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Diplomová práce

An Analysis of the Color Line in Harlem Renaissance Novels

Analýza barvy pleti postav v románech Harlemské renesance

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Abstract

The master's thesis focuses on five selected novels by African American authors written and/or published during the Harlem Renaissance. The theoretical background reviews the period of the Harlem Renaissance and offers an interpretation of the plots of the five novels. The thesis then examines the system of the color line, racial segregation, and intra-racial prejudice. Then it analyses signs of the color line in the selected novels.

Anotace

Magisterská práce se soustředí na pět vybraných románů afroamerických autorů, napsaných a/nebo publikovaných během Harlemské Renesance. Teoretická část se věnuje samotnému období Harlemské Renesance a nabízí interpretaci obsahů vybraných románů. Práce dále zkoumá společenský systém, jež určuje práva, výhody, a příležitosti mezi dominantní americkou a minoritní afroamerickou kulturou; rasovou segregaci a intra-rasové předsudky. Dále pak v románech analyzuje znaky tohoto systému.

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1. Introduction

The impacts of the slavery social system in the United States remain rather unknown to Czech learners. Even though Czech high schoolers ought to learn some American literary works for the graduation exam, rarely do they learn about African American authors who portray these impacts in their writing. Thus, they typically have little to no insight into the issue of the color line. This thesis studies the social struggles that Afro-Americans faced in post-slavery times and brings understanding to the inferior ethnic group. The analysis of Johnson’s, Hurston’s, McKay’s, and Wallace’s novels, i.e., of African-American Harlem Renaissance works, offers a preview of social segregation, racial pride or racial shame, intra-racial prejudice, and much more, as the aftermath of the 246 years of slavery.

This thesis concerns the sensitive question of skin color. However, when analyzing the color line and its repercussions, one needs to look at the subject of color objectively. Up till this day, scholars and media argue about the question of capitalizing race or ethnic names. To properly distinguish the meaning, using capitalized *Black* in this thesis indicates the community with its African American heritage, and lowercase *black* (or *brown,* etc.) would only determine the skin color. With the term Negro (Spanish and Portuguese word for black color), the case is somewhat similar. Some regions consider it offensive, some neutral. While studying the literary sources, primary, as well as secondary, many scholars frequently use the word *Negro*, especially in older texts. This word will thus mainly occur in citations or paraphrases of the sources.

2. The Harlem Renaissance

Before the end of World War I, the United States witnessed a gradually appearing change of thinking in terms of the perception of Black culture. Whites, especially in New York City, started to show great interest in this so far “primitive”, yet exotic community. Their attention only grew after the end of the war, and although some members of the Afro-American community later doubted these changes, overall it was a time of hope for African American artists of New York City, in particular Harlem. Harlem became the focus of many Black writers, musicians, politicians, painters, and scholars, even though many African American artists lived and created artistic and imaginative works elsewhere in the United States. However, the movement is today designated as the Harlem Renaissance.

During the Great Migration, Afro-Americans migrated from the rural South and the Caribbean to the industrial North. This sparked the interest of many of them in all kinds of art, so they created more artwork than ever before (Hutchinson 2004, 50). Only a few Black literary pieces were published between the years 1905 and 1923, and the chance for them to get national acknowledgement was small. During the decade of the 1920s and early 1930s, however, more and more Afro-American authors published their works. This encouraged other Black intellectuals to produce art (Singh 1). The Harlem Renaissance movement thus uplifted the spirit of artists of African heritage and enhanced their cultural output.

Before the war, social conditions in the United States did not benefit the Black minority. A change of the oppressive racial politics was much needed so that the uplift of Afro-American culture could progress (Brown, 7). The Harlem Renaissance, at the time known as the “Negro Renaissance” (Hutchinson, 1995, 4), opened in March 1924, when the Harlem elite organized a dinner party for influential white figures among the black artists, such as W. E. B. DuBois or Charles S. Johnson (Kirschke, 14). This event connected two formerly separated worlds and affected the dynamics of the African American cultural development. The event tangibly resulted in Paul Kellog dedicating a whole

edition of his magazine *Survey Graphic* to new Black artists. Alain Locke became the guest head editor and a year later, in 1925, the edition subtitled *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro* saw the light of day (Kirschke, 15).

Especially Locke's manifestation survey *Enter the New Negro* helped with the overall determination of the whole movement. He compared the New Negro movement to a "spiritual emancipation" (Locke, 2). Locke suggested that while the Old Negro tried to fix his social perception, the New Negro aims to be accepted for its true character (Locke, 3-4). For Locke, the Old Negro was based on Garveyism, African radical nationalism as agitated by Marcus Garvey. Garvey aspired to turn the two races against each other and thereby express the hatred accumulated over hundreds of years. He did not allow any interracial combinations or acculturation. He preached continental separation–Africa for Africans, Europe for Europeans, Asia for those of Asian origin, and accordingly encouraged Blacks to return to Africa. However, he did not succeed with his ideology, neither among Black scholars (Graves, 65-67) nor among the black masses who naturally remained in the United States. The former efforts of Blacks, i.e., the Old Negro, were to force a mind- and attitude change, whereas the new movement aimed to, as Locke says, gain self-respect and self-dependence, and also to be deeply studied rather than just discussed. They wished to cancel the myths and prejudices that "affected African Americans' own relationship to their heritage and each other" (Hutchinson, 2004, 50).

Even though the dinner event and Lock's survey helped to put the movement in motion, a series of encounters and collisions since 1890 must have happened to eventually provide the opportunities. At the time when the American economy was going through a transformation of mass industrialization, the education and labor market changed as well. (Hutchinson, 1995, 8). Historians name this period the Progressive Era. As Goldberg states, "progressive governors fought for ameliorative reforms such as workers' compensation, factory inspection laws, and measures establishing maximum work hours for female wage earners". Progressive activists aimed to increase the voice of ordinary middle-class people. At that time, the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People was founded and women protested vigorously for their right to vote.

(Goldberg, 3-5) Progressives demonstrated the benefits of slow-paced, gradual, calm changes, which created a flourishing environment for social and cultural shifts.

A. Philip Randolph in *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (edited by Nathan Irving Huggins) refers to the Old and New Negro as "Old Crowd" and "New Crowd". He explains the reasons why such social change was necessary. He claims that the main reason "lies in the inability of the old crowd to adapt itself to the changed conditions, to recognize and accept the consequences of the sudden, rapid, and violent social changes, that are shaking the world" (Huggins, 18). Randolph also suggests that the New Crowd must cancel the Old Crowd leaders, who ignored the terrible situation of African Americans who were, among other things, exploited and underpaid for hard work. For instance, he points out that the leaders never encouraged their people to organize a strike, which back then was a normal act to undertake for dissatisfied workers in Europe (Huggins, 19). The Old Crowd leaders failed to find possible ways to provide what already should have been provided, therefore they had to be replaced by new younger Black guides.

World War I served as one of the driving forces for many changes and movements, for instance, the Lost Generation in American literature. When Afro-Americans fought for world democracy as a part of the United States military, it led them to discover confidence, self-appreciation, and pride. They also realized that "a world made safe for democracy should liberate Afro-Americans" so the US government should now protect them, as expected in a democracy. Their spirit unfolded from political and social criticism to focus on literature, music, and art (Huggins, 8-9). They aimed to express themselves through various cultural institutions, which resulted in the expansion of African American artworks and their overall enjoyment. For example, the blue-jazz tradition started developing way sooner, in the post-Civil War period, as "an expression of the black man's experiences during Reconstruction; stride piano had its beginnings in ragtime; black musicals were staged on Broadway in the first decade of the twentieth century", but it was not until the Harlem Renaissance (and the help of phonograph and radio technology) that it became a "mainstream phenomenon" (Shaw, 65).

As for the center of the movement, Harlem in New York City indeed was the heart, but the change of spirit and mood concerned, as W. A. Domingo states in *Voices*, “every country where the race is oppressed”, whether that would mean Asians, Africans, or Native Americans (Huggins, 21). Also, the World War dispersed the Blacks all around the world (Huggins, 6), especially throughout Europe. Therefore, not only did the social development touch other American centers, but it occurred worldwide. Many authors, critics, and politicians came to New York, mostly for publishing opportunities, for big publishers such as *Opportunity* or *Messenger* were based there (Brown, 6) However, Harlem also radiated with excitement, power, new experiences, and the urge to conceive something astonishing, which also alluded to authorities. However, some of the famous authors remained outside Harlem, e.g., Wallace Thurman, or Zora Neale Hurston (Shaw, 57-58).

Some intellectuals criticized the label “Harlem *Renaissance*”. Scholar Sterling Brown argues that the movement took place only for a few years, and cannot then be distinguished as a renaissance. Additionally, according to Brown, the majority of the literary works did not take place in Harlem, and nor did they come out of the pens of Harlem authors, with which Robert Bone agrees and thus prefers to designate the group of Afro-American authors centered in Harlem as *Harlem School*. Bone, however, agrees with the designation *Renaissance* as for the “nationwide upsurge in black writing during the twenties”. Nevertheless, intellectuals such as Alain Locke or Charles S. Johnson recognized and propagated the term Harlem or Negro Renaissance (Singh, 3). Even if the movement did not last two centuries as the European Renaissance, for its impact on society, and economy, and its cultural contribution, it deserves such a designation.

3. Selected Harlem Renaissance novels and their plots

3.1. *The Blacker the Berry* by Wallace Thurman

Thurman's novel about Emma Lou and the intra-racial prejudices she faced throughout her life portrays how skin color determined not only the perception of society but also the perception of individuals of themselves.

In the first part of the novel, Emma Lou, a young woman from Boise, Idaho, appears tangled in a vicious circle. Born with a very dark complexion into the blue vein society to a mulatto mother Jane and dark black father Jim, she confronted deeply destructive racial bias. Her maternal grandparents held the idea of decolorization. Therefore, they wanted their children to marry mulattos, for lighter-skinned people had been more privileged – they did not have to work in fields and overall had better social circumstances. However, Jane did not fulfill this expectation so her parents never respected Emma Lou's dad and called him "old black Jim Morgan" (Thurman, 24). However, Jim left Jane after Emma Lou was born. Her stepfather Aloysius stepped in as one of the manly figures of Emma's early life. Aloysius was Irish but of African origin, so he could not pass as white. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer but did not fulfill this dream, for which he blamed his African blood. He was angry at dark black people, he insulted and despised them. He did not mind people of color or mulattoes, but he hated people as dark-skinned as Emma Lou.

Emma Lou took over his mindset and perceived her dark skin as a tragedy. Her perception of herself made her try to do everything to become paler. She hated being so dark.

> Emma Lou had been born in a semi-white world, totally surrounded by an all-white one, and those few dark elements that had forced their way in had either been shooed away or else greeted with derisive laughter. It was the custom always of those with whom she came into most frequent contact to ridicule or revile any black person or object (Thurman, 24).

She despised blackness, despite being black herself. She felt the urge to ingratiate herself with the white cosmopolitan society by suppressing her African heritage. This emerged when she left Boise to board a college in Los Angeles, where she desperately tried to find some educated, classy, colored, or even white students she could befriend.

Emma's own intra-racial bias came to light with her encounter with Hazel, an African-American student. Emma considered Hazel ostentatious. She thought Hazel talked too loudly, expressed herself too much, was uncouth, and that she should rather attend some southern college if she was not able to suppress her blackness. She felt embarrassed in Hazel's presence and thought she was the reason that nobody else wanted to approach and befriend her. Emma Lou tried culturally to be as white as possible, whereas Hazel was simply being herself. At that time, Emma did not realize she was being prejudicial towards Hazel. She also did not realize that other colored students (mulattoes) were being prejudicial towards her and other darker people. Emma Lou was so unhappy in California that she decided to go to New York City.

In Harlem, Emma Lou was working as a maid. She told everyone she was going there for school but she never intended that. She just needed to escape, not fully realizing what from. She met a boy named John, who showed her Harlem and taught her the local essentials, such as rent parties. However, Emma Lou decided he was "too dark" and "too obviously ex-cottonpicker from Georgia" (Thurman, 96) so she cut ties with him. She imagined her dream man to be light brown, intellectual, and from the right sort of people, but such men just overlooked her.

Emma Lou decided to get her dream job as a stenographer so she visited two employment offices. Being inexperienced, she was offered to work as a dishwasher or a nurse, which was unacceptable for her. Thinking it was easy to find a job in New York, she headed to the second office expecting much better chances. However, even though she lied about her experience this time and got a job offer, they eventually rejected her for she was not pretty, i.e., not light-skinned, enough. After this, she encountered many more unpleasant situations where people pointed out her undesirable appearance.

Emma Lou started working as a maid to a white actress Arline Strange. Arline was playing on Broadway a mulatto girl in a melodrama *Cabaret Gal* portraying the alleged Harlem life of African Americans. One day, Arline's brother from Chicago came to the city and they both took Emma Lou to her first cabaret. He knew a lot of dark people and thus expected to see more of them in the cabaret. He most likely wanted to dance with Emma Lou but she was black and a maid and this tension prevented him from asking her for a dance. However, another man danced with her – Alva, half mulatto and half Filipino, a member of the Elk social club. His oriental features made him very appealing. He also appeared as an intellectual and dressed well, which was exactly Emma Lou's type. Their dance left her feeling ecstatic, but Alva acted in front of his friends like he did it out of pity.

Emma Lou then asked the Cabaret Gal director for a role in the play because she was dark-skinned so she could simply play a Black woman and would not have to paint her skin darker since the white actresses had to. Also, some of the male actors were dark-skinned. The director rejected her, though, because she was just too dark. Actresses had to be white or mulatto. Emma Lou found herself in the same situation as in Los Angeles, where students would not accept her into their sorority because she was unacceptably dark.

Emma Lou was hopeful for months in Harlem but with every experience concerning her skin color, she began to realize she was too dark for everything. She could not see her situation improving or any possibility of getting out of this racial slump.

Arline left to attend her mother's funeral so another woman filled in her role in Cabaret Gal. This time, it was a real mulatto and Emma Lou was asked to be her maid but a colored woman serving as a maid for another colored woman was unacceptable to Emma Lou. She started bleaching her skin again and planned to find the man she danced with in the cabaret. Meanwhile, she met Jasper Crane, who just used her for money. She decided to buy a new dress, bleach her face again, and visit a casino. Her skin was now more purple than black. In the casino, two men asked her for a dance but neither was

her dream type. Finally, she saw Alva. They danced together, Alva taking it as a joke but eventually, he gave her his number.

Emma Lou's relationship with Alva was based on him using her for money. He said to his friend Brexton: "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" (134), suggesting the darker a woman's complexion is, the more money he can get out of her.

Their relationship abounded with many difficulties. Alva faced a dilemma. He did not take Emma Lou to dances or among his friends for he favored to be seen with Geraldine, a beautiful, much lighter-skinned girl. At the same time, he did not want to lose Emma Lou's financial subsidy. He knew he should take Emma Lou out with his friends at least once, so when an opportunity to accompany a group of young artists at a rent party came, he decided to bring Emma Lou with him. Emma Lou was afraid she might encounter racial prejudice again but happy that Alva was finally taking her to meet his friends.

The people at the party were young and talented but not his friends. At the party, they discussed the issue of intra-racial segregation and how Negroes are prejudiced towards themselves. Truman Walter, a guest at the party, rationalized and objectively explained his point of view on the problematic topic, asserting that it is the shared environment with Whites that shapes the intra-racial prejudicial approach of Negroes and that Negroes cannot resist this influence. This conversation, mainly Truman's thoughts, disgusted Emma Lou. The reader here may realize that Emma Lou has rejected Hazel for the same reasons she was being rejected by others. The intellectual's monologue offended Emma Lou and she did not consider Alva's acquaintances respectable enough because intellectuals would go to no such party.

Later in the chapter, Thurman pictures Alva and his life. Overindulging in alcohol and entertainment, he had developed a drinking issue. He had also been married twice but never got divorced because the law simply did not pay attention to Afro-American marriage or divorce, only to murders, robberies, and harassment of white women.

Emma Lou was obsessed with Alva. She even forgot about bleaching her face. One day, he took her to a movie theater. Emma Lou enjoyed herself there but then there was a "usual rigamarole concerning the undesirability of black girls" (174) which upset her. She felt insulted and betrayed by Alva for taking her to such a place. They end up discussing color consciousness together. Alva told her she was always talking and noticing the color and that everything was about color for her. The chapter ends with Alva coming back to his room, where he finds Geraldine who is expecting his baby.

The last chapter portrays Emma Lou working as a personal maid for Clere Sloane. Clere was a retired actress married to Campbell Kitchen. They were both very kind to her and treated her more like a companion than a servant. Campbell Kitchen was a white intellectual interested in Harlem. He showed genuine interest in what would make life better for Negroes in America. He supported many Negro young artists, writers, and musicians. He even motivated Emma Lou to take the public-school teacher's examinations for her to gain greater economic independence. Emma Lou started to ask herself if she was that sensitive about color. "Did she encourage color prejudice among her own people, simply by being expectant of it?" (187). She could not blame herself, though. The seed was planted in her head by her Mother, who, for example, hid her when she was expecting guests, not to mention her stepfather's attitude.

Emma Lou kept herself busy so that she did not have time to think about herself and her misery. She moved to Y.M.C.A., where she met and befriended Gwendolyn, a light-brown, educated girl of the opposite attitude towards blackness. Gwendolyn and her mother idolized black skin and aimed to marry real Blacks to have real Afro-American children. Emma Lou and Gwendolyn attended the same church and met a lot of people that Emma Lou would consider the right sort of people. Emma Lou even found a boyfriend – Benson Brown, a fairly skinned boy who was happy to have her interest and did not mind her dark black complexion. Even though Benson was light-skinned, she considered him ugly, stupid, and boring, and deep down, she still loved Alva, so she eventually left Benson without goodbyes. This portrays a huge shift in her mindset because Benson impersonated the man of her dreams, a mulatto who was interested in a girl as dark as her, yet she rejected him.

Alva's and Geraldine's baby was born afflicted. Meanwhile, Alva got very sick since his stomach was burnt from all the consumed alcohol. Geraldine thought Alva was planning on leaving her, so she decided to leave first. One day, she just never came home from work. She left sick Alva as well as the needing baby. However, someone knocked on Alva's door right when he needed it the most – Emma Lou.

Emma Lou took good care of Alva and the child. She was risking her career because teaching at school and living with a man was socially unaccepted. After a while, Alva began to treat her worse and worse and got back to his old lifestyle.

As a teacher, Emma Lou did not fit in well at her school. Almost all of her coworkers were lighter-skinned than her and she felt like everybody was discussing her skin. She was indeed discussed, but rather because of her make-up, which only made her look worse.

Eventually, Emma Lou realized that Alva was just using her all along and that even though she now was economically independent, which she longed for, she felt more like a slave than ever before. She decided to "reclaim herself" (212), pack her bags, leave Alva and his child, and return to Y.M.C.A. Full of hope, she called Benson but found out he and Gwendolyn were getting married. She did not know what to do now. Returning home would only mean starting her life all over again. In the epiphanic end, she concludes that she cannot escape her problems because they are within herself.

> She was determined to fight against Alva's influence over her, fight even though she lost, for she reasoned that even in losing she would win a pyrrhic victory and thus make her life less difficult in the future, for having learned to fight future battles would be easy (Thurman, 218).

3.2. *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson

Despite the "Autobiography" in the title, Johnson's work is a novel and deals with the psychological aspects of ''passing for white'' as well as the American class system. It was first published in 1912, anonymously, but was not widely successful until the second edition came out in 1927 under Johnson's name (iii).

The unnamed narrator was born at the end of the Civil War in Georgia to a mixed-race woman and a wealthy white man. He was raised just by his mother who, thanks to the financial support of the father, was able to provide him with a pleasant, middle-class life in Connecticut, which was scarcely common for Negro families. She worked as a modiste and many women came to her for her artistic-quality service. She dressed her son very aptly, bought him books, and taught him music and good manners. He learned to play the piano very soon, at first only by ear. Even though his mother arranged music lessons for him, he still preferred to play by ear, not by notes.

When he reached nine years of age, he started attending a mixed public school. The best learner in their class was Shiny, whose nickname originated from the contrast between his dark black skin, white teeth, and shiny eyes. He studied hard and won most of the school prizes. However, he was still despised in a way. One day, the narrator came home from school and told his mother about an incident caused by a black classmate, designating him a "nigger". His mother got immediately upset that he had said that word and told him that he should be ashamed, which again, he could not quite comprehend since all the white people at school used that term.

The major turning point of his early life occurred when the principal came to their class and said: "I wish all of the white scholars to stand for a moment" (Johnson, 7). The narrator rose, too. He was told to sit down and stand up later with the other colored pupils. He could not comprehend what was happening. He rushed home after school, stared in the mirror for a long time, carefully observing his appearance, trying to recognize the Negro features. Then he asked his mother: "Tell me, mother, am I a

nigger?'" At that moment, he realized his mother was different from other ladies. She answered: "No, you are not a nigger." He continued: "Well, mother, am I white? Are you white?" to which she answered: "No, I am not white, but you … the best blood of the South is in you." (8) This traumatic moment triggered an identity crisis and radical change in the narrator's self-image. He accordingly developed a certain "dual personality" (9), one that is unveiled only among his race. Nevertheless, outside his identity struggle, he made great progress in playing classical music on the piano. He even appeared in the newspaper under the title "Infant Prodigy".

Soon, his father briefly visited him and his mother. The narrator knew nothing about prejudice back then but he could sense that between his mother and father, "there was something about the affair which had to be hid" (16). He began to think more about his and his mother's position in society.

On graduation day, Shiny gave a speech, as the top scholar is so honored by tradition. This meant a lot not only for himself, the narrator, and the school but also for the whole race. Shiny was the only dark black scholar there, therefore he simply had to succeed, and he did. The speech exerted a great impact on the narrator because he felt the pride to be colored and began to aspire to bring "glory and honor to the Negro race" (21) and set a goal to go to college. However, as his mother was becoming more and more sick, his college fund was slowly disappearing to pay for her medical treatments.

After his mother's death, the narrator, not financially secure for his future, moved to his teacher's. He was now too old to earn money under the name of "Infant Prodigy" and too inexperienced to become a full-time professional artist. Eventually, people organized a beneficial concert for him to raise the needed money. At the concert, he played Beethoven's *Sonata No. 8 in C minor*, *"Pathétique"*, which was composed ten years after Beethoven's mother died (Beethoven's mother died at the same age as the narrator, sixteen years old)[1] in 1786. It brings the emotions the narrator was feeling while performing. Therefore, the novel's musical background links itself to the plot's

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[1] AVERY, Tamlyn. *"Split by the Moonlight": Beethoven and the Racial Sublime in African American Literature*. 2020. American Literature.

situations, thereby carrying a much deeper meaning, setting the meaning of the tragedy of a young man's mother's death to music. "When the last tone died away the few who began to applaud were hushed by the silence of the others; and for once I played without receiving an encore" (23).

After the concert, he had enough money for the tuition to study for two years at Atlanta University. He took a train to the South, back to the state of his birth.

He pictured the South in a much better light, so the first impression disappointed him. He met a student from Jersey who offered him a place to sleep until the semester started, so he got accommodated with two dark men. The neighborhood was full of lower-class colored people who behaved impolitely and talked very loudly, which repulsed him. Their dialect, on the other hand, attracted him, because he had never heard it as fully and freely before. He visited the best restaurant where Colored people could eat, yet it was just a terrible place in every aspect. However, the narrator was told he could go to any establishment because people would not recognize that he was not white, suggesting the first situation in which he could pass for white.

When he was about to move out to the school and set off on the right life journey, he found out that somebody had stolen all of his money. At that moment, his life rapidly deviated from his plan.

He had to travel to Jacksonville, Florida, where he could find a job. The local preacher led him to a place of a fine-looking brown lady and her Hispanic husband, where he could stay, together with about ten Hispanic cigar makers. The husband also offered him a job at the cigar-making factory as a stripper, and because the narrator had the best fingers for this job thanks to his piano skills, and soon became the fastest stripper. They soon promoted him to a cigar-roller. He learned to smoke, swear, and, most importantly, speak Spanish while working among Cuban workers. He realized that picking up a foreign language was very easy for him, and after a year, he spoke the language fluently. He continued working at the factory but now as a "reader", whose work was to sit in the middle of the room and read Spanish reports on Cuban independence to his Cuban

coworkers while they were rolling. After all, the landlady's husband was a member of the "Jacksonville Junta" (33), a committee that financially supported Cuban rebels.

The narrator liked Jacksonville, Florida very much. He enjoyed his job, fell in love with a teacher, and eventually gave up the idea of attending Atlanta University. However, after three years in Jacksonville, the cigar factory shut down, which crushed his dreams of living in Jacksonville forever and marrying the teacher. A desire to see the North again sparked in his heart, so he abandoned his girlfriend and decided to go to New York City.

In New York City, he got into gambling which dragged him into the underworld. He was, of course, losing money, and eventually, he lost his job because of this hobby. However, he found another passion there: ragtime piano music. He fell for it the second he first heard a black musician playing in a Harlem social club. The rhythm and the catchiness astonished him, as well as likewise astonished white people and even actors, who came to such places for inspiration to their stage imitation of African-American features.

The narrator became a great piano player of ragtime and even made some ragtime transcriptions of classical compositions. Then he became acquainted with a white millionaire, who got him out of the underworld and provided him with more opportunities as a ragtime player for white audiences. He performed at dinner parties and always amazed everyone.

His friend became his patron and manager, as well as a father figure. Even though the narrator had to do everything his friend said. When he was not playing for his patron, he played at the Club. Once he was sitting in the Club with a beautiful, fair-skinned, rich widow when her usual black companion came in and shot her in the throat. Aghast, the narrator ran away frightened and ran into his patron, who took him on a trip to Europe the next morning.

They landed by ship in France. Soon he was able to pick up the French language as well. His friend bought him clothes and treated him as an equal. The only hardship of their

over-a-year-lasting stay in Paris was that he had to play the piano for his friend whenever he was told to.

One day, he visited Charles Gounod's *Faust* opera. A girl was sitting next to him. He fell in love with her at first sight and was simply astonished by her beauty. Then he caught a glimpse of her father and realized it was *his* father, the man who came to their house when he was a child and who promised to visit him soon but never did. He could not speak to him. He could not do anything. He felt suffocated. This situation was accompanied by the aria "Avant de quitter ces lieux" which in the opera Valentine sang as his last wish for God to protect his sister Margarete. "Valentine's love seemed like mockery, and I felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to rise up and scream to the audience, 'Here, here in your very midst, is a tragedy, a real tragedy!'" (63). As with the previously mentioned Beethoven sonata, Johnson here, again, incorporates a musical echo of the plot, where the plot of Gounoud's opera corresponds with the narrator's situation. Frustrated, the narrator left the theater and got drunk.

The narrator and his patron left France and traveled to London, the Netherlands, and then to Germany.

In Berlin, as usual, he picked up the German language and performed ragtime improvisations of white classical music. However, once he heard a German playing ragtime oppositely, turning ragtime into a classic, he accordingly developed a desire to create something new. This musical transformation would make black music popular with Whites. He reminded himself of his boyhood dream to make his race glorious. He wanted to return to the South, live with the colored locals, and gather inspiration from them. To do so, however, he had to break ties with his patron and leave him. His friend's response to this decision was crucial. He told him: "My boy, you are by blood, by appearance, by education and by tastes, a white man" (67). He could not believe his companion wanted to lose this privilege. Not that he would experience racism, but he simply realized the strength of racial prejudice in terms of one's success. Slavery was banned, but racism had not been destroyed and African Americans in the US were still disadvantaged and oppressed. The narrator had a big dilemma but it did not stop him

(yet). He did not quite know if this desire was driven by the need to help those that he considered his own, or by the need to distinguish himself. He just knew he wanted to "voice all the sorrows, the hopes and ambitions of the American Negro, in classical music form" (69). He left his patron and set off on a journey to attempt a realization of his self-fulfillment.

The main protagonist arrived in Atlanta and noticed that Northern men did not speak to each other if they were not friends, whereas, in the South, everybody was a friend after only a few minutes. Once, he got together with a few men and a heated discussion arose. It turned into a form of an argument between a Texan, who praised the Anglo-Saxons, saying that Afro-Americans were inferior and weak and that there should be no equality; and an old soldier, who expressed a different opinion – all the Anglo-Saxons did was build everything on the foundation of other races. The race question thus laid more in the "mental attitude of the whites" (78) than in the actual conditions of Blacks. The Whites were simply unwilling to give any opportunity to educated, deserving Blacks.

On the trip among the colored folk, the narrator had to leave the welfare he was accustomed to during his Europe trip, and sleep in low-quality houses in uncomfortable conditions, and eat distasteful food.

During his traveling and gathering material for his work, people sometimes treated him as a white man, and when they found out about his origin, they quickly changed their attitude. At his last stop, he experienced a Big meeting. At such meetings, people would listen to John Brown, a powerful preacher who "led the race from paganism and kept it steadfast to Christianity through all the long, dark years of slavery" (82). The narrator there witnessed a community singing very powerful spiritual Negro songs in a way he had not seen before. Especially the emotional power and strong theme of "Go Down Moses" grabbed his heart.

After this experience, he witnessed a black man accused of rape and murder about to be lynched. There was a crowd of many people and somebody suggested "Burn him!" (88), which the people present did, and the others, including the narrator, just watched.

The narrator could not believe what he just saw. He could not believe that Negro people were treated worse than cattle and was deeply ashamed to be identified with the African Americans.

> A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with; and shame for my country, that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should be the only civilized, if not the only state on earth, where a human being would be burned alive (Johnson, 88).

As a consequence of this experience, the narrator immediately left the South, went to New York, and dropped his plans to voice the ambitions of the Colored people.

In New York City, using his privilege of passing for white again ensured him a job as a salesman. A friend then advised him to invest in New York real estate, so he bought an old tenant house and earned double the money in six months. He continued investing in real estate and became successful in that field, which brought him into a circle of high-culture people.

He met a beautiful, white, blond woman with an amazing voice, and fell in love with her. They connected through music and he won her over by playing piano. The only problem was that everybody considered him a white man and he was afraid to admit to his lover that he had African origin. One day, he played for her Chopin's *Nocturne No. 13 in C minor, Op. 48, No.1*. They both got emotional, and, realizing he truly loved her, the narrator decided to tell her the whole truth about himself. She cried and could not understand it. He felt the same helpless pain as when he met his father at the French opera house. She went away for some time but eventually, she came back to him. They got married, briefly visited Europe, and had two children. During the birth of the second child, though, the wife died and the narrator became a single parent. One regret haunted him still – he could and should have helped the Negro race, such as Mark Twain or Booker T. Washington had done. He admired those men who spoke on behalf of the whole race and felt selfish for choosing the easy way.

> My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am, and keeps me from desiring to be otherwise; and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast

> yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought, that after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage[2] (Johnson, 100).

3.3. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* by Zora Neale Hurston

This semi-biographical novel displays a bit of the account of the youth and marriage of Hurston's parents and their migration from Notasulga, Alabama to Eatonville, Florida. It offers an insight into the after-slavery life of African-Americans and their struggles with adjusting to freedom, with emphasis on the life of Zora's father, John Hurston, a farmer, Baptist minister, and mayor of Eatonville, Florida.

Jonah's Gourd Vine narrates the story of John Buddy – the son of former slave Amy and her former white slaveholder. Amy is now married to a former slave Ned Crittenden and the whole family works on one of the cotton fields in Alabama which belong to malignant white men, who cut their wages and more. Amy, Ned, John, and two more children thus live in poverty as sharecroppers. Ned, the head of the family, hates and even despises John because he is a mulatto and also not his biological child.

> "You jes' do lak Ah say do and keep yo' mouf shet or Ah'll take uh trace chain tuh yuh. Yo' mammy mought think youse uh lump uh gold 'cause you got uh li'l' white folks color in yo' face, but Ah'll stomp yo' guts out and dat quick!" (Hurston, 1990b, 2)

Even though John works the hardest and quickest, Ned is very hard on him and does not respect him at all. Ned was raised in slavery and projects the habits of slaveholders onto John, almost trying to enslave him to obtain power and respect. Amy tries to influence Ned's attitude with occasional interference, e.g.:

> "We black folks don't love our chillun. We couldn't do it when we wuz in slavery. We borned 'em but dat didn't make 'em ourn. Dey b'longed tuh old Massa. (…) It wuz liable tuh be took uhway any day. But we's free folks now. De big bell done rung! Us chillun is ourn" (Hurston, 5).

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[2] Mess of pottage is something immediately attractive but of little value taken foolishly and carelessly in exchange for something more distant and perhaps less tangible but immensely more valuable. From: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mess_of_pottage

Here, she suggests the children of Black people used to belong to their slaveholders, whereas now, in the post-slavery times, their children belong to their parents. Therefore, the time to give the children real parental love and affection has arrived. However, she knows insightfully that it might take a few generations to fully internalize this new attitude.

Hurston reveals that a common marital habit among African Americans was domestic violence. One day, Ned, routinely under the influence of alcohol, attacked Amy. John, now grown up and strong, stuck up for his mother and punched Ned. John was accordingly forced to leave and his mother suggested to find a job at Alf Pearson's in Notasulga.

John does not know that Alf is his biological father. This heritage, as well as his mulatto skin, brings John some privileges. He does not have to pick cotton with the rest of the workers. Instead, he was given much better tasks. Mister Pearson had also persuaded him to attend basic school. Overall, John is very popular, especially among girls for his lighter skin tone.

John has developed a strong passion for studying, singing, going to church, and chasing girls. He fell in love with his classmate Lucy Potts. John loves his new life away from his father and wants to work on Pearson's farm forever. However, this dream soon dissolved for he was forced to return to his family.

Ned still oppressed John so John fled back to Alf's. At Alf's, John lay with a girl who was not his girlfriend Lucy. She was not the first nor the last mistress of his. This habit accompanied him throughout his life. However, he felt heavy-hearted so he left the farm and settled down in a tie-camp. He did not stay in the camp very long for he got himself into trouble by brutally beating up a man. Again, he returned to Notasulga.

In Notasulga, he proposed to Lucy. Her mother forbade their marriage because she had already promised her daughter to an old, wealthy man, and she also suspected a difficult

future for her daughter if she were to stay with John. However, Lucy followed her young heart and nevertheless married him.

Lucy knew her husband was cheating on her but she tolerated it. Even though they did not have money for food, she did not complain. However, John did not try to make their situation any better. When she was at a late stage of pregnancy, he left her home alone and enjoyed a few days with another woman. Meanwhile, it rained heavily and the river, which he had to cross on his way home, rose in level. Hurston here incorporates a moment where nature responds to John's sin.

> "The river was full of water and red as judgement with chewed-up clay land. (…) Red water toting logs and talking about trouble, wresting with timber, pig-pens, and chicken coops as the wind hauls feathers, gouging out banks with timber and beating up bridges with logs" (Hurston, 86).

John almost drowned there. Consequently, he promised to never cheat again. However, a new woman arrived in the city and the "brute beast" (88) woke up in him again, so he broke his promise.

One day, Lucy's brother came to their house to blackmail John because he owed him some money. However, John was not there and so her brother took their expensive bed instead. The whole situation, not to mention the discomfort of not having a bed during late pregnancy, stressed Lucy out. She eventually gave birth to a girl in terrible agony, without John.

When John found out what happened, he went to beat up Lucy's brother. This time, John got arrested for his aggressive behavior. Lucy, not even three days after the delivery, went to the prison and arranged his release. Alf then advised John to leave for some time. He gave him some money and John left for Florida.

He arrived in Eatonville, an all-black town in Orange County, Florida. Amazed by the town, he sent for his family to come to live there with him. Lucy fell in love with the place, too. She persuaded John to start building houses for Florida people. She gave him

great pieces of advice. Locals knew Lucy was behind John's real success and all men wanted a smart woman like her. John realized that and his jealousy caused him to threaten Lucy to kill her if she ever left him, paradoxically judging her by his standards.

John became a preacher and his family was financially secure. He even decided to run for mayor. Even though people considered him "a wife-made man" (112), he still beat his opponent Sam Mosely in the election. As an important man, he had to travel a lot. Lucy, expecting again, was very happy about his accomplishments but missed him. She also knew that he had another mistress.

John and Lucy had another baby girl. Their newborn daughter got typhoid with a very low chance of surviving. John escaped again, with a mistress, from this unpleasant situation and left Lucy to watch their child die alone. However, when he came back, he saw their daughter was alive and recovering.

People noticed that John sinned a lot and therefore should not be preaching at all. They called a conference to discuss that matter but nobody had spoken so John remained the preacher. He still managed to get his people's support and admiration.

Hattie, John's mistress, paid a voodoo queen to hypnotize John and make him want to marry her. Her wish came true. Lucy got very sick. John did not care about his wife. In a confrontation, Lucy brought up his sins and said that his words meant nothing. She told him: "You can't clean yo'self wid yo' tongue lak uh cat" (129). It resulted in John hitting his ill wife for the first time.

Lucy was not afraid of death. She knew she lived a pure life. John was anxious about Lucy's spirit and about his wish that she would already die. When Lucy died, people cried. John thought that he was not responsible for her death and that he could now sin freely.

Less than three months after Lucy's death, he married Hattie. Hattie fully neglected the children. After seven years, John realized that he did not want to marry Hattie. He even

felt like he had been asleep for the past few years and did not recall ever wanting to marry her. His family was broken. He told Hattie: “You sho ain’t no Lucy Ann” (144). “‘Tain’t no danger uh me bein’ no big nigger wid you uhround. Ah sure ain’t de State Moderator no mo’” (145). He implied that Hattie made him hit Lucy that one time because he never even thought about hitting her during the twenty-two years they had been together. In this strong fervor of regret, guilt, and anger, he beat Hattie ruthlessly and found mental relief in this act. John awakened and realized he would much rather prefer Lucy, who was dead, over Hattie, who was his current wife.

Hattie tried to sabotage her husband. Conspiring with Deacon, they found a younger preacher who could take over John’s church. However, John’s next sermon was so passionate and strong that it even deepened the emotional connection between him and his people. People did not believe somebody could preach like John, which was the only reason why they still supported him, despite disapproving of his sins.

John’s friend Hambo, suspecting Hattie of Voodoo witchcraft, sent John to search his home and look for some odd things in his bed and drawers. John, indeed, found strange objects in jars. He came home and beat Hattie so much that the neighbors had to take him off of her. John cried and wept, completely letting his emotions out. Hattie fled and then sued him for divorce. Although he could lose his church, he was happy about the divorce. At the courthouse, only John’s friend’s son came to support him for “courthouses were bad luck for colored people” (165). The divorce of colored people did not matter to white officers. For them, it was a joke. John agreed to everything Hattie and her witnesses said and resigned on his defense. “Dey know too much ‘bout us as it is, but dey some things dey ain’t tuh know. Dey’s some strings on our harp fuh us tuh play on and sing all tuh ourselves” (169). John knew the white lawyers and officers held prejudice and so he did not want to expose to them the anti-Christian cultural aspect of voodoo. Therefore, he did not even bring up the found Hattie’s voodoo items.

> “Dey thinks wese all ignorant as it is, and dey thinks wese all alike, and dat dey knows us inside and out, (…) De only difference dey makes is ‘tween uh nigger dat works hard and don’ sass ‘em, and one dat don’t. De hard worker is uh good nigger. De loafer is bad. Otherwise wese all de same” (Hurston, 169).

In this passage, Hurston points out that the Whites only knew the social image and perceptions they had created about the colored and the lack of willingness to get to know them properly.

After John's last sermon, when he walked out the door, people suddenly started accusing him of things he did not do. People quickly turned away from him and the gossip spread vehemently. John prayed to Lucy, Heaven, and God, to have mercy on him. Once again, John expected Lucy to fix something for him. He spent the nights crying and sobbing. Some days, feeling unfulfilled and betrayed, he did not even get up out of bed.

His life turned brighter again when he met Sally, a rich widow who knew him from a sermon he once had at the church she attended. She treated John very kindly and took care of him. He shared his story with her and eventually, fell asleep in her lap like a little child. On Sunday, he accompanied her to her church and also preached there. He took her fishing, which her husband had never done. Even though she met John in her late 40s, he was her true love. She was wealthy and bought him a new Cadillac. He made a promise to himself and God that he would never leave Sally even for a night. However, she suggested to go show off in the Cadillac to Hambo and his former church.

The city had deteriorated since he left and the church was desolate. A girl Ora asked him for a drive and, even though he resisted all the temptations he encountered since his arrival, he let her drive to the garage. However, she passed it and sped up. They had sex, John was mad at her for seducing him, mad at his weakness, and rushed angrily away. "He had prayed for Lucy and God had answered with Sally" (200) but he broke his promise again. He drove speedily to Sally but crashed and died.

After his death, Sally gave all the insurance money to his children. At the homage, she even sat among them. The story ends with the preacher at the ceremony saying: "'He wuz uh man, and nobody knowed 'im but God'" (202), and with "the drumming of the feet, and the mournful dance of the heads" (202).

3.4. *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay

Depicted by Cooper's foreword as the "first Afro-American 'best-seller'" (McKay, 1987, ix) depicts the journey of a young working-class man and other protagonists of such class. It displays the downsides of the Afro-American underworld in Harlem in contrast to the strong friendships and community, race pride, and a sort of untamedness, vitality, and love.

After enlisting in the Army, Jake (Jacob) Brown expected an adventurous experience but was not allowed to take real combat action against the Germans, which disappointed him. He decided to desert to London. Jake thought about the reasons why he had gotten involved in the white people's war. "'Niggers am evah always such fools, anyhow. Always thinking they've got something to do with white folks' business'" (McKay, 1987, 8). He decided to leave London and realized that he could find happiness only in Harlem, his home.

Jake accepted a job on a freighter ship as a coal stoker. There he lived in horrible conditions with a group of filthy Arabs. However, the ship was taking him back home to Harlem, and that mattered the most.

Right after he arrived in America, he noticed the repercussions of Prohibition. It did not stop him from going to the Baltimore cabaret, where he used the service of a nice brown girl. The service cost him fifty dollars, all the money he had left, but the prostitute made him very happy. McKay closely connects Harlem's allurement to getting pleasure through sex, alcohol, music, and dance.

> Oh, to be in Harlem again after two years away. The deep-dyed color, the thickness, the closeness of it. The noises of Harlem. The sugared laughter. The honey-talk on its streets. And all night long, ragtime and 'blues' playing somewhere, … singing somewhere, dancing somewhere! Oh, the contagious fever of Harlem. … Burning now in Jake's sweet blood. (15)

The next morning, Jake found out that the sweet girl did not take his money. He tried to find her again, unsuccessfully. Throughout the plot, thoughts about her reoccur many times and she becomes the representation of his ideal female.

Jake went to a saloon for a drink and met an old friend Zeddy, also a former soldier. They went to the pool room they used to visit together. Zeddy warned Jake that the government was still searching for deserters and that they were offering people money for turning them in. Some deserters were in Harlem but the local Afro-Americans, despite the offered reward, did not extradite them. "'I tell you, niggers am amazing sometimes. Yet other times, without any natural reason, they will just go vomiting out their guts to the ofays[3] about one another'" (23). Jake, light-hearted and full of life, praised Harlem again. "'O Lawdy, Lawdy! I wants to live a hundred and finish mah days in New York" (25).

Jake and Zeddy went to Congo, an exclusive African-American cabaret. The singer and dancer of the cabaret, a beautiful mulatto named Rose, fancied Jake, as women usually did. Even though Zeddy always dreamed of Rose, he was a good friend and left her and Jake alone to be together. Rose brought Jake to her place and told him he could stay with her forever. He did not have his room rented yet so he stayed at Rose's. He did not love her, though, because she lacked the spark that the Baltimore brown girl had.

Rose suggested he did not have to work because she makes a lot of money. The idea of a woman making money and her partner living off of her earnings frequently occurs throughout McKay's storyline as an honorable social position among a part of the community.

> There was something romantic about the sweet life. To be the adored of a Negro lady of means, (…). It was much more respectable and enviable to be sweet – to belong to the exotic aristocracy of sweetmen than to be just a common tout (82).

[3] "ofays" = White people

However, Jake did not find this sweet life alluring at all since he aspired to earn his money honestly. Zeddy, on the other hand, desired to become one of the proud sweetmen.

Jake was a carpenter and Zeddy a blacksmith, though they could not work in their fields, because White people occupied these professions. Therefore, they had to accept underpaid jobs below their professional level. Zeddy found them a well-paid job opportunity, however, in the middle of a strike. The situation around their new workplace escalated when two white men beat up one of the black workers. Jake was angry at Zeddy for bringing him there but Zeddy responded:

> "One thing I know is niggers am made foh life. And I want to live, boh, and feel plenty o' the juice o' life in mah blood. I wanta live and I wanta love. And niggers am got to work hard foh that. Buddy, I'll tell you this and I'll tell it to the wo'l' – all the crackers, all them poah white trash, all the nigger-hitting and nigger-breaking white folks – I loves life and I got to live and I'll scab through hell to live" (49).

This notion of African vitality reoccurs multiple times throughout the novel and portrays the mentality of working-class Black men.

In the following chapter, McKay reveals more about Zeddy's life. Before going North, he used to be married to a "crust-yellow girl" (55), who cheated on him with white men and eventually left him for the white lover and the smoother, simple life. Since then, Zeddy led an unsuccessful love life. He was full of aggressive, masculine energy, which some women venerated, but he still could not find a sweet woman.

One night, Zeddy, Jake, and a friend called Strawberry Lips went to Susy's apartment on Myrtle Avenue. Susy was a "chocolate-to-the-bone" (56) woman nicknamed "Gin-head Susy" for her regular gin consumption. She organized parties for men, which cost her a fortune, in a desperate search for a lover. All men always used her for money and free alcohol. Everyone considered her very ugly, however, not as ugly as her friend, Miss Curdy, a "putty-skinned mulattress with purple streaks on her face" (60). Susy, as well as Miss Curdy, fancied Jake right away, but Jake, irritated by the women's behavior and appearance, thought of his lost Baltimore ideal girl. Susy then turned her attention to

Zeddy and Miss Curdy to Strawberry Lips. Jake left Susy's with a thought on Harlem: "'Myrtle Avenue, (…), pretty name, all right, but it stinks like a sewer. Legs and feets! Come take me outa it back home to Harlem'" (74).

Zeddy eventually moved to Susy and began to live his dream sweet life. "Though Susy was not the prettiest, she treated him well. He appreciated her delicious cooking for she "belonged to the ancient aristocracy of black cooks" (77). However, when Zeddy decided to go to Harlem with Jake, Susy did not allow him to go:

> "What makes you niggers love Harlem so much? Because it's a bloody ungodly place where niggers nevah go to bed. All night running around speakeasies and cabarets, where bad, hell-bent nigger womens am giving up themselves to open sin" (79).

She also forbade him from visiting buffet flats. This matriarchal mood satisfied Susy for she felt proud to boss around a strong masculine man like Zeddy and it also provided her higher attention from the "yellow gin-swillers" (84). People in Harlem joked about Zeddy's new life "under Gin-head Susy's skirt" (84). One night, Zeddy came home drunk and when Susy asked him where he had been, he told her to shut up and threatened to choke her.

Zeddy had to prove he was a respectable, manly, mighty sweetman and partied for Susy's money. When Susy caught him with another girl, she said to Miss Curdy: "'Leave the plug-ugly nigger theah. I ain't got no more use foh him nohow'" (98). After the night, Zeddy drank half a pint of whiskey for courage and went home. Meanwhile, Susy had already packed his things and put the suitcase behind the door.

The next chapter discusses the closing of the Baltimore cabaret, where Jake has met his dream brown girl. The owner, despite strict policy, was not convicted for selling alcohol during Prohibition. Instead, the place was ordered to be shut down. However, Jake stopped going there after he met Rose because they usually went together to buffet flats. He often went to Madame Suarez's buffet flat, full of extraordinarily elegant girls. There were regularly three white rich special guests, one of them was an acquaintance of the owner of the Baltimore place. The Baltimore owner brought that white man to

Madame Suarez's buffet flat. The white men later revealed themselves as the *Vice Squad* – a police department that typically enforced law against prostitution, drug abuse, and illegal gambling. They disbanded Madame Suarez's buffet flat and everybody was fined, except for two white women. Madame Suarez was sent to prison. After this affair, cabarets in the Black Belt would no longer allow white or near-white customers.
In the next chapter, Jake leaves Rose. One day, he came home from work and some clues suggested that Rose cheated on him with a white man. He got very angry, called her a "slut" (115), and slapped her twice, which he had never done to any woman before. He left and then overheard Rose: "'A hefty-looking one like him, always acting so nice and proper. I almost thought he was getting sissy. But he's a ma-an all right. …'" (117), implying that domestic violence was expected of a man and considered manly. When Jake came back, Rose seduced him – she loved him more now after the incident, but he did not enjoy hitting women and so, feeling like he should get out of Harlem for some time, he deserted.

In the second part of the book, McKay describes Jake's journey as a dining car cook on the railroad. He befriended Ray, an exceptionally intelligent young "smooth pure ebony" (127) Haitian. Jake later found out Ray's father was imprisoned in Haiti for protesting against "Uncle Sam" (138), i.e., during the 1920s United States military occupation of Haiti (Lowney, 14). Ray's brother was killed for the same reason, and thus there was nobody to pay for his education. He had to start working to earn money. "Uncle Sam" also sent him to the US.

Jake learned a lot about Haiti from Ray, about how the French Revolution vigor "had lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island" to fight for their independence from French slave owners (McKay, 1987, 132), and about Toussaint Louverture, the leader of the slaves. "'A black man! A black man! Oh, I wish I'd been a soldier under sich a man!'" (132). Ray explained to him that the age of European revolutions "had lifted up ignorant people, even black, to the stature of gods" (133) and also that Blacks were competent enough to establish a country (Liberia). The fact that African Americans were so capable of fighting for their liberty surprised Jake for he, having been raised in America, considered all foreign people of color as "bush cannibals" (African) and "monkey-

chasers" (West Indian). Ray certainly opened his eyes and McKay does likewise to his readers.

The railroad workmen slept in horrible conditions, with dirty sheets and beds full of bugs. The railroad belonged to wealthy white men. The contrast between the riches of the owners and the conditions of the workers embodies the not-so-changed after-slavery social system.

The chef at the dining car was an excellent cook but treated his staff very poorly with no exception to the mulatto waiters. He was black as the others but refused to eat anything considered Afro-American. He was "big and naughty about not being 'no regular darky'! And although he came from Alabama country, he pretended not to know a coon tail from a rabbit foot" (162). He rejected his blackness. Nobody could stand the boss's behavior. One day, one of the workers pranked him, the chef lost control and attacked him, and was demoted to a different dining car as the second cook.

Jake visited Madame Laura's place. A white policeman came in and somebody yelled "'Raided!'", which scared the newcomers but not the regular guests, though the policeman was in love with a black girl who worked there and was protecting Madame Laura and the place.

Later, Jake was diagnosed with a serious sickness. The doctor advised him to stop drinking alcohol but Jake continued drinking beer at least. He took his illness with humor. Ray suggested that Jake should consider new ways of living, "'You can't just go on like a crazy ram goat as if you were living in the Middle Ages,'" (206) he warned Jake.

Jake thought it might have been nice to have somebody stable in his life, and, again, thought about his lost Baltimore girl. She was not elegant nor educated, but she was nice.

> Maybe if he found her again – it would be better than just running wild around like that! Thinking honestly about it, after all, he was never satisfied, flopping here and sleeping there. It gave him a little cocky pleasure to brag of his conquests to the fellows around the bar. But after all the swilling and boasting, it would be a thousand times nicer to have a little brown woman of his own to whom he could go home and be his simple self (212).

The outside world teased him with the smell of fried chicken and the sound of laughter. He missed the vitality of his people and Harlem life. Despite his illness, he decided to go out for food and drink. He met a friend Billy, owner of a gambling place, and drank with him. Quickly, an excruciating pain overwhelmed him. Doctor told Jake that should take the illness seriously because his health was completely in his own hands, so he should stop with the alcohol and late-night entertainment.

Billy went to see Jake, together with a sweetman Yaller Prince. Ray and his student friend James Grant visited Jake, too. They talked about the sweet life, as Ray often criticized the African American subculture in Harlem. He despised non-working "sweet yallers" (241), as much as Grant. However, sociologically, the sweetlife had its substantiation since black women found employment much easier than black men. As Curry argues in his analysis of Richard Wright's *Man of All Work*, black males were wanted for industrial jobs but not for domestic jobs. Even though the main protagonist in *Man of All Work* was trained as a professional cook, he was forced to dress himself as a woman and take on his wife's identity to be hired as a cook and housekeeper (Curry, 143). Thus, it was not unusual for a black woman to work and financially support her man.

Ray then narrated a story about a pimp with whom he shared a house and also spent some friendly time. This pimp had become completely dependent on the money his wife made through prostitution, and so he lived the ideal life of a sweetman. However, his wife got fatally sick and even though he was so desperate without money, he did not even look for a job. Eventually, he committed suicide; Ray was the one who found him dead in a bathroom.

Before Ray and Grant left for Australia and Europe for their new job on a freighter, Jake invited them to a farewell feed at Aunt Hattie's place, which was Jake's favorite. They

ate and drank, and then went to a cabaret to jazz. Jazz over the ocean was nothing like Harlem jazz so they had to experience it one last time.

Next, Jake appeared with Billy in the Bronx, a neighborhood next to Harlem. In the street, they witnessed a heated conflict between Yaller Prince and a brown man. It turned out that Yaller Prince left one woman for a richer one. The brown man stood up for the woman and knocked Yaller Prince with a glass bottle. The police were absent during the fight but showed up right afterward and one of the policemen called an ambulance for him. Billy uttered that Yaller Prince should carry a gun if he wanted to play with fire like in a place where black men fight over women so dangerously. Jake pointed out that no matter the skin color, men fight over women like that everywhere, even in Europe. "But Harlem is the craziest place foh that, (…). Wese too thick together in Harlem. Wese all just lumped together without a chanst to choose and so we nacherally hate one another" (McKay, 1987, 285).

Jake and Billy then went to Shelba Place to "jazz around a little" (294). Jake was just dancing with a girl when he caught a glimpse of his little brown Baltimore girl. Her name was Felice and he found out that she was not a regular prostitute. She had a job so she did not spend every night in cabarets. Jake also found out that Felice was at Shelba Place with her current man. However, she decided to leave him for Jake. She went home to pack her things. Then, Felice remembered she had forgotten her lucky charm necklace. She always wore it but that night she had taken it off. Jake opposed it, claiming that it was only because she was not wearing it that they found each other. Jake and his friends went to order drinks at the bar. When Jake was returning to the table, he saw Zeddy holding Felice's wrist and yelling that she was his woman. He took out a razor and wanted to cut Jake but Jake pointed a gun at him. Zeddy said: "You come gunning at me, but you didn't go gunning at the Germans. Nosah! You was scared and runned away from the army" (327). This defamation hurt Jake deeply. He went outside and Felice ran after him. She did not believe what Zeddy had said. They were talking about leaving Harlem and going to Chicago, when Zeddy came out with his hands up. He apologized and asked Jake to pardon his behavior. They hugged and Zeddy walked away out of Jake's life for good. Felice still thought they should leave Harlem for news might spread

and they could accuse Jake of deserting the U.S. Army and consequently send him to prison. Felice went back for her lucky charm necklace for she believed if she had it on, Jake would not have gotten into the fight with Zeddy. They went to the subway station and left Harlem.

3.5. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

Hurston's novel tells the story of Janie, a light-skinned woman on a quest for her own voice and identity, community, and life fulfillment. Black male critics such as Richard Wright or Alain Locke hardly criticized the work since they considered its only contribution to amusing the white audience. They found Hurston's depiction of the black southern life shallow and thoughtless and not deep enough documentation of the social and racial struggles of Afro-Americans. However, Hurston does not fail to document and affirm the Black folk traditions. Washington opposes in the foreword that "her [Janie's] journey would take her, not away from, but deeper and deeper into blackness" (foreword by Washington; Hurston, 1990b, ix), and thus it highly contributed to the Harlem Renaissance.

The plot starts with the main protagonist, Janie Woods, returning home to Eatonville. The local people, sitting on porches, gossip about her life. A few years ago, they saw her leaving Eatonville in a satin dress with a handsome young black man. Now she comes back with nothing, dirty and exhausted. "They sat in judgement" (Hurston, 1990b, 2), wondering if the man left her for a younger woman or if he stole her money and vanished, as they predicted. Phoeby, Janie's true friend, implies that the others would like to know her story, too. "'Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Phoeby. 'Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf'" (6). This scene highlights the oral tradition so typical for Afro-American culture. Then, Janie tells her whole story to Phoeby.

Janie tended to romanticize life and to connect deeply with nature. She enjoyed sitting under a pear tree, asking herself questions about life and searching for answers. She imagined love like the pear tree in spring blossom.

> Oh to be a pear tree – any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! (…) She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? (11).

When she was sixteen, Nanny saw her kissing the "trashy nigger" (12) and realized she was very old and would not be living much longer. She wanted to provide her granddaughter with a good life. However, Nanny's visions of a good life differed from Janie's. She tried to ensure her granddaughter an easy life by setting Janie up with Logan Killicks, an old and ugly but wealthy white man. Nanny could not understand that she would much rather prefer true love over financial security.

After Nanny died, "Janie waited a bloom time, and a green time, and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world, she began to stand around the gate and expect things" (23). She realized marriage did not entail love.

Logan Killicks did not treat Janie very well. He went to buy a mule for Janie so that she could plow the field, too. While he was gone, a "seal-brown" (26) handsome wealthy man, Joe Starks, came and told Janie about a fully colored Florida town. "He did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon" (28). He wanted to make Janie his wife, so she left Logan without a divorce. She and Joe got married and set on a journey to Joe's desired town – Eatonville, Florida.

The town did not look as Joe expected when they got there. "'Just like Ah thought, (…) A whole heap uh talk and nobody doin' nothin'" (32). He started making it his town according to his plans. His strong voice and admirable spirit amazed the locals. He emphasized creating a big community. People believed in him and even made him the mayor without voting. One of them called Mrs. Starks to give a speech but Jody (as Janie liked to call him) interfered: "'She's uh woman and her place is in de home'" (41). Joe

then told Janie that she should be grateful because he had gained a big voice which made her a big woman.

Soon, Eatonville grew and Joe profited from renting the houses. He also opened a store but as a mayor did not have much time to manage it. Therefore, he left Janie in charge of selling. Over time, he distanced Janie from the community. He was also buying expensive things that would distinguish them from the townsfolk.

> The town had a basketful of feelings good and bad about Joe's positions and possessions, but none had the temerity to challenge him. They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and then again he was all of these things because the town bowed down (47).

Janie had to hide her beautiful long hair, the erotic symbol, under a scarf because Joe could not stand men admiring her. Jody forbade her to integrate into the town community. He did not understand why she would even want to get together with the "trashy people" (50).

One day, Joe saved an old mule by buying it from a man, who had exhausted it and treated it very poorly, to give it peace. He gained everybody's respect, including Janie's:

> "Jody, dat wuz uh mighty fine thing fuh you tuh do. 'Taint everybody would have thought of it, 'cause it ain't no everyday thought. Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. Something like George Washington and Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln, he had de whole United States tuh rule so he freed the Negroes. You got uh town so you freed the mule. You have tuh have power tuh free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something" (55).

At that moment, Janie used her voice for the first time in front of the people. The townspeople never thought she was such a great speaker because Jody had never given her a chance to speak. The mule was free, people fed it and it was thriving. After it died, Joe organized a goodbye ceremony. Janie could not attend, as much as she would have loved to, for she was ordered to stay in the store. Janie developed strong resentment towards Jody and even started to talk back at him. Nevertheless, he always had to speak last. He considered women inferior and incompetent: "'Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows'" (67).

When a picture of her and her husband broke, she took it as a sign of the end of their relationship. Jody often abused her, verbally as well as physically. While she was still looking young, Jody was much older and not in good physical shape. Nevertheless, that did not stop him from teasing her for her age. "She saw he was hurting inside so she let it pass without talking" (73). Once, Jody told her she was so old her breasts were almost touching her knees. Janie stood up for herself for the first time. She compared him to a woman in menopause and implied that he did not have what it took to brag like that.

> "T'an't no use in gettin' all mad, Janie, 'cause Ah mention you ain't no young gal no mo'. Nobody in heah ain't lookin' for no wife outa yuh. Old as you is."
>
> "Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (75).

Jody beat Janie heavily. He had been making her feel small all those years and when she fought back once and made him feel small that one time, he got angry with her.

Soon, Joe got seriously ill. He thought Janie wanted to poison him so he refused to eat her food and also forbade her to come to his sick room, which crushed Janie. She would never hurt him. She got him a proper doctor and he said it was too late to save his kidneys and that he was about to die soon. Janie forced herself to his room to see him and told him everything she had on her mind. She said he changed a lot and that he only cared about his business and not about her. It upset him badly: "'Shut up! Ah wish thunder and lightnin' would kill yuh!'" (82). Janie kept talking:

> "now you got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo'self if you wants any love and any sympathy in dis world. You ain't tried tuh pacify nobody but yo'self. Too busy listening tuh yo' own big voice" (82).

At that very moment, he died. Janie went to a mirror, ripped down the scarf covering her head, and let her hair fall loose. After her husband's death, she changed just two things – she burned all the headscarves and started sitting on the porch with the others. She realized she had still been forced to accept Nanny's ideas. All of Joe's property

belonged to her now, so she obtained the financial security like Nanny wished, but still was not truly happy.

About half a year after her husband's death, a tall handsome man called Tea Cake came to the store to buy cigarettes. He was very charming, made Janie laugh, and taught her chess. She was glowing inside because Jody used to say the game was too hard for her female brain. Tea Cake took her fishing, complimented her, and brushed her hair. She hesitated to let him into her heart. She argued with the age gap but he opposed that age had nothing to do with love but only with convenience. Soon, she realized that "he could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in the spring" (101). He took her fishing and more, so she did not have to stay home anymore. However, Janie's relationship with Tea Cake upset the Eatonville people. It was nine months since her husband's death and she stopped wearing black clothes, which they found immensely disrespectful towards her dead husband. She also dressed like a younger woman and wore new hairstyles, which these conservative Blacks disapproved of as well. They thought that he was just after her money. They did not see how happy she felt with Tea Cake. Phoeby, her Eatonville best friend, said: "'Dat's jealousy and malice. Some uh dem very mens wants tuh do whut dey claim deys skeered Tea Cake is doin''" (106) Nevertheless, Phoeby tried to convince Janie to marry a rich man from Sanford, to which Janie responded: "'Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine'" (108). Janie sold the store and left Eatonville wearing a beautiful blue satin dress because she was soon to be re-married.

Janie decided she would tell Tea Cake about her money later when she was certain he would not use her for it. She had just two hundred dollars in cash and hid it in her luggage. They got married right away and then Tea Cake brought her to his room. The very first morning, he left early to buy some fish for lunch. However, he did not come back. Janie looked into her bag and found her money missing. She thought that everybody was right; that he just used her.

The next evening, however, Tea Cake appeared at the door. He explained what happened and did not realize that she would love to be a part of his world, including the underworld. Tea Cake promised to win the money back in a game and he did. She told him she had much more money in the bank, to which he replied she should put even the two hundred in the bank.

The couple then went to the Everglades. Tea Cake found himself a job on the muck and also a modest house for the two of them. Soon, more and more workers came and a community started to build.

> All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants (125).

One day, Tea Cake suggested she should work with him on the field because he missed her during the day, so Janie started picking beans, too. Janie enjoyed the work but, more importantly, she loved the community. People gathered every night around their house to tell stories and gamble, and she was finally able to participate, too. She could even speak her mind if she wanted to.
Mrs. Turner, a light-skinned woman, despised all black people, even Tea Cake. She wanted to introduce her brother to Janie. Tea Cake then slapped Janie to show his dominance in front of Turners and all the workers discussed it the next day. They envied them both, Tea Cake and Janie. "The way he petted and pampered her as if those two or three face slaps had nearly killed her made the women see visions and the helpless way she hung on him made men dream dreams" (140). They envied that Janie had light skin which shows bruises because dark skin typically does not bruise. Also, most Colored women fought back when they were hit by their husbands but Janie did not.

Janie noticed groups of Indigenous Americans going east. One of them told her there was blooming sawgrass, meaning that a hurricane would come, and therefore, they were leaving. Most people did not believe that. Tea Cake commented: "'Indians don't know much uh nothin', tuh tell de truth. Else dey's own dis country still'" (148).

The storm eventually hit land and covered the sky with darkness. Tea Cake and Janie sat in their house with their friend Motor Boat.

> They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God (151).

The nearby lake overflowed and flooded the surrounding communities. Tea Cake and Janie were scared to stay in the house so they decided to swim to Palm Beach. Tea Cake supported Janie while swimming which immensely exhausted him. Then, he saved Janie from an angry dog but got bit by it. It turned out that the dog had rabies and infected Tea Cake.

Janie sent for a white doctor and he confirmed it was, unfortunately, too late for any antidote to heal him. Tea Cake was going to die soon and the doctor warned Janie before possible anger attacks and contagiousness. Still, she insisted on taking care of him herself.

When Tea Cake found out Mrs. Turner's brother arrived back in town, he started to have jealous outbursts at Janie and even hid a gun under his pillow. When Janie found the gun, she unloaded it so that it would click three times before it would shoot a bullet. Janie had hoped but took precautions by preparing a riffle for her self-defense. Tea Cake, in one of his delirious states of mind, aimed his gun at her. The gun snapped three times. His sickness was telling him to kill Janie. Janie had to shoot him otherwise he would kill her first.

At her trial, there was a jury of twelve white men who were supposed to decide if she should get the death penalty for killing Tea Cake. "That was funny too. Twelve strange men who did not know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her were going to sit on the thing" (176). People of the muck came to the courtroom, too. They adored Tea Cake and wanted justice for him. Janie felt scared. The doctor, as Janie's witness, told the jury the truth – Tea Cake's sickness threatened her life. The court freed Janie after finding

her not guilty. The colored folk believed the jury freed her only because of Janie's light skin. They figured that Tea Cake was a dark man so it did not matter to the white jury. If she had killed a white man, they would find her guilty. "'Well, you know whut dey say 'uh white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth. 'Dey do as dey please'" (180). Despite that, Janie invited them all to the funeral because she knew they loved Tea Cake. She was not wearing a new dress; she wore her work overalls. "She was too busy feeling grief to dress like grief" (180). People started blaming Mrs. Turner's brother instead of Janie and they ran him out of the Everglades. Janie left, too, for she could not live there without her true love. She returns to Eatonville and narrates her whole story to Phoeby. Janie's story inspires her friend and she decides to convince her husband to take her fishing.

> "Phoeby, you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" (183).

4. The Color Line

More than four hundred years ago, the first batch of captured Africans, who were exchanged for food and forced to leave their homes, landed at Port Comfort in Virginia via a Dutch slave ship. Evidence shows that, in Virginia, these people were not registered by their name, only by their race, i.e., by the way they visually differed from the colonists. As Deetz argues in her article, this denotes the first attempts to formulate a "racial caste". Deetz also points out that even though slavery was not a new concept in 1619, meaning, there already had been cultures that embodied the slavish hierarchy, it fundamentally changed on the American continent since there, slave status became fixed and inherited (Deetz, 2019) for more than two centuries. Whereas in some cultures, a slave potentially could move up the social ladder, and children were not born slaves; in North America, it was the other way around.

> Some one has well said, we may easily forgive those who injure us, but it is hard to forgive those whom we injure. The greatest injury this side of death, which one human being can inflict on another, is to enslave him, to blot out his personality, degrade his manhood and sink him to the condition of a beast of burden ; and just this has been done here during more than two centuries (Douglass, 572).

In *The Color Line*, Douglass suggests that, after slavery was abolished (in 1865[4]), the antipathy for Black people continued. He then aptly points out that slavery was a great business. Because a slave master had invested a thousand dollars into slaves, he had many reasons to prevent slavery from being abolished. Therefore, slave owners found their way to influence the press and politics to then help feed a bad picture of African Americans (Douglass, 573), which created heavy barriers of irresponsible power and dominance that colored people had to overcome.

The color line, a term frequently occurring after the 13th Amendment had been added to the US Constitution, is deeply connected to racial segregation. Though it is not quite clear when the term was used for the first time, the first significant work titled *The Color Line* by Frederick Douglass was published in 1881. Many scholars have discussed the

[4] https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment

color line, among them, e.g., W. E. B. Du Bois and his crucial work *The Souls of Black Folk* from 1903.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines color line as "a social and legal system in which people of different races are separated and not given the same rights and opportunities[5]". In other words, there was (is) a line drawn between the Whites and the Colored.

Douglass states that "prejudice of race has at some time in their history afflicted all nations" (Douglass, 567). However, the author contradicts his own words later on by saying there is "no color prejudice in Europe, except among Americans who reside there" (Douglass, 571). He sees it as "a moral disease" brought to Europe by "infected" Americans (Douglass, 572). In *Home to Harlem*, McKay echoes this idea when Jake, as well as other African Americans, served in the First World War but was not allowed by the white Americans to fight Germans.

Douglass also points out examples of non-racial prejudice, e.g., the Indian Hindu caste system, or Catholics versus Protestants. (Douglas, 574). Another example is when people of some Yorkshire towns held prejudice against strangers so strongly that they would throw stones at foreigners who walked their streets (Douglass, 568). This shows the fact that not only the difference of race provoked prejudice in the world. However, racial prejudice remained the strongest and longest force driving and feeding the social oppression of African Americans.

Douglass defines prejudice as a "moral magic that can change virtue into vice, and innocence to crime ; which makes the dead man the murderer, and holds the living homicide harmless" and suggests that everything people of color do wrong is taken for granted, while everything they do right is suspicious and disreputably in the eyes of Whites (Douglass, 569). However, if color were the trigger of hate, then Whites would

[5] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/color-line

not be able to relax in a world where every human, themselves included, comes from Africa and, thus, has Negro ancestors.

The social situation of African Americans in the early 20th century stood as an onerous obstruction in their way of finding self-consciousness, or, as Locke describes it, "spiritual emancipation" (Locke, 2). The influence of prejudice finds them everywhere and all the time – when they apply for a job (Emma Lou in *Blacker the Berry*), when they look for accommodation (the narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man*), and, tragically, in the courtroom (Janie's court in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*).

> Without crime or offense against law or gospel, the colored man is the Jean Valjean of American society. He has escaped from the galleys, and hence all presumptions are against him. The workshop denies him work, and the inn denies him shelter; the ballot-box a fair vote, and the jury-box a fair trial. He has ceased to be the slave of an individual, but has in some sense become the slave of society (Douglass, 568).

As Davin Lyons depicts, the color line, i.e., the racial division of society, was supported by laws. This ingrained the power and dominance of White Americans (Lyons, 23-24). Douglass pointed out this idea as well, 138 years earlier: "Formerly it was said he [the negro] was incapable of learning, and at the same time it was a crime against the State for any man to teach him to read" (Douglass, 576). The Laws of Virginia included many oppressive laws, e.g., the *Casual Killing Act of 1669*, which made it legal for slave masters to kill their slaves as a result of punishment. (Waler Hening, 270). Another law, issued 180 years later, was the federal *Fugitive Slave Act*, which was an attempt to make a compromise between free Northern states and South slave states. This law ordered all fugitive slaves to be returned to their slave masters, even when captured in the Northern "free" states[6].

> Years have passed away since then,—ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation's feast (Du Bois, 10)

[6] PECK, ROWAN, WINSTON. *Black Americans and the Law*. Berkley School of Law Liberty. Timeline available at https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=1tGZ6Nr055nYPbmxHT-Pz2xNwof6z1S-OhhqStYfjuDc&font=Lustria-Lato&lang=en&timenav_position=top&initial_zoom=2&height=650

Although the five novels, analyzed in this thesis, were all written or published well after the abolition of slavery, specifically between the years 1912 and 1937, the authors vividly display the struggles of African Americans adjusting to freedom, grasping self-awareness and racial pride, and fighting intra-racial prejudice, considerably determined by color line. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for instance, the protagonist's grandmother, just like the author's own grandparents, was born into slavery, and that experience forms part of the plot.

5. The analysis of the color line

5.1. The color line in *The Blacker the Berry*

Thurman's main protagonist Emma Lou has been encountering intra-racial prejudice since childhood. Her skin color held such a power over her life that she blamed everything on it. She relentlessly fought against the hue of her skin with bleach and makeup before she finally found self-acceptance.

Emma Lou's mother Jane had sinned against her race, at least in the eyes of her parents, by marrying a dark black man instead of a mulatto. If Emma Lou's father had been a mulatto, she would not have inherited such a dark complexion and thus lived a better, more privileged life.

As Thompson and Keith indicate, society placed women with dark complexion at the very bottom of the social hierarchy (Thompson and Keith, 338). This can be seen multiple times throughout the novel, for example, when Emma Lou went to a workshop in Harlem. Having a college degree and the ambition to become a stenographer, she was offered just menial jobs, such as a dishwasher or a nurse. In another workshop, she was told she had been rejected because the jobs she applied for needed pretty girls. Suggesting Emma Lou's beauty depended on her skin color, the workshop lady advised her to become a teacher, for which a woman did not have to be pretty. In the last part of the book, she indeed became a teacher, but still, her coworkers, as well as the students, mocked her for the terrible makeup that she used to cover her blackness.

Emma Lou's makeup habits embody what the aforementioned scholars discussed in their research: attractiveness is closely connected to skin color, and because women of all cultures ordinarily face heavy beauty expectations more than men, "stereotypes of attractiveness and color preference are more profound for Black women" (Thompson and Keith, 339). Emma Lou repeatedly found herself in the position of a victim of negative appearance judgments. It resulted in her low self-esteem. "'A dark skinned Black woman who feels herself unattractive, however, may think that she has nothing

to offer society no matter how intelligent or inventive she is' [Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992, 42]" (Thompson and Keith, 339).

> Get a diploma?—What did it mean to her? College? —Perhaps. A job? —Perhaps again. She was going to have a high school diploma, but it would mean nothing to her whatsoever. (Thurman, 23)

Another example of this struggle occurred when Emma Lou asked for a role in a cabaret play. The director rejected her, even though the white and mulatto actresses played Black women and, therefore, corked their skin darker, which Emma would not need to do. However, the director told her the actresses needed to be white or mulatto, meaning, pretty. Moreover, some male dark-skinned actors were playing in the cabaret. Again, the main protagonist faced sexism, as well as racism and the inevitable beauty standards expectations, same as during her studies in California, where she had been rejected by the sorority of Colored people.

Emma Lou sinned against her race, too, when she met the temperamental and full-of-life student Hazel. Emma Lou failed to accept Hazel because of the intra-racial bias. Emma Lou's character here represents the Old Negro, depicted in Locke's survey *Enter the New Negro*, mentioned above. Emma Lou tried to fix the social perception of her by choosing with whom she would spend time, and searching for the educated, classy students. Hazel did not fit into that category. Emma Lou, unaware of her own racial prejudice, saw her just as a too-loud, too-expressive, and obscene girl. Therefore, in Emma's eyes, she should attend some college in the South, where people like her "belonged", rather than this civilized university. Not only would appearance determine Emma Lou's social status, but also the people with whom she surrounded herself. She did not accept her origin, features, and nature, and thus tried to erase it from her soul by attempting to be white in every aspect – education, manners, even skin color, which she covered in makeup. However, her plans to rise in society through these attempts made her hypocritically prejudiced and victimize others in the same way she was victimized.

Emma Lou's grandparents had placed this way of thinking in her head when she was a child, hating her biological father. Her stepfather Aloysius, hating and despising the dark black relatives, only invigorated that. Thus, Emma Lou perceived her dark skin as a tragedy. As scholar Basu suitably implies, Emma Lou "could not place herself not only within the White community but also within her community as well" (Basu, 5), most importantly, in her family and her home, where she was the darkest-skinned person, and even hidden by her mother from the visiting guests. It appears that Emma Lou's constant need to change places was her physical, subconscious, id response to the environment she lived in and the racism and criticism she repeatedly experienced. The main protagonist wanted to find the right sort of people, so she always moved: from the rural south to California, from there to Harlem. Yet, she could not find a community anywhere. Even when she met the Harlem intellectuals or her dream man, she was never satisfied or relieved.

Despite her dark black skin, a despised physical attribute, she dreamed of encountering her dream, light-skinned, educated, well-mannered man and automatically overlooked all the other men who showed interest in her, for example, John, who helped her when she first came to Harlem. Emma Lou saw John as a

> too pudgy and dark, too obviously ex-cottonpicker from Georgia. He was unlettered and she couldn't stand for that, for she liked intelligent-looking, slender, light-brown-skinned men, like, well… like the one who was just passing. She admired him boldly. He looked at her, then over her, and passed on (Thurman, 97).

Additionally, the social tension caused by her and society's prejudice prevented her dream men from approaching her. For instance, Arline, the white actress Emma Lou worked for as a maid, had a brother, who fancied asking Emma Lou for a dance in a cabaret. However, the social perception of the image of a white man dancing with a pitch-black woman was unacceptable.

> The ethics of the case were complex. She was a Negro and a hired maid. But was she a hired maid after hours, and in this environment? Emma Lou had difficulty in suppressing a smile, then she decided to end the suspense. "Why don't you two dance. No need of letting the music go to waste." Both Arline and her brother were obviously relieved. (Thurman, 110)

A similar situation arose when Alva asked her for a dance while acting in front of his companions as he did it out of pity.

Alva embodies McKay's *sweet man*. He does not work, uses Emma Lou for money, keeps a relationship with not just one woman, and enjoys entertainment and alcohol. His character also impersonates the intra-racial prejudice toward darker-colored people – he prefers to attend public events with Geraldine "with her olive-colored skin and straight black hair" (Thurman, 138) rather than with Emma Lou. At some point, he had to take Emma Lou out, for he:

> did not wish to risk losing her before the end of summer, but neither could he risk that he would be derided for his unseemly preference for 'dark meat,' and told publicly without regard for her feelings, that 'black cats must go' (Thurman, 138).

When Alva took her to the rent party among the talented, outstanding, non-prejudicial group of Harlem people, black as well as one white man, Emma Lou found herself disgusted by their attitudes. For instance, she could not understand how could the Colored people say "nigger" in front of a white person. "Didn't they have any race pride or proper bringing up? Didn't they have any common sense?" (Thurman, 143), again, suggesting that Emma Lou feels the constant need to behave as "white" as possible in front of White people. At the party, an intellectual named Truman, a briefly occurring but crucial character in the novel, had a speech that aroused Emma Lou but cogently summed up the socialization process behind intra-racial prejudice:

> "you can't blame light Negroes for being prejudiced against dark ones. All of you know that white is the symbol of everything pure and good, whether that everything be concrete or abstract. (…) We are all living in a totally white world, where all standards are the standards of the white man, and where almost invariably what the white man does is right, and what the black man does is wrong, unless it is precedented by something a white man has done. (…) It merely explains, not justifies, the evil—or rather, the fact of intra-racial segregation. Mulattoes have always been accorded more consideration by white people than their darker brethren. They were made to feel superior even during slave days. (…) As I said before, Negroes are after all, human beings, and they are subject to be influenced and controlled by the same forces and factors that influence and control other human beings. In an environment where there are so many color-prejudiced whites, there are bound to be a number of color-prejudice blacks. … it is no wonder that even the blackest individual will seek out some one more black than himself to laugh at" (Thurman 143-146).

Truman here essentially describes Emma Lou's psyche. Having the darkest black skin possible, she was forced to seek out a different blackness in others. She focused on their "black" behavior, language, grammar mistakes, and gestures, to laugh at. Unsurprisingly, Truman's monologue thus strongly affected her. She took it as the people at the party insulted her and blamed Alva for bringing her there. They argued about it until Alva said:

> "It's always color, color, color. If I speak to any of my friends on the street you always make some reference to their color (…). And you're always beefing about being black. You're not the only black person in this world. There are gangs of them right here in Harlem, and I don't see them going around a-moanin' 'cause they ain't half white" (Thurman, 179-180).

After Alva pointed out that Emma Lou is "a trifle too color-conscious" (Thurman, 179), and that the color consciousness of people like Emma Lou was the cause of color-prejudice, she began to ask herself if she encouraged intra-racial prejudice simply by anticipating it. These thoughts guided her to the right path to eventually find self-assurance.

Contradictorily to all the struggles Emma Lou dealt with, Thurman portrays a decent inter-racial storyline – the time she worked for a retired actress Clare Sloane. Her husband, Campbell Kitchen, a white intellectual, was, in many ways, helping the African American community in Harlem. For instance, he was a publicist and a sponsor of many Negro artists. He genuinely cared about the advancement of the Negro people, which he expressed by treating Emma Lou like an equal companion rather than a housemaid and therefore trampling the color line principles.

An interesting situation emerged when Emma Lou encountered Gwendolyn, a light-brown, educated girl, i.e., a person of the right kind of people. Gwendolyn's mindset utterly differed from that of Emma Lou. Namely, Gwendolyn grew up in an environment where the norm was marrying and having children with real Negroes, thus, the exact opposite of the idea of colorism. Gwendolyn was raised normalizing the Negro bloodline, not decolorizing it. She and her mother resisted intra-racial separation. If

Emma Lou had been raised by Gwendolyn's mother, possibly, her self-evaluation would not have been as negative and her aspirations would have been different, as family and environment strongly influence one's habits, perceptions, and attitudes.

Based on the mentioned literature, Thurman's demonstration of the social aspects of Negro (women) life, such as poor work opportunities, helplessness of not fitting in any community because of color prejudice, and low self-esteem, is valid. Skin tone functions as a determinant of the amount of opportunities one has, therefore, the socioeconomic status, and, thus, happiness. Occupying the very bottom of the social ladder as a deeply Black woman, the main protagonist of *The Blacker the Berry* distinctly illustrates how the social system treated African Americans in the 1920s, i.e. the struggles of the color line.

5.2. The color line in *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man*

Johnson's novel portrays racial issues differently than the other analyzed novels. It deals with passing for white and the issues it brings to an individual who faces the dilemma of choosing either the white side or black side of the color line.

Unaware of his Negro descent, the narrator considered himself white until the school incident forced him to ask his mother the crucial question: "Tell me, mother, am I a nigger?" (Johnson, 8). Finding out he had the best Southern blood in his veins led him to start noticing some visual features and social aspects he did not notice before, as children are not naturally aware of the idea of race; and to begin perceiving himself through the eyes of others. Though he could easily pass for white with his fair skin, education, and good manners, this, as Johnson refers to it, "dual personality" (Johnson, 9) accompanied him until the very end of the novel, where he regrets his decision to give up on his African American identity. W. E. B. Du Bois aptly described this double consciousness of Colored people in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903, 8)

During the visit of the narrator's father, the narrator felt "there was something about the affair which had to be hid" (Johnson, 16). Later in the novel, when the main protagonist met his father at the opera, he realized the tragedy of it. This, again, suggests it was socially unacceptable for a white person to be seen with a person of color. Douglass profoundly commented:

> A good but simple-minded Abolitionist said to me that he was not ashamed to walk with me down Broadway arm-in-arm, in open daylight, and evidently thought he was saying something that must be very pleasing to my self-importance, but it occurred to me, at the moment, this man does not dream of any reason why I might be ashamed to walk arm-in-arm with him through Broadway in open daylight (Douglass, 576).

Another case of the color line appeared when Shiny, the darkest and the most successful student, gave a speech on graduation day. Being a dark-skinned student, there was an overpressure put on his performance for, as mentioned earlier, white dominant society expected a dark-colored person to fail and, therefore, would take Shiny's failure for granted. Shiny succeeded, though, and his speech deeply influenced the narrator. It evoked his pride in being a member of the African American community, as well as his desire to honor and glorify the ethnic group of which he was a part.

The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man portrays, among other things, how prejudice influenced the everyday lives of African Americans in the South, for example, when looking for accommodation or a restaurant. Even though the main protagonist of this novel would pass for white and could have been served a meal anywhere, Johnson suggests that those who showed features of Africanism, i.e., the inferior ones, had been doomed to eat in a poor-quality eatery.

Throughout the novel, Johnson often uses music to paint the plot setting, e.g., the link between Beethoven's *Pathetique* and the narrator's life. However, the two musical forms used in the novel, classical music and ragtime, also function as two different social and political backgrounds. According to Barnhart, "Johnson uses music in *The*

Autobiography to critique the role of time in the racial formations and expectations of the early twentieth century" (Barnhart, 551). Classical music, indeed, is rooted in Europe and, therefore, represents the white tradition; ragtime mirrors the tradition of Colored people, hence originating among the African American community. However, the two musical forms are not antagonistic for they both emerged out of complex socioeconomic circumstances and not out of limited bio-culture (Barnhart, 553). Ragtime developed not just out of African heritage but also out of the conditions created by the white-dominant society inside of which African Americans lived.

The fact that the patron demanded his trustee play at night, not respecting his sleep and, therefore, as Barnhart suggests, rupturing his time (Barnhart, 554), conveys the relationship between an owner and a slave. Although forcing the narrator to play on command, the patron purposely abstained from body reaction, i.e., dancing or even tapping his foot to the rhythm. Barnhart argues that this is the patron's way of staying at a distance from his "employee" (Barnhart, 564), and thus keeping his superior position. Even though the patron saved the narrator from the bowels of the New York underworld and helped him to break through in the music world, he did not forget their heritage differences and stayed careful about not crossing the color line.

Eventually, the main protagonist found himself not satisfied with his companion's behavior, left behind his ambition to become a "white" classical composer, and developed an eagerness to return to the United States, research the Negro themes, and convert them into classical music.

The patron, a modernist, despised racial segregation. Nevertheless, his perceptions prove he viewed the issue through the lens of a white person. Namely, he did not understand and instead mocked the narrator's decision. He told him he would then lose the privileges he possessed as a (visually) white person and would directly make a Negro out of himself. He would voluntarily expose himself to violence and prejudice. "To the patron, race is something that one assumes rather than something one is born into" (Barnhart, 554).

On the boat to America, he met a broad-minded, optimistic, black doctor and they discussed the inconsistent race question. The narrator realized that the huge social pressure comes from the natural unconscious tendency of African Americans to marry mulattos for they are more desirable by Whites for various work positions, and therefore acquire economic safety. The doctor makes a good point by saying that people judge Black society by emphasizing the worst of them – the "lazy, loafing, good-for-nothing darkies" (73), whereas they judge other races by the best examples.

The narrator's return to the South glutted him with other racial struggles. For example, he noticed that local people treated him differently before and after they found out he was of African American descent. Barnhart also points out an important matter:

> The narrator imagines his trip to the South as a mining expedition in which he aims his headlamp at the obscure backwaters of small southern communities in search of the most valuable veins of musical ore to chisel out their surroundings (Barnhart, 556).

Then, he takes his gathered material elsewhere to purify it into the finished product (Barnhart, 556). This interesting idea sees the narrator as a miner, who digs up themes and inspirations from the southern communities, and processes them somewhere more fitting for his envisioned (classical music) form, suggesting that classical music cannot be created in the environment of African Americans, which could, again, indicate the gulf between classical music and ragtime as both emerged from a different racial tradition, however, ragtime, and later developed jazz music, would probably not see the light of day if it were not for the sorrows initiated by slave politics in the United States.

After the narrator witnessed the lynching of a black man and that people of color were not treated any differently than in slavery, the shame of being identified with the African American community ousted him from the South to New York City. Seeing a person of color in such a humiliating and degrading situation caused him to internalize his former companion's worldview and to realize "the essentially unchanging nature of the world" (Barnhart, 556).

In New York, he went back to using his privilege of “passing for white” and became a real estate investor, which placed him among the white elite of the City. His dual personality, or, as Du Bois calls it, double-consciousness, found him again, though, when he faced the dilemma of telling his blond white girlfriend that he was not white and that, under his skin, he had southern blood. “Under the strange light in her eyes, I felt that I was growing black and thick-featured and crimp-haired. She appeared to not have comprehended what I had said” (Johnson, 96). He expected her to perceive him that way as people usually did when they found out about his origin, since the mainstream, “blue vein” society considered it uncanny for a white person to mingle with the Negro race. Her initial reaction supported his expectations; surprisingly she overcame the social pressure and returned to him.

At the end of the novel, the main protagonist once again found himself longing for fulfilling his potential as the voice of the American Negro and not giving up on his Southern heritage. He spiraled up and down, from the easier life to the more challenging one, from elite society to the underworld, from classical music to ragtime, from white to black. This perfectly supports what Du Bois had written in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,— this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (Du Bois, 9).

Johnson’s novel offers an elaborate preview of another color line issue, that is the hopeless disability of Black people to find harmony between their Negro and American self and to be accepted for what they truly are without prejudice, pressure, or expectations. The narrator was forced to choose either the life of privilege and decent opportunities, or the low-quality life of suppression.

5.3. The color line in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

Jonah's Gourd Vine portrays Hurston's unique and undaunted insight into the life of African
Americans from the rawest angles, emphasizing the African features, attitudes, and way of thinking, as well as some parts of her own life.

In this novel, Hurston noticeably uses natural phenomena as a coherent accompaniment to real situations that her characters experience, e.g., the aforementioned scene of nature judging John who was crossing a fierce river after having sinned with a mistress. The very first page of the novel begins with Amy Crittenden's comment on a coming storm: "Ole Massa gwinter scrub floors tuhday" (Hurston, 1990a, 1). The storm truly came, despite her husband Ned's objections, and, at the same time, an argument between the couple, a storm in their household, arose.

Ned Crittenden, as already mentioned in this thesis, grew up in slavery. In the novel, he represents those African Americans, who struggled with adjusting to post-slavery modernity. Throughout the novel, Ned acts like a rough slave-holding patriarch, as he thinks that women are not respectable human beings and treats his children like slaves. He beats his wife, whips and abuses his children, and thinks he knows everything best. Hurston thereby uncovers the defects of black families caused by the years spent in slavery.

The Crittenden's are both former slaves but their situation did not change much. They still work in fields that do not belong to them. They are still oppressed by white men who own the fields and do not pay enough. They still live at the bottom of society. Though Amy realizes the changes through which the formerly enchained people need to get, she knows it will take a lot of time to reverse the mindset of Negroes like Ned, a mindset so strongly internalized through the years of inhumanity.

The one who suffers in Ned's hands the most is John – Amy's bastard half-white son whom Ned deeply despises out of envy.

> "John is de house-nigger. Ole Marsa always kep' de yaller niggers in de house and give 'em uh job totin' silver dishes and goblets tuh de table. Us black niggers is de ones s'posed tuh ketch de wind and de weather" (Hurston, 1990a, 4).

As Steverson points out, Zora Neale Hurston exposes, through the relationship between Ned and John, how race mixing spoiled the unity among the Black community. Ned suggests that John as a mixed-race man belongs to neither of the two communities. "Hurston uses Ned's ignorance to uncover damaging stereotypes about mixed-race people that make it difficult for them to define their identity in a strict, racially polarized system" (Steverson, 227). Mulattoes had been privileged; however, they struggled as well, only in a different way. John and other mulattoes de facto stood *on* the color line because of the social pressure from both sides – being Colored and not being Colored enough.

Ned's hatred forced John to leave his family and start a new life elsewhere. He went to the farm of Alf Pearson, his biological father, i.e., the former master of Amy, whom he had impregnated. When John reached Notasulga, he passed the local school and asked the students where to find "Master Alf" (Hurston, 1990a, 14). A girl corrected him that they were now saying "Mister" instead of "Master". This situation presents John's crossing the border between his former tyrannized sharecropper era under "Master" Ned and his future of admiration, praise, and privilege under "Mister" Alf.

As a mulatto, John typically attained the highest privileges at Alf's, e.g., a better job, which Alf justified by saying that John was "too tall to be good cotton-picker" (18). John was also too light-skinned not to get an education, so Alf told him to start school. Despite coming to Notasulga barefoot and as a lowly laborer, John soon rose on the social ladder, thanks to his appearance, later acquired education, and the support of his first wife Lucy Potts.

The main protagonist did not beat women, at least for the majority of the plot, even when other black male characters, as other Harlem Renaissance novels depict, suggested it was a normal thing to do when a woman showed disrespect. When John found out M'haley had scratched his love note about Lucy, Bully told him: "If 'twas me felt bad lak you do, Ah'd beat her jes' ez long she last" to which John responded: "Naw, Ah don't choose beatin' lady people. Uh man is crazy tuh do dat—when he know he got tuh submit hisself tuh 'em" (51). This might be interpreted as one of the things for which John was not black enough. However, still inferior to a white man and dependent on him because of the share-cropping relationship, the masculinity of a black man was undermined and he had to reinforce it. As Schmidt asserts, after Emancipation, a black man knew only one way of expressing his masculinity and dominance after years in the slave cabins – by beating women. This was the only thing to "attain some kind of leverage with the white man, even if only in sexual terms" (Schmidt, 59-60). With that being said, John as a mulatto did not need to reinforce his masculinity by beating women because his position in the social hierarchy was already higher.

Hurston, not afraid of what other scholars might think, expresses a good amount of Africanism in her works. In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she for instance paints a vivid picture of African American style and culture in the barbecue scene. "Hey you, dere, us ain't no white folks! Put down dat fiddle! Us don't want no fiddles, neither no guitars, neither no banjoes. Less clap!" (29). African American community considers violins, guitars, and banjoes white people's musical instruments and strictly refuses them for they possess something better – rhythm in their souls, and they only need their hands to clap the rhythm out.

Hurston spent several months in Haiti researching folklore and conjure as an anthropologist (Koy, 168). Therefore, she often uses Voodoo signs in her novels. Voodoo is a set of mixed beliefs and rituals of African origin and Catholicism, widely spread in Haiti. Those who practice Voodoo, do so to cure illnesses, satisfy current needs, and find hope (Métraux, 15), which is the typical demand of believers of any religion. Voodoo practitioners characteristically draw from nature, and nature, as mentioned before, served Hurston as the basis of her narratives.

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston mainly pairs Voodoo with the female protagonist Hattie Tyson. Hattie paid a voodoo practitioner An' Dangie Dewoe to create a spell that would make John fall in love with her. An' Dangie Dewoe is probably Aunt Dangie Deveaux, whom Hurston describes in her research *Hoodoo in America* as a great practitioner on the Cat Island (i.e., Haiti) in the Bahamas, and who was using Obeah, a Bahamian voodoo branch (Hurston, 1931, 320). This confirms that Zora Neale Hurston's stories are based on her anthropological studies of African heritage.

> "Stan' over de gate whar he sleeps and eat dese beans and drop de hulls 'round yo' feet. Ah'll do de rest." … "G'wan do lak Ah tell yuh. Ahm gwine hold de bitter bone in mah mouf so's you kin walk out de sight uh men." … The door slammed and An' Dangie crept to her altar in the back room and began to dress candles with war water. When the altar had been set, she dressed the coffin in red, lit the inverted candles on the altar, says as she did so, "Now fight! Fight and fuss 'til you part." When all was done at the altar she rubbed her hands and forehead with war powder, put the cat bone in her mouth, and laid herself down in the red coffin facing the altar and went into the spirit (Hurston, 1990a, 125-6).

The spell worked as John's wife Lucy got sick shortly after, creating a space for Hattie to come and seduce John. John's character then rapidly changed. He did not take care of his ill wife and treated her badly. Under the influence of the spell, John even hit his wife once. As he eventually realized, he felt as if he had been asleep since Hattie appeared in his life and that he did not even want to marry her. After John had discovered the hoodoo objects and found out he had been cursed by Hattie, he savagely beat her, as a proper African American husband would have done.

At the court, John agreed to anything Hattie's witnesses claimed because he did not want to feed the White's already spoiled perception of Afro-Americans, risking losing his church. Despite all that, his mulatto skin secured him a good position again, so he did not lose his church, just Hattie's parasitism. The first time the court let him go free was when he brutally beat a black man. Analysis of the five Harlem Renaissance novels suggests that if John had beaten a white man instead, he would immediately go to prison.

After his second broken relationship, John escaped to a different city. Escapism, usually through sexual satisfaction, accompanied him anytime things got sour – when he got into trouble on Alf's farm, when Lucy was pregnant, or when their daughter had a deadly disease.

> Giving up the pulpit and moving to another town where he marries for the third time, John surrenders yet once more to his promiscuous bent. His dramatic death in a car crash under the Florida sunrise is the final authorial judgement on a man whose emotional atrophy and lack of self-awareness made him into an oppressor of women (Schmidt, 59).

Hurston's choice to depict the male protagonist John as a savage controlled by his sexual needs, and the female protagonist Lucy Potts in a more empathetic way, is rooted in her own life. The character of John Pearson is to an extent based on her real father, John Hurston, who was also a tenant farmer and a Baptist preacher. As Koy asserts, John Hurston "was a white man who never acknowledged paternity" (Koy, 167), suggesting he was not there as a father figure for his children, similar to John Pearson. Zora's mother, Lucy Potts, after whom the main female protagonist of this novel was named, died when Hurston was thirteen years old. It is known that she supported her young daughter. She tried to motivate Zora (and her siblings) to get an education and to want more from life (Koy, 167). Hurston dedicated a passage to her mother where Lucy gave her daughter Isie a lesson about education and ambition before she passed away. She told Isie that education was the thing that would get her far and that she should always love herself the most.

Another interesting depiction of the Afro-American mind concerns the disregard of black scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois. Hurston expresses the opinion of the community concerning rumors about World War I: "De black man ain't got no voice but soon ez war come who de first man dey shove in front? De nigger! Ain't it de truth?" (Hurston, 148). The author also portrays the opinions of African Americans concerning black important figures. They appreciated Teddy Roosevelt, the 26th president of the US, and Booker T.

Washington[7], “Nigger so smart he et at de White House” (148), more than the current president, a Southerner, Woodrow Wilson. Hurston also points out that the African-American community neglected literature and the Black intellectuals of the era:

> “DuBois? Who is dat? ‘Nother smart nigger? Man, he can’t be smart ez Booger T.! Whut did dis DuBois ever do? He writes up books and paper, hunh? Shucks! dat ain’t nothin’, anybody kin put down words on uh piece of paper. (…) Writing! Man Ah thought you wuz talkin’ ‘bout uh man whut had done sumpin” (148).

As Trombold argues, Hurston tries to express how much the African American community treasured voice, i.e., oral tradition (Trombold, 89). Leaning towards oral speakers rather than writers, the black folk thus admire Washington’s voice more than Du Bois’s pen.

After the war, a new attitude appeared. Men, even though they declined white European women because “Blacker de berry sweeter de juice” (Hurston, 1990a, 149), were not coming back to farms and mules. The majority of them headed North in the Great Migration. Nobody cared about color anymore, since factories needed hands and muscle. Therefore, there was nobody to take care of the fields and the crops in the South rotted. Even though the Whites tried to stop the Blacks from “goin’ Nawth” (151), for instance, by ejecting them out of trains, the majority of John’s congregation from Eatonville migrated.

Zora Neale Hurston writes from a very different perspective than her male contemporaries. She flamboyantly, unfiltered, shows the African in America. She puts on the pedestal the characteristic aspects of Africanism, such as family issues caused by slavery, voodoo practice, the importance of oral tradition, and the neglect of black artists. With her tendency to portray the black community as it is, she represents the

[7] Booker T. Washington was the first leader of the *Tuskegee Institute* – a teacher’s college for colored in Alabama. He portrays the establishment of the university, as well as his childhood during the Civil War, obstacles in education, and more, in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*. https://www.tuskegee.edu/discover-tu/tu-presidents/booker-t-washington

New Negro. She does not attempt to change the White's view on Afro-Americans but rather wishes the community would be accepted and studied.

5.4. The color line in *Home to Harlem*

McKay's narrative had been considered primitive and indicted for romanticizing masculinity. As Rottenberg points out, the main protagonist does not aspire to assimilate into the dominant culture of the United States (Rottenberg, 119), which might have caused such accusations since especially the scholars of Old Negro criticized those Afro-American writers who displayed the true aspects of the Negro identity that were unaccepted for the majority culture, i.e., African heritage, underworld customs, or laziness, all of which *Home to Harlem* contains.

As McKay commented:

> Negro art, these critics declare, must be dignified and respectable like the Anglo-Saxon's before it can be good. The Negro must get the warmth, color and laughter out of his blood, else the white man will sneer at him and treat him with contumely (McKay, 1921, 24).

The author realized that Harlem writers should portray the Negro life with pride, and not just fulfill the literary expectations of Whites. As the prior analysis of *The Blacker the Berry* suggests, some members of the Afro-American community joined the path of weakening the essential features of the Negro. Therefore, they considered it inappropriate to write about the primitive underworld life of the lower working class.

The "primitivism" is, for instance, expressed by the animal reactions of some characters. When Jake arrives in Harlem, his body responds with sweating and sniffing: "His blood was hot. His eyes were alert as he sniffed the street like a hound" (McKay, 1987, 10). Another example of McKay's animal metaphor is when the main protagonist hits Rose: the author describes that she "moves down on him like a panther, swinging her hips in wonderful, rhythmical motion" (McKay, 1987, 118). Comparing people to animals

clashed with the attempts of the Old Negro Movement, and thus, had not found much popularity. McKay did not hold back in praising "blackness", mainly through Jake's lust for Harlem and everything colored.

> The broad pavements of Seventh Avenue were colorful with promenaders. Brown babies in white carriages pushed by little black brothers wearing nice sailor suits. All the various and varying pigmentation of the human race were assembled there: dim brown, clear brown, rich brown, chestnut, copper, yellow, near-white, mahogany, and gleaming anthracite (289).

Rottenberg suggests that the novel illustrates Harlem as a "positive all-black space" (Rottenberg, 120) and that its "charm is intimately linked to pleasure—gaiety, sex and sexuality, drink, and syncopated movement and music" (Rottenberg, 122), which creates the primitive and barbaric savor.

The narrative emphasizes blackness as the spark that brightens up everything. Harlem, portrayed as an "alternative world, a world with little use for 'offays,' or white folks" (Rottenberg, 123), functions as a subcultural territory full of positive blackness and African spirit, separated from the rest of the United States. The scenes that include white men seem like a mere support of the strength and dominancy of the Blacks in Harlem, e.g., the white policeman who was in love with one of the black girls at Madame Laura's and the scene where he raises a glass with his girlfriend, Jake, and Madame Laura's: "Four brown hands and one white" (McKay, 1987, 198). Jake is even resistant to white culture, which appears when he sails to London and the sailor calls him "darky" (5). This designation carries a somewhat friendly connotation. Jake did not want to befriend white people, so this designation made him feel absurd and exasperated. He would prefer to be called a "nigger", which was very offensive but the hatred would evoke strength and masculine aggression in him.

> 'Blackness,' in all of its various manifestations and shades, forms the background for and frames all that pertains to Harlem; 'color,' perhaps more than anything else, is the defining feature of this neighborhood and the subculture it generates (Rottenberg, 122).

As Rottenberg notices, McKay tends to describe Harlem's qualities in a specific way: first, he names the negative pole of the neighborhood and then continues with the positive depiction:

> "Harlem! Harlem! Little thicker, little darker and noisier and smellier, but Harlem just the same. The niggers done plowed through Hundred and Thirtieth Street. Heading straight foh One Hundred and Twenty-fifth. Spades beyond Eight Avenue. Going, going, going Harlem! Going up! Nevah before I seed so many dickty shines in sich swell motor-cars. Plenty moh nigger shops. Seventh Avenue done gone high-brown. O Lawdy! Harlem bigger, Harlem better… and sweeter" (McKay, 1987, 25-26)

Even though Jake perceives Harlem as louder and smellier, the positive aspects allure him and thus beat the negative sides. This underscores the race-pride mood of the novel.

As Jake adores Harlem and all things made by a dark person – jazz and blues, or food, he even prefers a brown prostitute Felice over a rich mulatto performer Rose; as opposed to Emma Lou in *The Blacker the Berry* who desperately tried to integrate into mainstream white society and wished herself to be white by accepting white manners and mindset.

Right at the beginning of the novel, Jake remembers his involvement in the "white folks'" war. It depicts how white American soldiers suppressed African Americans in World War I. The Whites did not allow them to fight and tasked them with menial work, the same as they had been doing for decades in the US, almost as if they wanted to prevent the Blacks from gaining merit and, consequently, social equality. At the end of the novel, when Zeddy falsely accused Jake of not fighting the Germans, Felice pointed out: "What right have niggers got to shoot down a whole lot a Germans for? Is they worse than Americans or any other nation a white people?" (332). This simple line implies that Americans had no reason to get involved in the war and help other nations because the Germans did nothing worse than Americans did to slaves for centuries.

McKay turns around the reality of black people working as cooks, railroad workers, or longshoremen as he portrays them as honest hard workers who would rather do underpaid labor in bad conditions than live the "sweet life". As Singh denotes, despite

working menial jobs, Jake craves the underworld's music, gambling, alcohol, and sex with a passion startling to most white men" (Singh, 43).

> Life burned in Ray perhaps more intensely than in Jake. Ray felt more and he could not be satisfied with the easy, simple things that sufficed for Jake. … But he drank in more of life than he could distill into archive animal living. … Life touched him emotionally in a thousand vivid ways. Maybe his own being was something of a touchstone of the general emotions of his race. ... That was the key to himself and to his race. That strange, child-like capacity for wistfulness-and-laughter… No wonder the whites, after five centuries of contact, could not understand his race. … No wonder they hated them, when out of their melancholy environment the blacks could create mad, contagious music and high laughter (McKay, 1987, 265-267).

McKay, yet again, points out the incredibility of Black people who not only survived the years of white ownership and injustice but even made the lively ragtime music, out of it, and are still full of life and laughter.

In the novel, the African American community shows togetherness by not extraditing the war deserters of their race. However, Black people in Harlem held prejudice toward colored doctors. When Jake got sick,

> Billy Biasse telephoned to the doctor, a young chocolate-complexioned man. He was graduate of a Negro medical college in Tennessee and of Columbia University. He was struggling to overcome the prejudices of the black populace against Negro doctors and wedge himself in among the Jewish doctors that prescribed for the Harlem clientele (McKay, 1987, 219).

Also, the decolorization tendencies, i.e., the aspiration to marry or date a mulatto, contradict the racial pride. Though Jake represents the proud Negro camp as a hardworking and honest man embracing blackness, the novel shows many examples of color line issues in Zeddy's life. His mulatto girl left him for a white man because it put her (and her future children) in a better social position. Decolorization had been the goal of the other Negro camp. Zeddy's leaning toward the ugly mulatta Susy was driven by his reluctance to work and his desire to live the "sweet life" but the fact that Susy was not attractive, however, a mulatta, cannot be overlooked.

Home to Harlem portrays a strong line between the two races. When a white lady crosses the line and hangs out with the Blacks, she dishonors her race. When the Vice Squat raided Madame Suarez's buffet flat, they fined everybody except for the white women who had been ordered whipping for their misbehavior. Whipping was the basic punishment for misbehaving slaves. The white officers saw crossing the separation gap to the Black bank as racial treason. From the other point of view, the Black people in this novel did not even want to cross the line and become a part of the White world. As Rottenberg affirms,

> McKay's protagonists, by sharp contrast, are not interested in carving out a niche for themselves in mainstream middle-class society; rather there seems to be an attempt—through their characterization and portrayal as well as through the spatial description of Harlem—to reassert, reevaluate, and lionize racial difference (Rottebnberg, 126).

Despite the main protagonist's intense love for Harlem, he decides to leave this subcultural territory to Chicago. This surprising moment at the end of the novel functions as McKay's judgement of Harlem society. Jake abandons his beloved home because he disapproves of the sexual violence that is expected of him. He left Harlem because he was expected to fight Zeddy over Felice. For the same expectations he did not desire to fulfill, he left Harlem after hitting Rose.

> These miserable cock-fights, beastly, tigerish, bloody. They had always sickened, saddened, unmanned him. The wild, shrieking mad woman that is sex seemed jeering at him. Why should love create terror? Love should be joy lifting man out of the humdrum ways of life. … Oh, he was infinitely disgusted with himself to think that he had just been moved by the same savage emotions as those vile, vicious, villainous white men who, like hyenas and rattlers, had fought, murdered, and clawed the entrails out of black men over common, commercial flesh of women (McKay, 1987, 328).

Jake pointed out that no matter the skin color, men fight over women like that everywhere, even in Europe. "But Harlem is the craziest place foh that, (…). Wese too thick together in Harlem. Wese all just lumped together without a chanst to choose and so we nacherally hate one another" (285).

Even though Jake despises physical force which is so common and expected among his ethnic group, he still proves his racial pride by not accepting violence that used to be forced onto black slaves. He does not want to assimilate with White culture and beat his people, therefore, he leaves Harlem behind.

Ray left Harlem as well. Despite his education and intellect, he did not find satisfaction in New York, on the contrary. He pointed out:

> "… a modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like–like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for" (McKay, 243).

Ray expressed that his education was useless because it only made him understand and enjoy life less, therefore, Jake was much happier without education than Ray with it. Nonetheless, their social position was equal, for Ray also could not get a better job. Ray

> was conscious of being black and impotent. … What a unique feeling of confidence about life the typical white youth of his age must have! Knowing his skin-color was a passport to glory, making him one with ten thousands like himself (154).

Home to Harlem deals with the question of racial pride, racial segregation, and injustice. Though heavily criticized for its primitive image of Harlem subculture, the novel certainly contributed to the Harlem Renaissance for its transparent view of the Harlem community.

5.5. The color line in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston's much-criticized story told from a female point of view, was and surely is a huge contribution to African American literature. As mentioned earlier, the scholars Wright and Locke did not find it valuable enough for the Harlem movement and saw it as a mere entertainment tool for the white dominant culture. However, further analysis of the novel proves its assets.

Hurston wrote this novel in seven weeks in 1936 at the time of her research in Haiti (Koy, 168). The author's aforementioned anthropological interest in African folklore appears in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, as well as in *Their Eyes* and presumably other pieces, e.g., *Mules and Men*. Although critics, especially early after Hurston's publishing, saw the usage of Voodoo aspects as a nostalgic reaction to modernity, Lamothe sees it as "her means of comprehending transformation" (Lamothe, 158). The author's resistance to leaving behind African folklore does not mean she rejects modernity, but it "becomes a vehicle for her to acknowledge modernity" (Lamothe, 158). Lamothe suggests that Janie's character is based on the Voodoo spirit Ezili, specifically two goddesses: an elite class, materialistic mulatta Ezili Freda, goddess of love; and Ezili Danto, who represents the black working-class spirit and "maternal rage" (Lamothe, 161). Physically, Janie mirrors Freda hence being a beautiful (and after marrying Jody) higher-class mulatta, and multiple times throughout the novel, she is perceived as a sexual object.

> The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with the mind what they lost with the eye (Hurston, 1990b, 2).

The resemblance between Janie and Ezili Danto lies mainly in Janie's independence and her readiness to get dirty from work, which is shown through her desire to work with the other migrants in the Everglades, even though she was financially secure after her husband had died.

Other Voodoo aspects in the novel concern the connection between African Americans and nature. As Koy alleges, Zora Neale Hurston emphasizes the sexual aspect of nature as Janie's "sexual awakening" arouses in spring (Koy, 172), when the pear tree is in blossom. Another crucial situation concerning nature is when a tribe of Native

Americans leaves the Everglades, expecting an upcoming storm[8]. Although the African connection to nature runs in the veins of the Black protagonists, it appears not as strong as that of the Native Americans. The tribe members notice tiny changes in nature. "Saw-grass bloom. Hurricane coming" (Hurston, 1990b, 146). Then animals began to behave strangely, but the Afro-Americans were sure about their truth: "Beans running fine and prices good, so the Indians could be, *must* be, wrong. You couldn't have a hurricane when you're making seven and eight dollars a day picking beans. Indians are dumb anyhow, always were (147)". This section proves the two Voodoo forces of Ezili discussed by Lemothe: the materialistic force, almost a tunnel vision, concerning money; and the willingness to work hard. Also, the African Americans feel superior to Native Americans, which suggests they consider themselves the elite class in this particular situation.

After the storm scene, Hurston describes white direct racism, when guards gave a command to first examine each of the dead bodies and determine whether they were black or white before burying them. "'God have mussy! In de condition they's in got tuh examine 'em? Whut difference do it make 'bout de color?'" (162-163). It mattered because the Whites had to be buried in coffins, whereas the Blacks were just thrown in a big hole. However, it was hard to tell what color their skin was so the guards said to look at their hair if uncertain, since Afro-American hair had a different texture. Tea Cake commented: "'They's mighty particular how dese dead folks goes tuh judgement. (…) Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de Jim Crow law[9]'" (163). Even though Whites did not care about the Black people's proper burial and buried them all together in a big hole, it can be interpreted as the future of the Negro – they will unite together, be together, as a strong community, even under the dirt.

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[8] Hurston based the hurricane scene on the true events of the San Felipe – Okeechobee Florida Hurricane which happened in 1928 and took the lives of 3000 people, of whom three-quarters were African-Americans (Koy, 172).

[9] Jim Crow laws supported and reinforced racial segregation in the South at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (Urofsky, 2023)

Koy noticed a feature of Haitian conjure, which influenced the scene of a mule's funeral. As the scholar asserts, the mule was buried "in Voodoo fashion: upside down with all four legs pointed straight towards heaven" (Koy, 173). The mule, an animal employed for hard work on plantations, embodies a slave and its owner Matt represents a harsh slaveholder. Jody Starks organized a respectful ritual for the animal because it "was a point of sidesplitting humor and gossip in the comical commentary about the mundane existence of poor black individuals in a small town in the South" (Koy, 173). In a way, the mule's life, as well as its funeral, served the Eatonville community as an amusement and as a coping mechanism to deal with the past, as Jody's strong speech contained:

> the joys of mule-heaven… *No* Matt Bonner with plow lines and halters to come in and corrupt. Up there, mule angels would have people to ride on and from his place beside the glittering throne, the dear departed brother would look down into hell and see the devil plowing Matt Bonner all day long in a hell-hot sun and laying the raw-hide to his back (Hurston, 1990b, 57).

Hurston's novel displays also other coping mechanisms through which her characters try to respond to history. As Hubbard argues, Nanny's personal experience of sexual violence pushes her to marry Janie soon and well; Jody's reaction to history lies in overcompensation by asserting his dominance over his citizens (through expensive stuff and his strong voice); and Tea Cake responds by searching for freedom and staying out of the system, and releases tension through laugh, games, and music (Hubbard, 171).

Nanny grew up in slavery, where Black people could not sit down whenever they wanted. Therefore, sitting on porches was all they dreamed of doing after the Abolition of Slavery in 1865. Nanny thus believes the best response to modernity is if Janie marries a rich white man so that she is financially and socially ensured, does not have to work, and can only sit on porches with other women. However, Nanny does not realize that Janie will get enchained by Logan Killicks as a plantation mule and so remain in history. This proves Nanny's severe issues with adjusting to post-slavery modernity. Later in the novel, when Janie was already married to Joe Starks, she realized that her grandmother had forced her perceptions onto her, which resulted in Janie's two parts of self – one that she felt inside and one that she showed, or was allowed to show. Hubbard calls this a "divided self" and cites from *Their Eyes*: "'She had an inside and an outside now and

suddenly she knew how not to mix them'" (Hubbard, 170). This two-ness of self, although grasped in a slightly different way, confirms Johnson's "dual personality" (Johnson, 1995, 9), as well as Du Bois's "two-ness" (Du Bois, 1903, 8), a common issue caused by the color line. One part of Janie's self represents what she truly is, her strong spirit, her dreams and desires, i.e., the African part; and the second part embodies what a woman should be and act like, i.e., how White Americans prefer the Blacks to express themselves – quite, small, humble, and without a voice, which created and supported intra-racial prejudice.

The challenge with intra-racial bias Hurston embodies in Mrs. Turner's character. Mrs. Turner represents the idea of decolorization, the same as Emma Lou's grandparents in *The Blacker the Berry*. "'We oughta lighten up de race'" (135). The lady hated dark-skinned people and despised Tea Cake. She wanted to introduce Janie to her mulatto brother, who hated Booker T. Washington, whom Janie, as well as other Colored folks from different novels, on the contrary, admired and considered a great man. She loved Tea Cake and did not want to meet Mrs. Turner's brother. Moreover, she was far away from Nanny's life view by now to believe she would be happier with that man than she was with Tea Cake. The next time Janie and Mrs. Turner spoke together, Janie behaved colder. Mrs. Turner did not mind that, though, as she also mistreated darker people. She accepted that Janie, who was lighter-skinned than her, would treat her worse. Mrs. Turner represents the Old Negro reaction to the past by trying to assimilate into the white mainstream society, i.e. to blend in and accept the dominant culture, rather than to integrate themselves, i.e. to accept the cultural differences but keep their own culture and tradition.

Janie was a child of interracial rape – her mother had been raped by a white teacher. Her grandmother was also raped by a white man, her slaveholder, and when his wife found out, Nanny had to escape with her baby daughter in her hands. After Janie's unnamed mother gave birth to her, she then started drinking and behaving irresponsibly. Thus, Nanny raised Janie by herself. The child grew up among white children as a black sheep for she was the only colored child. She did not know that she was African American and did not consider herself different from the others. Then she

saw a picture of everybody and could not find herself among the kids. Then she realized she was the one dark girl in the photo. Same as in *The Autobiography*, the main protagonist learned about her racial heritage as a child and did not realize it prior. The fact that children do not comprehend the aspect of race implies that race is a socially constructed concept.

The white society advantaged Janie in many ways, as well as the mulatto narrator in *The Autobiography*. On the other hand, she often faced some challenges from the other side of the color line. The court scene after Janie had killed her husband serves as an example of this issue. As a mulatto, the white jury did not find her guilty. Moreover, she had been defended by a white doctor. However, this aroused pressure from her Everglades community, a community she desperately desired to be a part of since Jody kept her out of the community in Eatonville. As they highly adored Tea Cake, they came to the courtroom to step against Janie. "Tea Cake was a good boy. He had been good to that woman. No nigger woman ain't never been treated no better. Naw suh!" (Hurston, 1990b, 177).

> They were all against her, she could see. So many were there against her that a light slap from each one of them would have beat her to death. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks (Hurston, 1990b, 176).

In this passage, Hurston depicts the irony of the color line – the whites had been brutally killing the blacks with whips for decades and now, when slavery was over, the Afro-Americans were not physically fighting back, they could only use their sharp tongues. The courtroom listened to their loud voices, however, only for a while. When Sop-de-Bottom wanted to speak, he was hushed by a white attorney Mr. Prescott, and forbidden to use his tongue:

> "'If you know what's good for you, you better shut your mouth up until somebody calls you.' … 'We are handling this case. Another word out of you, out of any of you niggers back there, and I'll bind you over to the big court'" (177-78).

When it came to Janie's defense of herself, Hurston chose to write her speech in the third person, even though Janie had already found her voice. Scholars who analyze *Their Eyes* can only argue why Hurston made this choice at such a crucial scene. Crabtree sees it as Hurston's attempt to honor the collective folk consciousness (Crabtree, 55).

> Janie is the tale-teller and her telling of the story is a consciously artistic act, one in which she imposes order and meaning on the material of her life. The story Janie tells is an intimate communication between the two friends, with Janie depending on Pheoby "for a good thought," that is, for a sympathetic hearing, on the basis of their having been "kissin' friends for twenty years" (Crabtree, 55).

Janie's story shows great feminine energy on a journey to own a voice and identity and to chase dreams. As Crabtree suggests, the novel fuses feministic features with Black self-assurance. When Janie, for instance, "discards her apron, historically the badge of the slave woman as well as of the docile wife, and goes off with Joe Starks", Hurston justifies it because Killicks wants Janie to work the fields with a mule since she has not conceived him an inheritor (Crabtree, 57). Janie needed to break free from her husband's dictate, similarly as slaves needed their freedom. However, marrying Jody does not bring her freedom since he also commands her life. Only after marrying Tea Cake does she become free. That is, after she begins to embrace her own dreams and life views, and fully lets go of her Nanny's and Eatonville people's opinions. She did not love her first, white, husband. She did not love her second husband, who was black but his values were white. She loved her fully black third husband, who amazed her the way he was, even with his underworld entertainment habits. The fact that she comes to true love and independence after she finds the man that does not pretend and does not try to whiten anything about himself, demonstrates the New Negro efforts.

The novel depicts different responses to history and modernity. With fierceness, Hurston portrays her culture and community in a way that the Old Negro did not appreciate; a real way. She appeals to people of her community to keep the folklore and customs, not to assimilate and decolorize to fit in. Thus, she deserves huge recognition and to be acknowledged as one of the biggest contributors to the Harlem Renaissance.

Conclusion

By analyzing five Harlem Renaissance novels, this thesis has shown how slavery affected and determined the post-slavery lives of African Americans in the United States. Firstly, the thesis discussed the background of the Harlem Renaissance, a Harlem-based movement, as the era of the rise of Afro-American art. To form a foundation for the main part, the analysis of the color line, it summarized plot interpretations and the journeys of the main protagonists. The analysis then searched for examples of the color line issues in the selected novels.

Thurman's *Blacker the Berry* pictures a black woman's longing to bleach her blackness and leave her African heritage behind to blend into the dominant white culture. It presents the struggles caused by skin color that prevent a black woman from living a happy wholesome life, and make her reject her racial substantiality.

The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man by Johnson portrays the difficulties of nearly-white African Americans not fitting (or wanting to fit) in either of the two cultures. The main character crosses the line multiple times and faces obstacles to find happiness both as "white" and as "colored" due to prejudice.

Hurston embraces Africanism and African folk traditions. In both *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she introduces ways of adjusting to modern times without slavery. Both of the main characters of her novels are mixed-race, which brings them some benefits as well as some disadvantages. The author's use of African slang and accent makes the novels challenging to read; however, it only ensures authenticity.

McKay's narrative unveils the vitality and fire of Americans of African descent. Even though some of the protagonists of *Home to Harlem* failed yet to find happiness due to the color line barriers, the love for Harlem and everything black portrayed in the novel fights the urge of some Black people to assimilate with the White culture and emphasizes the need for racial pride.

After the abolishment of slavery, African Americans had to re-socialize and find confidence to function in society. This research clearly illustrates that, unsurprisingly, they encountered many problems along the way and so it took a lot of time for the ethnic group to get on their feet after lifetimes of bending and keeping silent. The fact that scholars of the Harlem Renaissance decided to portray these problems helped immensely. They revealed the issues that had suffocated the cultural rise of Afro-Americans and solidified the foundations for other works by African-Americans to have been created. They thus contributed to American literature as a whole.

Resumé

Analýzou pěti románů Harlemské renesance tato diplomová práce ukázala dopady otroctví a jejich vliv na životy Afroameričanů ve Spojených státech po Abolici. Nejprve probírá pozadí Harlemské renesance, tedy hnutí s centrem v newyorkském Harlemu, které pozvedlo afroamerické umění. Práce shrnuje obsahy vybraných děl a životní cesty hlavních hrdinů jako základ pro hlavní část, která hledá příklady problémů tzv. *color line*. Český ekvivalent, který by vystihl význam tohoto sousloví neexistuje. Jde však o společenský a právní systém, který rozděluje společnost na základě rasy. Lidem různých rasových příslušností pak v tomto systému nejsou zajištěna stejná práva a možnosti, což se podepisuje na kvalitě života.

Thurmanův román *Blacker the Berry* zobrazuje příběh mladé černošky, která touží po „vybělení“ a oproštění se od svého afrického původu s cílem asimilovat se do majoritní bělošské kultury. Thurman představuje potíže spojené s barvou pleti, které Afroameričance stojí v cestě za šťastným a blahodárným životem, a nutí ji odmítat svou rasovou příslušnost.

The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man z Johnsonovy tvorby líčí obtíže, se kterými se setkávají Afroameričané na první pohled nevykazující známky afrického původu, kteří nezapadají (nebo nechtějí zapadat) ani do jedné z probíraných kultur. Hlavní postava několikrát překročí hranici mezi černošským a bělošským světem. Ani jeden svět mu však kvůli předsudkům taktéž nezajišťuje spokojenost.

Hurstonová vyzdvihuje afrikanismus a africké lidové tradice. V obou analyzovaných románech ukazuje způsoby, jakými se bývalí otroci (a jejich potomci) přizpůsobují nové době a společenskému systému. V obou dílech jsou hlavními postavami míšenci, což jim přináší jisté výhody i nevýhody. Autorčino užití afrického slangu a přízvuku podstatně ztěžuje čtení, avšak zajišťuje autenticitu.

Narativ Clauda McKaye odhaluje životní sílu utlačované etnické skupiny ve Spojených státech. Přestože některé postavy románu *Home to Harlem* nenachází své štěstí

z důvodů předsudků, rasové segregace atd., láska k Harlemu a všemu „černému“ vzdoruje tendenci některých Afroameričanů splynout s dominantní kulturou, a podtrhuje nutnost rasové hrdosti.

Po zrušení otroctví se Afroameričané museli resocializovat a najít sebevědomí. Tento průzkum ukazuje, že po cestě naráželi na mnoho překážek, a proto této etnické skupině trvalo nepřekvapivě dlouho, než se po 246 letech klečení a mlčení postavila na vlastní nohy. To, že se zmiňovaní akademici rozhodli tyto překážky vyobrazit ve svých dílech, neskutečně pomohlo. Odhalili totiž problémy, které udusávaly kulturní vzestup Afroameričanů, a upevnili základy pro další afroamerická díla. Tím přispěli celkové americké literatuře.

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