

Their eyes were watching god: overview

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Houston reveals the injustice of life as an African-American female during the early 20th century. Through narration, Houston sheds light upon the ignorance and biased perceptions in the African-American society that help to mold expectations for individuals while also placing limits upon them. Expressing hatred amongst their own elevates the telling of the novel's bildungsroman and a woman's strong desire and belief in her own fate.

The conflict of man vs. society is quickly revealed from the beginning of the novel. Through a recalled account of past life events, the reader is allowed to grasp an understanding of the life of Janie Crawford. Her life's trials and tribulations have compelled her into the woman she is, a woman of self-determination who has abandoned the idea of the need for a male presence, as a result of three unsuccessful marriages. Coming into her own, Janie battles with society's ignorant definition of gender roles and relations versus her personal views of self progression and independence.

From her financially driven first marriage to the death of her last husband, she has taken on the flaws of others, specifically a man, to help her search for personal happiness, which has only hindered her progression. Janie once took on the same views as society but due to her personal experiences that allowed herself growth, she broke free of the biased, realizing that the development of an individual identity amounts way more than simply compromising for the like of others.

There is an evident reoccurring theme of ignorance throughout the novel. At the center of this ignorance is Janie, as she is ridiculed and poorly judged by

her community. As she arrives back home, she is looked down upon because she arrives without the company of her husband. The judgment placed upon her and the gossip that is said is a result of naïve ignorance on both parties, the community and Janie herself.

The people of the town know little about Janie and what she has encountered in her years away, but make no genuine attempt to know, so to them their assumptions are truth. Janie makes no attempt to conform to their beliefs and what they feel is appropriate and this is seen when she is judged by the clothing that she wears. For her, she is comfortable and the lifestyle that others live are not one in which she envies.

The naive ignorance of the people of the community and Janie only heightens the conflict of man vs. society. It is because of this lack of knowledge/information and lack of desire to understand while there will forever be a vicious cycle of ignorance. Ignorance within the novel is also revealed in the character of Mrs. Turner. With her the issue of what is true beauty is addressed. Being a woman of Caucasian characteristics, she believes that a more African appearance does not equal beauty in the same way. She has a fascination with Janie because of her Caucasian characteristics.

She herself has Caucasian characteristics that she believes amplifies her beauty. She does not want to be categorized with people of tones darker than hers and hair of different texture. Her limited perspective causes a self battle. The novel reveals truth about the human race and how although it can be found in everyone, ignorance can be damaging to a person growth and growth as a whole.

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