolitionism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021.

Taylor, Taryne Jade. "Introduction to CoFuturisms," *in The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms,* ed. Taryne Jade Taylor, Isiah Lavender III, Grace L. Dillon, and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay (New York: Routledge, 2024): 1–8.

Thomas, Sheree. "Dangerous Muses: Black Women Writers Creating at the Forefront of Afrofuturism," in Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century, ed. Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020): 37–55.

West, Genevieve. Editor's Note to *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories from the Harlem Renaissance*, by Zora Neale Hurston (New York: Amistad, 2020): 1–5.

Wilderson, Frank B. *Afropessimism*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020.

Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.