

Freedom and societal pressures in hurston's novel

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



In Zora Neale Hurston's contemporary novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she displays the fight between freedom and societal pressures. The author illustrates the struggles black women face growing up in the mid-thirties when discrimination and unequal rights existed. Throughout the novel, Hurston displays to women the importance of gaining self-realization and independence.

Hurston shows women's struggle to gain what they deem important in a controlling marriage. In the novel, Janie notices Joe Starks because he spoke for far horizon. The horizon represents hope for ideas Janie sees as unattainable, such as true love. Janie blames her Nanny for pinching the horizon so small it could choke her. Janie believes her chances at living happily in an equal partnership have been stripped away from her, leaving her to spend the rest of her years in submission. Hurston uses the horizon to show her audience that in order for self-actualization to occur, one must have the freedom to figure out what they need from life. Self-realization allows people to reflect on what they value most and gain the independence to achieve it. While gazing at a pear tree's beauty, Janie concludes this is marriage. She connects sexual desire with a successful marriage. Janie felt no passion for her first husband, and thus she considered it a failure.

Throughout the novel, she uses sexual attraction as an indicator of whether she has reached the horizon. Hurston uses the pear tree as an image of love to show women forced into marriage end up restrained from exercising their rights, such as having sexual desires. Without freedom, females do not gain the independence needed to grasp what they value in relationships and life. Janie's second husband, Joe forces her to hide her hair because it exists for

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him to look at. He uses Janie's appearance as a way to keep her under his control. After Joe's death, she decides to take down her hair, symbolizing her new found independence. The author uses the image of her hair to emphasize the suppression of females in relationships that do not allow for self-reliance. Hurston emphasizes that without securing independence, women will live a life of obedience and thus not have power over their future.

Through the use of emotional manipulation and confinement, Hurston emphasizes women's struggle for independence. During Janier's marriage to Logan, he described her place in marriage as wherever Ah need yuh. Logan restrains Janier's freedoms and confines her capabilities to only what potential he sees in her. Hurston demonstrates that confinement of one's abilities will keep them in permanent submission. She uses this to emphasize the physical and emotional power men yield over women, depriving females the independence needed to explore opportunities. Towards the end of Janier's second marriage, Joe started to comment on her aging appearance. Janie saw he was hurting inside, so she decided to endure his rude remarks. Hurston uses Janier's passiveness to show her audience how emotional manipulation can restrict a person from sharing their thoughts. Only when a person freely expresses themselves can they change their situation for the better. Hurston emphasizes that women must realize their self worth in order to reach their full potential and have an influence on society. After a fight, Janie reveals shed rather be dead than have Joe think she would hurt him. Hurston shows the loss of Janier's principles and the heavy influence on women to put their husband's feelings first. Hurston stresses the struggle for women to capture power in a manipulative and controlling relationship. The

author highlights that independence and self-realization compose the keys to satisfaction with one's life choices. Throughout the novel, Hurston uses manipulation and restriction of freedoms to show women's struggle to gain self-actualization and fulfillment.

Hurston compares the character's relationships in order to show the continuous effects of oppression in women. In Janier's first marriage, Logan complains about her work ethic saying, You think youse white folks. Logan forces Janie to do physical labor and does not allow her to speak back to him. Hurston uses the character Logan to show discrimination of black women: Logan stereotypes black females as more labor tolerant individuals. Hurston emphasizes that black women are less respected and considered ill-mannered if they disagree. The author shows a lack of independence allows for the discrimination and suppression of people. In Janier's second marriage, the longest one, her husband believes somebody got to think for women. Janier's husband does not allow her to converse and keeps her working in the store.

Hurston uses the second marriage to show the repetition of oppression in women. She emphasizes that because men continuously consider women inferior and ignorant, women struggle to have an influence on changes in a male-dominated society. Hurston highlights the need for self-actualization and independence in order to reach a state of equality. In contrast, Janier's marriage to Tea Cake allowed her to gain independence and arrive at the horizon. Tea Cake remains thankful for Janie because she came along and made something outta him. Tea Cake allows Janie to voice her opinions,

make decisions, and experience real affection. She found love in a marriage that allowed her to exist as her own person and reflect on her past. Hurston compares this marriage to the previous two in order to show the effects of gaining independence and control. Hurston emphasizes that women must have self-actualization in order to end oppression and establish equality among men and women.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston displays women's struggles for independence. Hurston describes the life of Janie Crawford, who struggles through three marriages and oppression. The author emphasizes the need for women to self reflect and fight for what they value. Hurston uses the marriages and characters to show how oppression prevents women from exercising their freedoms and gaining equality. She shows that self-actualization allows for women to take control of their future and acquire a sense of fulfillment with their life choices. Hurston wrote the novel in order to show women the importance of having self-actualization and independence.