

## Day Two

### I. Background Information on Hurston's Eatonville

#### A. Read "The Eatonville Anthology."

This story was published in *The Messenger* in 1926, while Hurston was still a student at Barnard College. It contains all the elements that would appear a decade later in her masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The construction of the story is composed of 14 short-story fragments, juxtaposed together to form a vision of a world in which life is hard and time stands still. In fact, Delia Konzett calls it a "hermetic" community, in which

Poverty, ignorance, and disenfranchisement become seemingly unchanging ontological conditions, characterizing the black community as having no recourse to civic and social agency in the larger context of America's sociopolitical landscape. For all their vitality, charm, and independence, Hurston's characters display a political complacency that unwittingly upholds the Southern feudal order, with social stagnation and white supremacist outlook" (100-01).

I ask students to address this controversial view by dividing them into groups with each group examining one of the sections of the anthology. The section receiving the most attention will probably be the ninth story, which deals

with the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Clarke. They are engaged in a cycle of abuse and reconciliation with each other (and will morph into the characters of Jody Starks and Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*). The most troubling line in the story is delivered drily by the narrator: "They say he [Joe] used to beat her in the store when he was a young man, but he is not so impatient now. He can wait until he goes home."

B. This story leads to a discussion about gender roles in Eatonville. For background information about the lives of black women during this time period, please see "Womanism, Feminism, and Issues of Gender." I enlisted my University of Central Florida graduate students, who were taking a course with me on the literary friendship of Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, to assist with the research. In this project, we first examine the history of feminism, in general, and then black feminism. Next, we look at gender roles in education and the workplace in Eatonville.

### C. Discussion Questions

1. In "The Eatonville Anthology," the narrator presents negative aspects of the town, such as adultery, spousal abuse, and poverty. Why do you think Hurston portrays the town in this manner? How would you characterize the town, based on the details that Hurston presents in the "Anthology"?

2. What is the position of women in the town? Based on the material presented in "Womanism, Feminism, and Issues of Gender," how does their position differ from white women's during that same time period?
3. What is the nature of women's power in the Eatonville world that Hurston creates?
4. Compare and contrast male/female roles in Eatonville, based on the story and material presented in the "Womanism" section.