



# The Interdisciplinary Juxtaposition of Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston

by John Lawlor and David Leight

According to Maryemma Graham in the introduction to her *Teaching African American Literature: Theory and Practice*, while the teaching of literature needs to be informed by theory, “...teachers do not want to be handed down judgments about any literature, and especially not about African American literature. They do want to be assisted with the process of engaging new literatures critically and holistically” (2). Her 1998 collection of essays by teachers explores ways in which literature teachers can inform theory through the consideration of multiple contexts and active engagement with those context. Only through such discussions about the actualization of literary theory and scholarship, she contends, can students and faculty more fully articulate and understand the relationships between texts.

To that end, this paper considers the interrelation of history and literature as a mutually supportive interdisciplinary study and teaching approach that integrates historical documents as contextual information. After describing the authors’ linked courses and

archival research in support of these courses, it puts forth a case study of African American writers Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright to show how students can understand and break through the dichotomy often posed between the two writers’ perspectives.

Scholars have long contrasted Hurston and Wright as representatives of opposing ideologies, not least because of their very public feud; however, more recent research has pointed to the ways in which they shared interests and advocacies. Historical social environmental factors impacted both writers, and both sought to define their identities while altering the racially oppressive social context in which they were writing. As this paper will demonstrate, their participation in the Federal Writers Project (FWP) during the Great Depression extends recent research on the pair and the teaching of African American literature by showing how teaching their historical texts in context with their literary texts leads to a more comprehensive understanding of both.

## THE LINKED COURSES

The interdisciplinary approach explained in this paper derives from a history/literature class co-taught for about ten years by the authors that merged a traditional American history since the Civil War course with a similarly traditional post-Civil War American literature survey course. While ostensibly stand-alone courses, the two have been co-requisites for students, with both instructors in the classroom for the full duration of each period; in effect, the courses are fused. The core premise behind the history/literature course is that writers exist in and report on history. Their writings help clarify period concepts, and values and, in doing so, writers serve as agents of change, seeking to explore and, often, remedy societal ills.

As a representative example, the class contrasts alternative presentations of narratives, such as Frank Norris's exploration of progressive era corporate greed in his 1902 short story, "A Deal in Wheat." After the class reads and discusses the story, it views D.W. Griffith's 1909 film "A Corner in Wheat," which was based on the Norris story and several of his other works, including the 1903 novel, *The Pit*. Norris sought to expose abusive corporate practices. In so doing, both Norris and Griffith represent author as social activist. The class focuses primarily on alternative endings of the story and film. The story ends with the main character, a former farmer, at the mercy of the robber barons, caught in the breadlines and then, as Norris writes, in the capitalist machine. By contrast, the end of the Griffith film finds the principle robber baron dead, killed in a suitably ironic accident at his own mill. The class is able to see how the history of the progressive movement can be framed differently for diverse audiences and media.

Norris and Griffith provided one of many early links between the courses, and early iterations of the course included fairly obvious links, such as Walt Whitman's role in the Civil War, William Dean Howells' "Editha" and the Spanish American War, Jack London's "The Law of Life" and Social Darwinism, memoirs by Booker T. Washington and Zitkala Ša, Upton

*The core premise behind the history/literature course is that writers exist in and report on history*

Sinclair's *The Jungle* and the meat-packing industry, Modernist responses to World War I, F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revised" and the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and the Harlem Renaissance. In designing the course, the authors sought intersecting points such as these. Toward this end, the authors initially created a series of "cases" through cross referencing *The American Pageant* history textbook with *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

## IDENTIFYING HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

While survey textbooks offer a wealth of links—and more and more frequently include descriptions of cultural, historical, and social context—their offerings are necessarily limited. The authors have subsequently supplemented this basic course matrix with research at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center (HPC), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and the Library of Congress (LOC). The object of the research was to access and acquire primary source documents and media (print, audio, video, images) to deepen the authors' knowledge and students' learning experiences.

Through active engagement of literary study with the documentary history of the period, both teachers and students can discover how narratives are constructed.

Both of the authors participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)-funded “Landmark” workshop, *Progress and Poverty*, at the Hayes Presidential Center in Fremont, Ohio, which provided opportunities for joint research for relevant course materials. Documents scanned and later included in the course ranged from letters to Hayes from Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois, petitions from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and stereographs and reports from Carlisle Indian School founder Captain Richard Pratt—all relevant to the letters, memoirs, and stories involving treatment of African Americans, women, and Native Americans, respectively.

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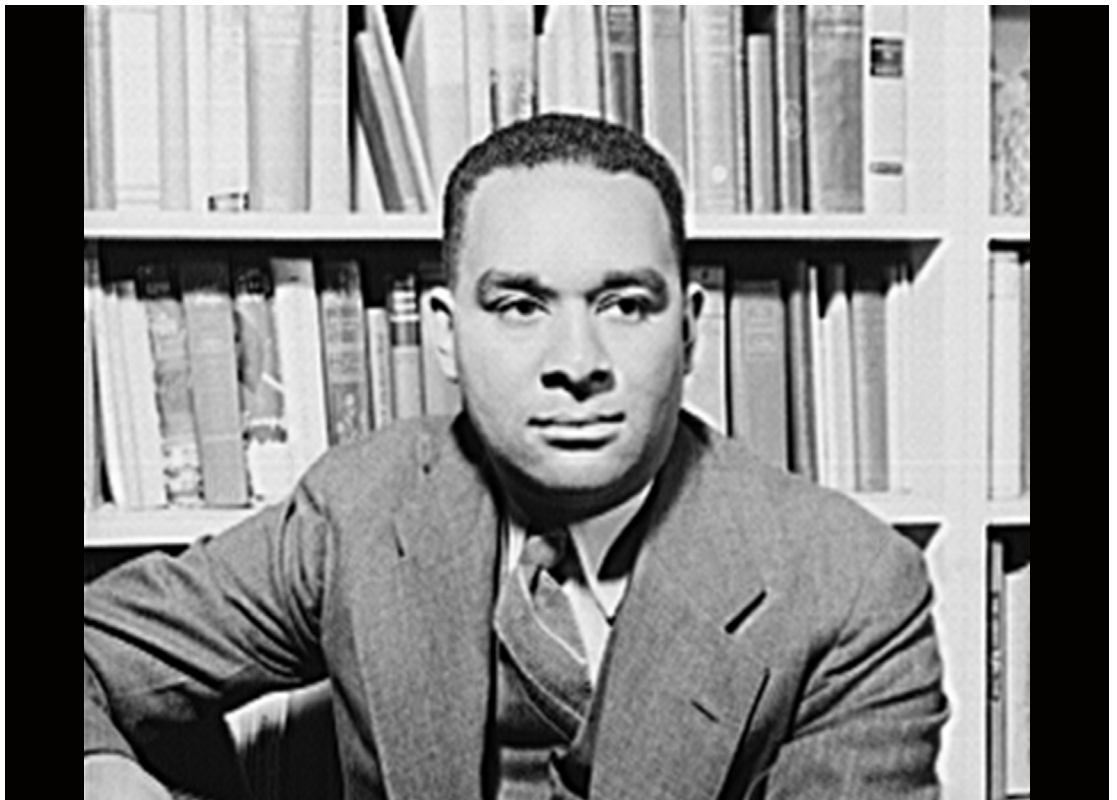
Among the documents accessed at the Hayes Center Library, three key images focus understanding on the rampant racism of American society in the post-Civil War era. Thomas Nast’s political cartoon “Patience on a Monument” portrays an African-American Civil War soldier (USCT) in tatters, standing on a monument inscribed with slavery facts and reconstruction era injustices and racial violence. The second document is an article by Sterling A. Brown entitled “Negro Character as Seen by White Authors” that identified seven racial stereotypes. The third document is an illustration of an African-American religious revival meeting in Florida with accompanying caption.

The class reviews each of the three documents separately for how the images and texts provide opportunities for inquiry into racial injustice. Thomas Nast’s illustration “Patience on Monument” offers students a sense of the nature and extent of racism prevalent in the United States in the post-Civil War era both textually and graphically. In text, the monument’s inscriptions include nine relating to slavery, four relating to the Civil War, and eighteen that speak to injustice during the reconstruction era. Examples of slavery inscriptions are “Branded and Manacled” and “Knowledge a Closed Book.” “Fort Pillow Massacre,” a Civil War reference, represents the extreme risk that African-American soldiers (USCT) faced in their fight for freedom if captured by Confederate forces. Post-war text includes several references to violence and the fact that, according to the text, “[a] Negro has

no rights which a white man is bound to respect.” Several lengthy inscriptions are quotes from newspapers of the era. Beyond the text, the graphics tell a story of abject horror.

An USCT veteran in tattered clothing sits upon the monument with his right hand holding his head. His rifle is at his feet. At the base of the monument are the dead bodies of his wife, clutching a dead baby in her arms with another bloody dead child nearby. Flanking the monument on the right side are scenes of a lynching and an orphanage on fire. A man with “KKK” on his hat looks on. Nast portrays a lamppost lynching on the left. The aggregate impact of the text and graphics is stunning.

Literary treatment of African-Americans in the post-Civil War era to 1932 is hardly less stunning, if more subtle at times. In a second document shared with the class, poet and literature professor Sterling A. Brown



*Richard Wright in his study*

identifies seven stereotypes in his 1933 article, “Negro Character as Seen by White Authors.” Brown’s list includes “The Contented Slave,” “The Wretched Freeman,” “The Comic Negro,” “The Brute Negro,” “The Tragic Mulatto,” “The Local Color Negro,” and the “Exotic Primitive,” and Brown provides detailed examples drawn from literature for each of the above. One of the exemplar works Brown references is Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman*, published in 1907. While Brown notes that Dixon’s “kind of writing is in abeyance today,” he did write that Dixon’s stories gained “a dubious sort of immortality, and finally fixed the stereotype in the mass-mind” (192). Fixing the stereotype in the mass mind was an outcome of a film that derived in large part from *The Clansman*: that film was *The Birth of a Nation*.

Paul Miller’s film *Rebirth of a Nation* enabled the extraction of clips that demonstrate the stereotypes identified by Brown. Miller

(aka DJ Spooky) takes D. W. Griffith’s 1915 *Birth of a Nation* and adds trance audio and visual enhancement with periodic narrative. In all, seven clips provide visualization of the stereotypes. Of the seven, two were shown to the class. One portrayed the “Contented Slave,” ironically with a “black-faced” actor fulfilling a central role in the clip. Essentially a video step out of the Dunning School of Civil War historiography that bemoaned the “Lost Cause,” this clip represents slaves as happy and well treated in captivity.

The second clip is much more volatile. Sexually charged, it follows a chase scene in which Gus, an African-American Civil War soldier, attempts to catch and presumably rape Elsie Stoneman; Elsie, played by Lillian Gish, commits suicide by jumping off a cliff rather than enduring the sexual attack. Casting Gish in the role of Elsie heightened the tension of the scene. The image of a black male sexual

predator stalking a young, white, beloved actress was too much for many critics of the film, who sought to have the scene excised by censors (Stokes 134-40). Violent public responses to this film mirrored the earlier reactions to Dixon's play that was based entirely on *The Clansman* (154). By soliciting students for their responses to the clips, the instructors help students to understand how writers and filmmakers are both a product and producer of their times.

A third document shared with the class is an illustration of an African-American religious revival said to have taken place in Florida. Printed in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* on October 13, 1889, the original caption reads "A Negro Prophet in Florida – Prepar' for de day of Wrath [*sic*]" (201). In class, students assume the role of illustration editor and prepare a maximum fifty word description. Upon completion, a sampling of students' descriptions are discussed and then compared to the original description for the illustration that appeared on page 195. Invariably, the

*By soliciting students for their responses to the clips, the instructors help students to understand how writers and filmmakers are both a product and producer of their times.*

students' descriptions contrast starkly with the blatant racism expressed in the original description. The original description is the following:

The negroes [*sic*] of the South are particularly susceptible of religious emotion, and they not infrequently give way to extravagant demonstrations which border closely upon hysteria,

if not insanity. They are, moreover, easily imposed upon and led away by mountebanks and pretenders who find profit in playing upon their credulity. The picture is sketched from real life and it admirably portrays the strong emotions which possess and sway the half-crazed audiences. (195)

In no caption do the student "editors" use phrases like "hysteria" or "half-crazed," the absence of which the instructors find encouraging. Students typically express amazement when presented with the original caption.

## HURSTON AND WRIGHT CASE STUDY

Historical context provided by these videos, articles, and illustrations provide a pathway for students to see the racial bias and antipathy that faced writers in the 1930s Federal Writers' Project such as Hurston and Wright. Mark Twain writes that "when a thousand able

novels have been written, there you have the soul of the people, the life of the people, the speech of the people. And the shadings of character, manners, feelings, ambitions, will be infinite" (qtd. in Taylor 5). Twain foreshadowed the infinite

shadings of narrative of the FWP, but he could not have anticipated the lives of the many writers who benefited from these projects. The cast of characters in the Federal Writers' Project included many literary luminaries or future luminaries. Robert Hayden researched the anti-slavery movement in Detroit and in Illinois; Claude McKay wrote about Harlem; Ralph Ellison notably based material later used in *Invisible Man* on his FWP interviews; and





Zora Neale Hurston

John Cheever worked on one of the FWP's more popular guidebooks, the *WPA Guide to New York City*.

But perhaps no two writers in the Federal Writers' Project contrasted so interestingly as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright because their FWP work followed similar trajectories, but also because they responded critically to each other's writings. In literary scholarship, initial contrasts between Hurston and Wright were made by June Jordan, poet and professor, who writes about teaching Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and using the book to question the way Richard Wright stood "towering before and above" all other Black writers (286). Jones rejects that "protest writing—and that *only one kind* of protest writing—deserves our support and study" (her emphasis, 286). Hurston, she writes, provides an "affirmation of Black values and lifestyle within the American context

[that] is, indeed, an act of protest" (286). Where Wright "conforms to white standards" (287), Jordan argues that Hurston celebrates the African American culture through her experience of being raised in an all-Black town. For Hurston, outright protest makes no sense because to reject love from war and violence, she writes, is "plain *white* craziness" (her emphasis, 288). Yet in positing the necessity of teaching the contrast between Hurston and Wright, she also offers teachers the opportunity to explore the complexity of the relationship. By finding that "[w]e should equally value and equally emulate Black Protest and Black Affirmation, for we require both" (289), Jordan sets up the dichotomy, aided, of course, by Hurston herself.

William J. Maxwell, for instance, picks up on Jordan's argument in his 1999 *New Negro, Old Left*. In lamenting how Hurston and Wright have served as "the formative division



*Zora Neale Hurston with Rochelle French and Gabriel Brown in Eatonville, Florida*

in the African-American literary tradition” (155), he argues that, by focusing only on the differences, critics “have blinded themselves to more-than-trivial points of contact between the two writers” (157). Both writers, not just Hurston, use narratives of folk culture to push back against the Great Migration, he writes, especially through their differing anthropological and Communist perspectives. More recently, Megan Obourn has argued that both Wright and Hurston use aspects of female voice to set the stage for voices in the early civil rights movement (241). Critics miss the point, she writes, if they stress the broader political oppositions to the exclusion of their shared political interests as expressed through, in particular, gendered voice work.

It is to this end of seeing how Hurston and Wright can be more cogently compared that the authors turned to the FWP materials, beginning with a search of documents at the

Library of Congress through joint research there. The one author’s familiarity with the LOC stemmed from participation in two intensive versions of the American Cities/Public Spaces Institute sponsored by the NEH, the Community College Humanities Association (CCHA), and the John W. Kluge Center. Research was executed in the Computer Center, the Main Reading Room, and Performance Arts Reading Room. Complementary to the research, the LOC offered an exhibit on the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) that was valuable in understanding the scope of Zora Neale Hurston and, to a lesser extent, Richard Wright’s work as both worked briefly for the FTP. Further, the Prints and Photographs Reading Room provided access to a full collection of FWP States’ Guides. Text and image documents supported inquiry into both Wright and Hurston. An additional depository was the National Archives and Records

Administration (NARA) facilities at both College Park, MD and downtown Washington, DC. NARA collections of materials from both the Federal Writers' Project and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) rounded out the primary sources used in the case, and they are considered within the course framework.

The class studies Wright and Hurston by looking at the writings (and, in the case of Hurston, listening to audio) that the two did for the FWP, their reviews of each other's work, and a discussion of how that work paralleled and informed their short stories. The instructors offer a series of juxtapositions between Hurston and Wright in order to show how the writers' differing attitudes toward race and writing were expressed throughout their government work and then continued through their articles and fiction. As Maxwell and Obourn express, the work that Hurston and Wright did with real people and situations, in other words, helped to build their shared cultural attitudes.

The largest, lasting legacy of the Federal Writers' Project is a series of state and regional guidebooks, which enabled writers to do oral and documentary research about local customs while at the same time providing helpful travel handbooks. Hurston wrote for *The WPA Guide to Florida: The Federal Writers' Project Guide to 1930s Florida* (1939) and *The Florida Negro*, the latter unpublished in her lifetime. The focus of her work was on folklore, myths, and music, and students are introduced to Hurston through this historical ethnography. A telling example of her work appears in a 1939 manuscript titled "Proposed Recording Exposition," which is a proposal that she sent to Dr. Carita Doggett Corse, who was a Florida director of the Federal Writers' Project. In her proposal, available through the Library of Congress, Hurston describes in an almost poetic, fragmentary way the "justly

famous Polk County, so full of varied industries that it is full of song and story. The most robust and lusty songs of road and camp sprout in this area like corn in April. 'Uncle Bud' Planchita' 'Ella Wall' and other real characters poured into song and shaped into legend" (4). Following this description, which the students respond to for its colorful language, Hurston quoted the lyrics from "Evalina": "Evalina, Evalina you know the baby dont favor me, Eh, / Eh, you know the baby dont favor me" (4). "Evalina" is also available online from the LOC, and students hear Hurston singing these lines, followed by a brief interview with Dr. Corse about how the culture of the West Indies parallels that of Florida, where "[t]hey hold jumping dances every week," Hurston tells her. According to Stetson Kennedy, Florida state director for Folklore, Oral History, and Ethnic Studies, upon her acceptance of Hurston's application, Corse good-naturedly warned her future coworkers of Hurston's proclivities:

"Zora Neale Hurston, the Florida Negro novelist, has signed onto the project and will soon be paying us a visit. Zora has been fêted by New York literary circles, and is given to putting on certain airs, including the smoking of cigarettes in the presence of white people. So we must all make allowances for Zora." (qtd. in Kennedy)

Students enjoy these expressions of Hurston's attitude. Writings from Hurston's work on *The Florida Negro* in particular are included in *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (1995), and the LOC maintains online multiple recordings of Hurston made for the FWP as well as a selection of her play manuscripts.

The students are then shown a passage of Richard Wright's manuscript titled, "A



Survey of the Amusement Facilities of District #35,” written for the FWP in Chicago and discovered by Rosemary Hathaway. Wright describes the taverns as “dark, dank places where the neighborhood drunks hang out night and day” (qtd. in Hathaway 97). The tone of his description contrasts sharply with that of Hurston. As he continues:

The cost of the entertainment is recovered through the sale of high priced drinks. The talent of the entertainers is nil. Most of them are amateurs, and are secured from nearby neighborhoods.

The ideological import of the entertainment is largely sexual. Blues and popular songs are sung. Dances such as the *Continental* and *Snake-hips*, (*sic*) are performed. Fights are many and frequent. (qtd. in Hathaway 98)

The students tend to note the ways in which Hurston finds joy in the activities that Wright finds troubling and sordid. Yet students also see how both share a similar focus on risqué entertainment and relationships, with Hurston celebrating rural Florida and Wright taking to task an urban Chicago. As Maxwell argues, they are in different ways problematizing the Great Migration.

Besides these more sociological descriptions, many authors contributed to a 1937 compendium of short fiction, poetry, and essays called *American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose & Verse by Members of the Federal Writers' Project*. Wright's contribution was titled “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow,” later added to *Uncle Tom's Children*, and the essay is shared with students for discussion. His story about growing up in the south and his initiation to racism while playing

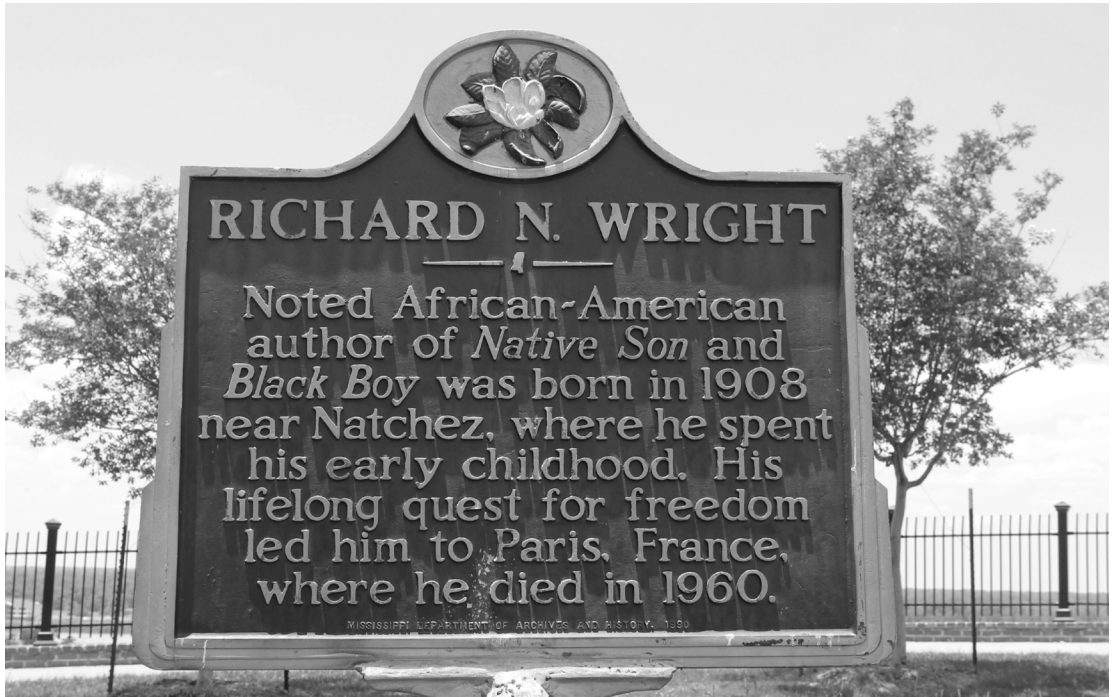
a boyhood game is both chilling and appalling. Later in life, he encountered workplace racism. In both cases, the lesson he was taught came with a large dose of violence, as shown in his passage below:

One of the bell-boys I knew in this hotel was keeping steady company with one of the Negro maids. Out of a clear sky the police descended upon his home and arrested him, accusing him of bastardy. The poor boy swore he had no intimate relations with the girl. Nevertheless, they forced him to marry her. When the child arrived, it was found to be much lighter in complexion than either of the two supposedly legal parents. The white men around the hotel made a great joke of it. They spread the rumor that some white cow must have scared the poor girl while she was carrying the baby. If you were in their presence when this explanation was offered, you were supposed to laugh. (49)

As an African-American male, Wright was subjected to the de-humanizing stereotypes and virulent racial bias that dominated the American social landscape.

*Racism, more than class, was the driving force behind Wright's work.*

At the time, the Dies Committee, which later turned into the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), was scrutinizing Richard Wright's work. Wright's essay drew the attention of the HUAC, which saw the essay as inciting class warfare. The transcript of the testimony notes that



*A historic marker in Natchez, Mississippi, commemorating Richard Wright*

“Richard Wright is a colored Communist” (“Investigation,” 1006), and in fact quotes several passages, including the above episode, into the Congressional record. Edwin P. Banta, who was a librarian with the Federal Writers’ Project in New York City, called “Ethics” “so vile that it is unfit for youth to read,” yet published by the FWP (“Investigation,” 1010). At no point in the HUAC files researched by the one author was there any discussion within the committee of the truth of Wright’s autobiographical essay. In the 1930s, Wright joined the John Reed Club in Chicago, a Communist organization (Fabre 35), which led to the Dies and the HUAC interest. Although he resigned from Communist Party in 1944 and published “I Tried to be a Communist” in *The Atlantic* magazine, the HUAC continued its surveillance of him up to his death in 1960. The HUAC had veiled hostility to Wright; the Communists were outspoken in their contempt for him. Robert Minor, writing in the *Daily Worker*, criticized Wright for his failure to

recognize that loyalty to the Communist Party was actually loyalty to the peoples’ cause (HUAC file). Racism, more than class, was the driving force behind Wright’s work.

The classroom session moves to a discussion of how Wright’s attitude toward racism reflected his assessment of Hurston’s writing. In his October 5, 1937, *New Masses* review of *Their Eyes Are Watching God*, Wright compliments Hurston before saying “her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley.” He criticizes what he calls “the minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh” in what he cites as her appeal “to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy” (“Between”). The students react to Hurston’s response to Wright in her April 2, 1938, review of *Uncle Tom’s Children* in *Saturday Review*. Calling it “a book about hatreds,” she writes that “[n]ot one act of understanding and sympathy comes to pass in the entire work” (912). She finds

that “all of the characters in this book are elemental and brutish” and that though “the book contains some beautiful writing,” which the students characterize as a “backhanded” compliment, Wright displays “the picture of the South that the communists have been passing around,” a region “ruled by brutish hatred and nothing else” (913). While Wright’s relationship with the Communist Party was on thin ice, that didn’t stop Hurston from using it to suggest that political purposes are not the role of the artist.

As the class case draws to a close, two oft-anthologized stories by Hurston and Wright are contrasted to show how the writers’ fiction paralleled their FWP work and echoed the contrasts they provided in their reviews. The students often note the ways in which Hurston describes the affection between young husband and wife in the frequently anthologized 1933 short story titled “The Gilded Six-Bits,” originally published in *Story* magazine, and then how their very human mistakes lead to potential tragedy:

Joe splashed in the bedroom and Missie May fanned around in the kitchen. A fresh red and white checked cloth on the table. Big pitcher of buttermilk beaded with pale drops of butter from the churn. Hot fried mullet, cracking bread, ham hock atop a mound of string beans and new potatoes, and perched on the window-



*Zora Neale Hurston*

sill a pone of spicy potato pudding.

Very little talk during the meal but that little consisted of banter that pretended to deny affection but in reality flaunted it. Like when Missie May reached for a second helping of the tater pone. Joe snatched it out of her reach.

After Missie May had made two or three unsuccessful grabs at the pan, she begged, “Aw, Joe gimme some mo’dat tater pone.”

“Nope, sweetenin’ is for us men-folks. Y’all pretty lil frail eels don’t need nothin’lak dis. You too sweet already.” (1714)

Their playfulness ends when Joe comes home unexpectedly to find a man whom he’d admired in his bed with Missie May:



Richard Wright

The great belt on the wheel of Time slipped and eternity stood still. By the match light he could see the man's legs fighting with his breeches in his frantic desire to get them on. He had both chance and time to kill the intruder in his helpless condition—half in and half out of his pants—but he was too weak to take action. The shapeless enemies of humanity that live in the hours of Time had waylaid Joe. He was assaulted in his weakness. Like Samson awakening after his haircut. So he just opened his mouth and laughed. (1717)

Joe's laughter at his situation—and his eventual forgiveness of Missie May, who despises her actions more than Joe ever could—emphasizes how Hurston could see the depth

of human relationships, which she explored through her intricate understanding of the culture of her lived experience. Joe learns that he can be more of a man by forgiving his wife than by killing his cuckold.

Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," originally published in 1939 in *Harper's Bazaar*, tells the story of a 17-year-old African American male who is yearning to be a man. The character Dave Saunders buys a gun in an attempt to feel powerful. Yet he does not know how to use the gun, and he carelessly shoots and kills a mule he was using to plow a white man's field. Dave

initially lies to cover his guilt, but when he ultimately confesses, the reaction is not what he expects:

Dave turned and walked slowly. He heard people laughing. Dave glared, his eyes welling with tears. Hot anger bubbled in him. Then he swallowed and stumbled on.

That night Dave did not sleep. He was glad that he had gotten out of killing the mule so easily, but he was hurt. Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they had laughed. (2074).

Dave suffers humiliation differently than Joe. And unlike the nervous laughter in the hotel of Wright's *American Stuff* article,



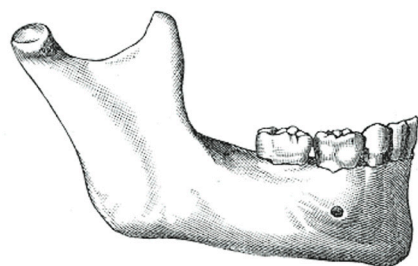
which later became part of his autobiography, the character of Dave looks for a way to retaliate:

He turned over, thinking how he had fired the gun. He had an itch to fire it again. Ef other men kin shoota gun, by Gawd, Ah kin! He was still, listening. Mebbe they all sleepin now. The house was still. He heard the soft breathing of his brother. Yes, now! He would go down and get that gun and see if he could fire it!

When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight and proud in the moonlight, looking at Jim Hawkins' big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had just one mo bullet Ah'd taka shot at tha house. Ah'd like t scare ol man Hawkins jusa little . . . Jusa enough t let im know Dave Saunders is a man" (2074-75).

Dave's anger isn't at the whites exclusively. Everyone laughed at Dave, black and white. His reaction, though, was not geared to make white audiences laugh, as Wright said was Hurston's aim, but instead to show the danger of inequality and attempt to respond to societal evils. And, again, the stories by both authors negotiate a more complicated understanding of black maleness, which students can see after being led through the writers' FWP documents and the fuller historical context of the Great Migration. Joe stays while Dave runs; Dave threatens violence but is incapable of action while Joe understands that restraint is the more difficult but more fruitful act. Both see the young black male as a person who must make a choice to preserve his dignity, and leaving is the easy way out.

In another New Deal Project for the arts, the National Archives' Still Image Division has a photograph captioned: "A negro [*sic*] from the Chicago Art Project is shown lettering an exhibit panel." The panel reads in part: "The foundation upon which this nation stands is the dignity of man as an individual. . . . [*sic*] his right to free expression of ideas in politics and religion, and in the labor by which he builds his way of life." Yet, also part of the New Deal imagery is a photograph by Marion Post Walcott. Taken for the Farm Security Administration, the lonely figure of a black man is walking up an outside stairway to a movie theater's "colored" entrance. The contrasts of these two photographs—both startling in their message and their artistry—echo the important connections between disciplines through which teachers can energize the study of both literature and history.





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