

1988

Zora Neale Hurston's Search for Identity in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

Joan E. Sebastian

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [English](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Sebastian, Joan E., "Zora Neale Hurston's Search for Identity in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*" (1988). *Masters Theses*. 2567.
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/2567>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

August 18, 1988

Date



Author

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because _____

Date

Author

ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

IN MOSES, MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

(TITLE)

BY

Joan E. Sebastian

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1988

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

August 18, 1988

DATE

[REDACTED]

ADVISER

August 18, 1988

DATE

[REDACTED]

DEPARTMENT HEAD

[Handwritten Signature]

Zora Neale Hurston, Afro-American writer of the 1920s and 1930s, has gained critical recognition for her novels and studies about the Afro-American masses. Hurston, also an anthropologist and folklorist, worked directly with southern Afro-Americans through her research in both of these fields. Her folklore collecting journeys enabled her to see and to capture the cultural traditions and oral heritage of Afro-Americans. It was her search into the cultural traditions, moreover, that led her to find her own identity. Hurston, therefore, depicted her protagonists as searching for an identity in most of her novels, with this quest especially apparent in Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939). In this novel she blends Afro-American traditions--voodoo, hoodoo, and folklore--to help Moses, the Egyptian version of the well-known Biblical figure, end his quest for self-identity. Hurston's own life parallels Moses's; and, in effect, when Moses gains his sense of identity and sense of community, Hurston gains hers also.

Three stages of development exist in Hurston's search for an identity: being raised in a southern but autonomous Afro-American community; studying under anthropologist Franz Boas, leading her to collect folklore and, eventually, to explore hoodoo and voodoo; and her final accomplishment, writing Moses, the novel that incorporates cultural elements from the first two

stages in a successful attempt to fuse these elements into the foundation on which Moses's (and Hurston's) identity is based.

Hurston spent much of her career fighting to overcome the obstacles that both white and Afro-American males set up; she fought against prejudicial stereotypes that labeled her derogatorily as an Afro-American woman novelist. She created her own esthetic with which to write, an esthetic that let her portray the masses as she saw them. She found a niche in society through which she could develop her identity by following her esthetic and by incorporating Afro-American traditions into her work. Moses, Hurston's most significantly important book in which she portrays the search for her own identity, contains elements that are culturally traditional, namely elements of folklore, hoodoo, and voodoo. Hoodoo, furthermore, was intimately grounded in Hurston's sense of community and sense of self, leaving her free to incorporate it into Moses. Hurston's Moses, for example, was the greatest hoodoo master who ever lived, yet he still had enough human qualities so that Afro-Americans could easily identify with him. Since Hurston found her identity through Moses, then her writing of this novel was a way for her to find out who she was and to what community she belonged.

Zora Neale Hurston, novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist, spent much time struggling for a reconciliation among the three most important aspects of her life: her race, her gender, and her profession. A combination of these three elements hindered her chances for success. The time period, though, was also against her. Hurston rarely gave the same date of her birth twice, leading critics to believe that she playfully fabricated the year so that her life would remain shrouded in mystery. Critic Joyce Joyce writes, however, that Professor Cheryl Wall concluded after much research that Hurston was really born in 1885 ("Myth and Reality" 1). Robert Hemenway, another critic and author of Hurston's biography, says that she was probably born in 1901 (13). The actual date, however, is unimportant here, for it was the historical era in which she was raised and worked that hurt her efforts at a successful writing career. In the 1920s and 1930s especially, males, both white and Afro-American, viewed her as an outsider whose only intention was to stir up trouble and to try to "become somebody."

Politics, time, gender, and race seemed to be against Zora Neale Hurston from the moment of her birth. But, if she had heard the above statement, she would probably have laughed, told a funny anecdote about her rural upbringing and then shrugged off the comment. Why? Because Zora Neale Hurston was a fighter. She

made her way up from a lower-class, southern family life, attended college, searched the countryside for folklore, and wrote books. She survived practically on a day-to-day existence, but her life was exciting and eventful, the way she probably always hoped it would be. She possessed the energy, the vitality, the vibrancy that made her want to shout "Hey, world! I'm Zora Neale Hurston, and here I come!"

Hurston's exuberance, along with her sense of values, becomes easy to recognize in her novels, which, incidentally, are all very diverse in plot and secondary themes. Though her major theme of a character searching for an identity is constant throughout her novels, the stories that depict the search range all the way from the exodus of Hebrews under the leadership of an Egyptian Moses to the exploration of a southern, white, female psyche. She wrote numerous short stories and essays; an autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942); two collections of folklore, Mules and Men (1935) and Voodoo Gods: An Inquiry into Native Myths and Magic in Jamaica and Haiti (1938), which was originally titled Tell My Horse; and four novels, Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939), and Seraph on the Suwanee (1948), leaving an additional one Herod the Great unfinished. Her best known work is probably Their Eyes Were Watching God, a novel depicting the protagonist

Janie's journey in search of love and in search of an identity. Though I am doing the novel a great injustice with my one-sentence description, it is Janie's search for an identity that is important here, because this theme becomes an important quest in Hurston's own life as well as in the lives of her characters. Since this quest repeatedly appears in Hurston's novels, I explore this theme as the central thesis of my essay while using Moses, Man of the Mountain as the central novel under discussion. Hurston writes Moses as an allegorical experiment that links the social, economic, and cultural struggles of the Hebrews to those of the Afro-Americans. Her exploration of the connection between the two peoples and between the Afro-American masses and herself helps in her own search for an identity.

Zora Neale Hurston herself spent a good deal of her life searching for an identity. She finds her identity through her cultural discovery of her Afro-American roots; the study of folklore and hoodoo (North American voodoo) affirms her folk heritage in the traditions of Afro-American culture. When Hurston further explores and understands the hoodoo framework, she also asserts her own cultural awareness. This cultural awareness, moreover, provides the first clue into Hurston's sense of self-identity. Because she collects information about and interprets the significance of hoodoo as one aspect of her Afro-American roots, she reveals her

concern for cultural authenticity, and, with this authenticity, Hurston reveals her own sense of self, not the persona that she chooses to show the public. In her autobiography Dust Tracks, for example, she caters to a white audience. She says "I have no race prejudice of any kind....you [white people] lose nothing by not looking just like me" (286). With this ironic twisting of words she says that being Afro-American is better than being white. In the last few lines, however, she contradicts this statement by saying that "...we godly demons may breed a noble world in a few hundred generations or so" (286). Here she sounds subservient to whites and almost tells them not to worry because Afro-Americans will not better their condition for at least a few hundred years. She is not entirely honest in Dust Tracks; she shows the public what she wants them to see while in Moses she shows her true sense of identity.

My argument, then, rests on my belief that hoodoo is so intimately grounded in Hurston's true sense of self and sense of community that she consciously weaves it among and within her characters in Moses. To demonstrate my premise, I separate this essay into three sections: a focus on Hurston as she establishes herself as an Afro-American, woman, and author; an exploration of the origins and significance of voodoo and hoodoo; and an indepth study of Moses, showing how the novel

incorporates hoodoo practices with Hurston's developing sense of self.

SELF-IDENTITY: DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFRO-AMERICAN WRITER

In this first section I provide a brief overview of the era and of Hurston's life and esthetics. By including background information about the social and political climate in the United States during the early 1900s, I stress the difficulties which all Afro-Americans faced and which caused the rise of new Afro-American leaders. These leaders influenced the Harlem Renaissance artists, a group which includes Hurston. Furthermore, I establish that Hurston's upbringing and research into Afro-American folklore is the key to her finding a niche in a society with which she can be comfortable and, subsequently, through which she can find her identity. I show how collecting Afro-American folklore gives Hurston a sense of community and a sense of self as an Afro-American, then as a woman, and, finally, as an author.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the horrors of continuing racial unrest engulfed the United States. The Great Migration of southern Afro-Americans to the industrialized cities of the North contributed to the problems. Southern whites were losing a large

percentage of their cheap labor forces while northern whites were stricken with the fear that Afro-Americans would take over jobs meant for white people and send their children to schools meant for white children. Also, the northern white population realized that it would have to live beside and accept a centralized mass of Afro-Americans; the fear still remained that with a little organization and luck, the Afro-Americans could rise up against the whites.

The fear and economic upheavals led to some of the most heinous crimes that white people committed against Afro-Americans. During the 1910s and 1920s Afro-American men, women, and children were dragged off and either lynched or burned alive. In the heavily populated cities such as Chicago, New York, and Detroit, riots broke out leaving both Afro-Americans and whites dead, usually, though, with a greater number of Afro-American bodies filling the streets (Bennett 293-94). This era was the time of active Ku Klux Klan terrorism and of Jim Crow laws, both of which pervaded the South, in the white effort to keep Afro-Americans ignorant and docile. But even during the worst events that befell Afro-Americans, they gathered strength to fight for equality against the unjustly ruling white middle- and upper-classes who kept freedom from them. Even though Afro-Americans saw repeated defeats in challenging the prejudicial attitudes prevalent among whites, many

thought that if they could prove themselves worthy of notice in any circumstance that showed them equal to whites, then they would start the climb towards overall social equality. Many Afro-Americans, therefore, directed their attention towards the political turmoil occurring in Europe in the late 1910s as a possible means of proving their worth through their abilities as soldiers. With the United States on the verge of declaring war against Germany in 1917, the need for Afro-Americans and white Americans to unite in battle seemed a likely possibility.

While World War I might have united the American population in the fight against a powerful enemy, the fact remained that racial unrest during and immediately following the war was just as bad as before the overseas involvement of the United States. Some Afro-Americans who were trained as soldiers and sent to Europe to fight were instead given menial jobs to do. White soldiers did not trust Afro-American soldiers. The men in the few all Afro-American companies that existed (there were no racially mixed companies at that time) usually had to undergo an unnecessary amount of humiliation. In one case an Afro-American company that had recently arrived in France was immediately sent to reside with a French company. There, the Afro-Americans were carefully watched so that they would not talk to French women, and the United States government distributed proclamations

cautioning against "any pronounced degree of intimacy between French soldiers and black officers" (Bennett 292). The controlling white leaders wanted to keep Afro-Americans where they thought they belonged: on a lower economic scale and far away from their view. But, in the wake of the returning, victorious soldiers, and through the efforts of a few Afro-American leaders, the era when the Afro-American artists were to weave their way into the annals of literary history was about to begin.

Langston Hughes wrote in his autobiography The Big Sea that "It was the period when the Negro was in vogue," (228) to describe this new era. He was referring to the Roaring Twenties, the era that future generations would look back upon and remember as a time when women danced the Charleston, men gambled all night, and speak-easies provided a little bit of comfort through their hoards of illegal alcohol. But the 1920s brought the existence of the Afro-American to life on the tongues of both educated Afro-Americans and whites. The Roaring Twenties, seen from an Afro-American perspective, was termed the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement, a time when new leaders were emerging in Afro-American communities, especially Harlem, since many Afro-Americans had moved there during the Great Migration. These leaders were artists--essayists, orators, teachers--and they instilled a feeling among

educated Afro-Americans that one day, using whatever necessary methods it took, Afro-Americans would prove that they were as worthy of respect as any white person. At least these were the sentiments of most of the more "radical" leaders. Booker T. Washington, of course, still advocated a policy of Afro-American submission to the whims of the white man and, consequently, accepted Jim Crow laws and segregation acts (Bennett 278). And, up until his death he could be found voicing his opinions and arguing against the views of the radical Afro-American leaders who preached equality. Afro-American writers, musicians, singers, and actors who became prominent in the 1920s and thereafter, however, proved through their work that they had heard a part of the message from the radicals.

Besides Washington, who directed his words mostly to the lower-class, poorly educated Afro-Americans, two other important leaders, W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke, influenced artists. Aspiring writers recognized these men as powerful leaders among the Afro-American literati in the Harlem Renaissance. Because DuBois and Locke only partially agreed on the principles involved in what they conceived as a new artistic movement, each developed his own theory of esthetics. The fledgling members of the new generation of authors respected these two men who directed them toward a more socially significant level of creative activity. The new authors

had the opportunity to examine DuBois's and Locke's esthetic ideas and choose which man, if either, they were willing to follow. Or, if they rejected either parts or all of DuBois's or Locke's views, then it was up to them and their own creative abilities to find an esthetic in which they believed and with which they could comfortably work. Hurston fit into this latter category, for she combined specific views from DuBois and Locke with her own views to mold a personalized esthetic that would guide her writing. To understand Hurston's esthetic ideas, however, DuBois's and Locke's must also be clearly delineated.

W.E.B DuBois, older and a bit more militant in his views than Locke, believed in the use of propaganda--the swaying of the emotions and behavior of an audience with symbols--to express himself. Propaganda was his tool for protest. One of the main purposes in his speeches and writings was to try to get white people to understand that "racist social institutions oppressed blacks" and to try to get Afro-Americans to understand that "change in their subordinate status was impossible unless they demanded it insistently and continuously" (Rudwick 63). He stressed the importance of voicing opinions, for he thought that the masses could only be heard through their loud outcry.

DuBois also believed in racial unity and the acceptance of the Afro-American in America. He was

acutely aware of and angered by the dual identity that some Afro-Americans felt while living in a white society. The integration of the African heritage with the American self into one self was extremely difficult to accomplish while still retaining parts of both identities. Moreover, though he sometimes differed with public opinions when he felt that the popular views were not advancing the Afro-American race, he always tried to keep the needs of Afro-Americans in mind:

He articulated the blacks' desire for full participation in the larger American society and demanded the abolition of all caste distinctions based simply on race and color.

...he also exhibited a nationalist side--a strong sense of group pride, advocacy of racial unity, and a profound identification with blacks in other parts of the world.

(Rudwick 64)

He closely identified himself with Africa and was proud of the traditions from which he came. He thought that the Afro-American race should create literary works using the themes of Afro-American life and history. And, he wanted Afro-Americans to define Beauty for themselves and not let white people define it for them. Once Afro-Americans had their own conception of Beauty, they--and America--would be enriched (Rudwick 78).

Finally, DuBois put his faith in the "Talented

Tenth" to serve the race and forward his ideals. The Talented Tenth was his term for "the college-trained leadership cadre responsible for elevating blacks economically and culturally" (Rudwick 66). In this view he was in direct conflict with Washington who taught his students that vocational education was the only way to gain success. DuBois, being highly educated himself, wanted the same types of Afro-Americans to continue his causes and battles:

For [Afro-Americans] salvation would come only from an educated elite who would chart the way to cultural and economic elevation, teaching the doctrine that blacks "MUST DO FOR THEMSELVES," by developing their own businesses, newspapers, schools, and welfare institutions. (Rudwick 77)

He believed that the school system should provide the means by which Afro-Americans could become better educated and begin the first step in the process of cultural and economic elevation.

DuBois viewed the educational system as the best way for Afro-Americans to obtain a "broad busy abundance" of "knowledge and culture" (372). Though he emphasized the Talented Tenth as the men and women who were to lead Afro-Americans toward social and cultural equality, he believed in a strong education for everyone, an education that would "teach the workers to work

and the thinkers to think; make carpenters of carpenters, and philosophers of philosophers..." (372). He knew that not all people were suited for the job of writers or plumbers or doctors, but for a society to work smoothly by itself and in the midst of other societies, all of these people were needed. DuBois stressed the importance of finding the correct profession for people so that they could progress as far as possible within their own level of mental and physical capabilities.

While DuBois (1868-1963) seems to be angrily assertive and bent on thrusting Afro-Americans into the consciousness of every white American, Locke (1886-1954) is more reserved and practical. They are both, however, almost cast from the same mold: highly educated, polemical, and successful. But here the similarities stop, for Locke represents a new generation of Afro-Americans. This new generation wants to use the experiences and attitudes of past Afro-Americans and whites to create a better present. By looking at the past, Locke and his followers are already one step further than DuBois, because they recognize and applaud the progress that the Afro-American race has made. DuBois sees only the pain and the humiliation that the past has brought to Afro-Americans, so he stresses the need for writers to show racial unity and pride. For DuBois the past is too immediate, and he is unable to

distance himself from it. Locke, however, can unemotionally examine the past and then integrate it in his work in the form of persuasive insistence for Afro-American freedom and equality.

One of Locke's main principles was the recognition of how far Afro-Americans had journeyed to reach their present state of self-understanding. He said, in his essay "The New Negro," that Afro-Americans would no longer stay in their subservient position:

The mind of the Negro seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority....With this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase... (4)

He knew that Afro-Americans had risen to their present condition through hard work and will power; they must, however, readjust their whole process of thinking, for when they thought they were inferior to whites, they were inferior. Locke verbally destroyed the white people's notions that they should be able to rule over a group of people that the whites termed inferior. His emphasis, then, on Afro-American growth showed his attempt at psychological manipulation of Afro-Americans' views of themselves. He felt that Afro-Americans were

just as important as white Americans; Afro-Americans needed to hear that fact, though, so they could gain a better sense of where they stood when compared with white people: Locke helped them recognize that they were creatively and culturally equal.

Locke also explored the principle of "mutual understanding" between the racial groups. He believed that contact within respective races and then among different ones would lead to a feeling of respect and enlightenment by all parties. Afro-Americans and whites alike needed to experience what it felt like to interact with a member from another race. Locke not only wanted Afro-American manual laborers to work with white manual laborers, but he also wanted Afro-American businessmen to work with white businessmen. Unfortunately, he never said how this optimistic idea was to be accomplished. He did mention, however, that more and more whites were becoming interested in and actually studying the Afro-American, which he encouraged (Locke 9).

Locke is correct when he says the way to learn about another race or culture is to study that society. He believes in race-consciousness and pride, and he wants others to see an accurate picture of Afro-Americans with all their faults and all their goodness. Locke turns a realistic view of people and places into a quest for authenticity through which others can gain a sense of Afro-American identity. His realistic insights

help readers and observers find the truth about how Afro-Americans look, feel, and act. He does not necessarily want to leave the ideal completely out of character portraits; rather, he wants the ideal and the real to blend together and to reach a level where the real is not only dominant to the ideal, but also dependent on the ideal for cultural accuracy.

Finally, Locke viewed confident self-expression through poetry, art, education, and the Afro-American intelligentsia's new outlook as a way to attain greater poise, and, hence, new leadership abilities (Locke 5). He thought that once Afro-Americans were accepted through the arts--the portrait of Afro-Americans that the arts produced, whether the novel about the bourgeois Afro-American family or the poem about urban unrest--that then they would be accepted as a race. The old days of DuBois's fire and brimstone propagandistic speeches saying artists should create works involving African themes in order to show Beauty were over at least for the time being. His ideas were to reappear in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, but in the 1930s Locke had become the new leader of writers, and he said that art should be separate from politics:

The great social gain in this (the Afro-American as participant in the making of American civilization) is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields

of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to the revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships. (Locke 15)

Locke saw art as the medium by which Afro-Americans could gain some degree of equality through expression. Then, through the acknowledgement of their talents, Afro-Americans and whites would reach an understanding that the races were equal. Locke hoped, then, that the Afro-American artist's work would stand up under the scrutiny of probing white eyes as a piece of great literature, or music, or dance. In other words, he admonished writers to create art about Afro-Americans because Afro-American expression would create great art. His hidden motive, however, was to use the art "created for the sake of art" to eventually prove to the white masses that Afro-American art was equal to white art; hence, Afro-Americans were equal to whites.

The new group of writers emerging in the wake of DuBois's and Locke's views demanded a more realistic set of values to follow than what other writers had so far provided. The artists--among them Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and Langston Hughes--wanted to write about every aspect of Afro-Americans,

whether or not their writings would raise Afro-Americans to the social, economic, or cultural level of whites; they had no intention of currying favor with whites. They believed that the cultural idiosyncrasies of Afro-Americans, the ones that made Afro-Americans different from whites, were the ones to capture because they gave Afro-Americans their identity. The race problem had become a tiresome issue to these artists, and they chose to write realistic portraits of Afro-Americans and leave the appeal for racial equality to sociologists.

In the eyes of those young artists, beauty was the uniqueness that the Afro-Americans showed, not the mask that Afro-Americans put on as they tried to imitate whites. This adoption of a mask, however, was a way for Afro-Americans to survive in a world that stressed the supremacy of whites and white values. The new artists followed Locke's views and opted to discard the mask in the portraits of their characters, for Afro-Americans could not be free until they were truly able to show themselves. The artists counted on Afro-American readers to synthesize the characters' virtues and uniqueness as Afro-Americans with their own lives.

Langston Hughes, acting as spokesperson for the group, commented on what he felt the Afro-American artist should try to accomplish:

It is the duty of the younger Negro artist,
if he accepts any duties at all from out-

siders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro--and beautiful!" ("Negro Artist" 694)

The new artists resented the idea of suppressing their background so that the powerful white figureheads would eventually come to see that Afro-Americans were the same as white Americans. They found this idea degrading to themselves and to the Afro-American masses, so in their writing they tried to capture the Afro-American essence using dialect, common people, spirituals, and other Afro-American rituals, events, and themes. Hurston wrote in her article "Characteristics of Negro Expression," for instance, that Afro-Americans contribute much colorfulness to language, using metaphors, similes, double descriptives, and verbal nouns. Some examples are "That's a rope," "High-tall," "Uglying away," and "Won't stand a broke" (25). The new writers intended to use phrases like these in their writing to reflect the speech and, thus, the differences that culturally set Afro-Americans apart from whites.

Zora Neale Hurston, born in a small, rural town, quickly established herself as a member of the new generation of Afro-Americans trying to develop an esthetic that would benefit all Afro-Americans. Her views fell in between DuBois's and Locke's, for she

was never entirely convinced that either man held a true grasp of the principles she felt should be inherent in an Afro-American esthetic. She believed in DuBois's views of group pride and racial unity, and she believed in Locke's views of a "pure art." She differed, however, with the goal of creating an artistic form of expression that would benefit Afro-Americans through a vicarious form of cultural and social elevation. She felt that she could adequately portray the Afro-American masses, but she could not take on the responsibility of guiding the masses to a greater sense of self-identity and self-understanding, especially since most of her life was comprised of the same search.

Compared to her contemporaries, Hurston was probably the one who was most closely associated with Afro-American masses. Growing up in a rural Florida town, she became acquainted with lower-class Afro-Americans and was herself, for a while, poor. Some of the other writers such as Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer came from a middle-class, northern background, so while they never needed to struggle financially as much as Hurston did, neither did they have a close connection with the lower-class masses (Hemenway 51, 61). Hurston never regreted her southern upbringing, for she knew that her connection with the poor, rural Afro-Americans gave her more of an insight into the minds and actions of the masses than any of the other writers. She did

not meet the elite Afro-American class until she was older; therefore, the people from her childhood made a lasting impression and became an influential factor in her artistic development.

Afro-Americans populated and fully governed the town of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's home. This fact also put Hurston in a different category from the other writers. She grew up with the notion that being white was not a sign of perfection. She probably realized that if the town survived without having any white people in control, then Afro-Americans could be just as responsible and intelligent as whites. The Afro-American town acted as a shelter from the outside white influences that stereotyped Afro-Americans into lazy, stupid non-humans. When she left Eatonville and obtained a view of the dominant white world, she never lost sight of the fact that America did not necessarily have to be based upon white superiority and Afro-American subserviency. If Eatonville could exist, then so could other towns like it. Hurston, thrust among such a strong, structured group of Afro-Americans working towards the good of their race from the very beginning of her life, gained a set of values on which she based her esthetics: she wrote about the Afro-American masses, the people she knew well.

Hurston recorded an incident from her childhood in her autobiography that captured the essence of Eaton-

ville's people and their survival code. When Hurston was nine years old, her mother, while on her deathbed, left Zora with certain instructions to fulfill upon her death. Zora promised Lucy, her mother, that she would not let anyone remove the pillow from under her head and would not let anyone cover the clock or the mirror. Unfortunately for Hurston, she was stopped in her endeavors to please her mother; some neighborhood women removed the pillow before Lucy died and covered both the clock and the mirror (Dust Tracks 86). Besides trying to solve the emotional problems and guilty feelings that arose from that childhood incident, Hurston had to come face-to-face with the powerful attitudes of the people she had known all her life. Hemenway suggests that the Eatonville community believed in certain rituals that should be performed upon a person's death. For instance, they thought that a pillow under a person's head prolonged dying, the clock would be ruined if it were running and the spirit of the dead looked on it, and the image of the dead person would appear on the uncovered mirror. Lucy's wish to defy the conventional ceremonies represented a symbolic rejection of the village folklore (16).

Lucy was a powerful force in Hurston's life, both as a woman who survived the insults of a philandering husband and as a woman who wanted her children to be equal to the best of the white upper echelon. Lucy

insisted upon her children receiving an education and even helped to teach them their lessons. But while Lucy encouraged Zora's spirit and imagination, it was Zora's father who demanded that his children settle down and live according to southern white wishes. He did not want his children hanged or beaten by any white man, so he taught them that it was socially and economically harmful for Afro-Americans to be too assertive (Hemenway 14-15). Hurston's father, therefore, had no intention of letting Zora help her mother assert her cultural independence; he wanted to be obeyed and saw disrespect in Zora's actions.

Hurston's failure to help her mother thwart these local customs, then, leads her to question the validity of familial relationships and of folklore. She begins to wonder whether her mother's idealistic image of her children is better or worse than her father's realistic image of Afro-Americans in a white society. At this time she turns to folklore and hopes that it, because it is so present in rural Afro-American life styles, will give her the answers that she wants. Hurston sees folklore as the means by which she can gain control over her own thoughts and actions.

After Hurston starts to research folklore and to realize that the Eatonville community's belief in town customs is too strong to combat, she feels less guilty about failing her mother. She comes up against a force

more powerful than she can control, a force that her fellow Afro-Americans willfully oversee. Once she knows that she has no control over helping her mother or over dissuading folk beliefs, she can begin to grow intellectually with this acknowledgement. Moreover, since the central core of Afro-American life revolves around the folklore that the members practice, Lucy's repudiation and Zora's interference are bound to upset the strength and cohesiveness of Afro-American beliefs. Hurston sees that once the force and unity is interrupted, the beliefs become less important. The town cannot allow this loss of folklore, for it is the lore that defines their lives. If someone takes away the folklore, then the traditions of the Afro-Americans are also lost. If Hurston, therefore, can find the rationale behind the customs, she can come to terms with her mother's death better than if she can only see the customs as "superstitions."

THE PROGRESSION FROM FOLKLORE THROUGH HOODOO TO VODOO

In this section of my essay, I address the relationship among folklore, hoodoo, and voodoo. All three elements nurture a sense of Hurston's identity through the cultural awareness that the elements provide. I show how anthropologist Franz Boas helped

Hurston connect rural, southern folklore with her own traditional upbringing; how voodoo progressed out of Africa into Jamaica, Haiti, and the United States, where it became hoodoo; how hoodoo was another way to link Afro-Americans to their cultural tradition; and how voodoo reaffirmed Hurston's quest for her African roots. Finally, I establish a strong link between Hurston's cultural awareness and her writing by showing that she has researched folklore, hoodoo, and voodoo and can include these elements as authentic cultural characteristics present in her own roots.

After Hurston was older, had moved away from Eatonville and enrolled at Barnard College (New York), important events happened, the first of which was the building of new friendships. These friendships were significant because she had left the tight circle of her rural, lower-class friends and joined the ranks of the intelligent middle-class, the men and women who were to become her contemporaries. It was a gradual shift, for in between Eatonville and New York she had performed odd jobs, such as a manicurist and a secretary, and had already come into contact with a wide variety of people. Living among the middle-class Afro-Americans, however, was a shock to her. She learned how these people lived and worked with each other and among the white people; she learned a new set of values that had to be adopted if she wanted to survive. For example, in order for

Hurston to survive financially, she had to solicit money from higher-class whites. Once she had the money, though, she had to act, live, and write according to how her white patron dictated. Her new environment was stressful and caused her to try to gain a different identity so that the other members and patrons would accept her.

The second important event was actually a combination of a few singular events: the loss of Hurston's self that was grounded in the rural, lower-class Afro-American life; her attempt to gain a new self that would get the approval of the educated middle class; and her eventual renewal of her background and folk heritage through the guidance of anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas helped Hurston realize where she belonged in relation to other Afro-Americans and to Afro-American culture; he helped her form the ideals that she would use in developing her writing; he helped her improve her assertiveness, for he believed that no studies should be blocked due to race or gender. All in all, his teachings provided the stepping stone that Hurston needed to transform herself from a floundering young girl interested in folklore to an intelligent anthropologist and collector of that folklore in order to become an Afro-American woman novelist recording the folklore and fashioning her own identity through her fictions.

Some of Boas's specific anthropological principles

played a dominant role in the forming of Hurston's identity. Critic Joyce Kilmer condenses them: first, Boas said that human behavior is an "unpredictable and changing cycle." Second, the anthropologist focused on the behavior of the whole racial or social group, not just on the individual. And finally, Boas believed in the idea that each culture has different values; universal values supposedly inherent in every culture are nonexistent ("Change" 70-71). If we view Hurston as an Afro-American searching for an acceptable environment in which she can culturally research, emotionally grow, and professionally write, Boas gave her the means to realize this goal. Through his teachings Hurston realized that cultures are different from, though not necessarily better than or worse than, one another. She could then look upon the town of Eatonville as having been comprised of people who had their own contributions to creativity in the oral tradition of storytelling; all she had to do was to talk with the people (her sense of humor and openness were helpful) and to collect the information. The cyclical advance from her rural home to her anthropological education and back to her roots strengthened her identity, for the cycle brought her in touch with the folklore that was not only a part of her past, but gave her the distance with which to view the significance of that past. Thus, Boas helped to build Hurston's self-confidence, which, in turn, made Hurston

a stronger folklorist and novelist.

For all practical purposes the folklore that Hurston collected while on her journeys through the American South could be defined as the stories Afro-Americans related and with which most of the other inhabitants were well acquainted. These stories, the ones passed down from generation to generation, were the ones Hurston wanted to hear, for they gave each town a sense of community, because all Afro-Americans living within that particular town shared the tales. Hemenway expands the definition of folklore by emphasizing tradition as being important in this orally transmitted communication. He says that people (in this case, Afro-Americans) are secure in the familiar, and, hence, repetition becomes a well-known and desirable tool for any group to use as a link to their cultural traditions (85). Hurston, then, collects these traditions and gains firsthand knowledge of her own culture. It is important that she chooses to write books on or including folklore; as she learns about Afro-American traditions, she develops a greater sense of herself as an Afro-American. These stories are hers, too, and they help Hurston develop into a writer with the ability to create authentic portrayals of Afro-American folk culture.

Hurston's folklore-collecting journeys help to establish her as an Afro-American, a female, and then a

writer. Many critics describe her as possessing an outrageous, fun-loving spirit always ready to tell a joke or act out a comical story that she had heard in Eatonville. But she also spends much of her time contemplating which direction her life should move. Folklore, and then hoodoo and voodoo, give her the direction. She moves from exploring the oral stories of Afro-Americans to exploring the religious voodoo practices that Africans began. Through the process of migration, Africans brought voodoo to America where Afro-Americans adopted the practices under more relaxed practices that they called hoodoo.

Hurston became interested in hoodoo because it was another way that Afro-Americans transmitted their folk heritage. In 1928 she began to collect the lore that would eventually be included in the hoodoo section of Mules and Men. Her collecting techniques were much like her techniques for gathering folklore: she took on the role of a participant-observer. When she found a hoodoo man who believed in her desire to learn, she would become an apprentice to him. In this way "she not only gained a holistic view of the hoodoo process, but also experienced a series of impressive initiation ceremonies marking her entrance into the occult world" (Hemenway 118).

After thoroughly researching hoodoo practices, Hurston came to the conclusion that hoodoo was a way for

Afro-Americans, being a powerless people, to gain power. Hemenway states that hoodoo (also termed conjure, goopher, tricking, hexing, and fixing) is a tradition in Afro-American culture:

Hoodoo and conjure are collective terms for all the traditional beliefs in black culture centering around a votary's confidence in the power of a conjure, root, two-head, or hoodoo doctor to alter with magical powers a situation that seems rationally irremediable. At its most basic level it is sympathetic magic; at its most complex, a highly complicated religion. (118-19)

Hurston herself saw the possibility of a religious transformation in her own life when she went through the initiation ceremonies. In Mules and Men she describes this experience: "For 69 hours I lay there. I had five psychic experiences and awoke at last with no feeling of hunger, only one of exaltation" (248). She was always receptive to any information or procedures that would help her to understand hoodoo.

Hoodoo is basically used for healing illnesses, especially ones brought on by a hex. A hex is an illness that one person inflicts upon another and that is usually resistant to medical treatment. Other hoodoo practices, moreover, include untangling love affairs,

causing an enemy's death, and securing advantageous legal outcomes. Hoodoo men have certain ways in which they achieve their goals; the ways usually depend on how much power the hoodoo man possesses (Hemenway 119). In Mules and Men, for example, Hurston records one hoodoo man as helping a woman get her mother-in-law to permanently leave the woman's house. He told the woman to cut the core out of an onion, write the mother-in-law's name on a piece of paper five times and put it in the onion, then roll the onion after the mother-in-law when she left the house. Later the hoodoo man went to the house carrying a glass with a candle broken in three pieces and some holy water. He repeated a magic spell and shattered the glass on the ground. The mother-in-law permanently left the house (271).

Though hoodoo is probably no longer dominant in present-day American society, Hurston found hoodoo to dominate Afro-American lives in the late 1920s when she was doing her research. She writes in Mules and Men that though hoodoo practices existed, they were kept secret:

Nobody knows for sure how many thousands in America are warmed by the fire of hoodoo, because the worship is bound in secrecy. It is not the accepted theology of the Nation and so believers conceal their faith....Nobody can say where it

begins or ends. Mouths don't empty
themselves unless the ears are sympathetic
and knowing. (231)

When Hurston became a hoodoo initiate, she joined a closed group of practitioners whose beliefs had their origins in African culture. The secrecy was a necessary element to keep whites and non-believers from destroying Afro-Americans due to their own fear and ignorance of hoodoo. In some ways this secrecy had the same purpose of a mask. Hoodoo practitioners used it to stay alive and relatively free from further oppression.

Once Hurston assimilates enough hoodoo from her "insider" point of view to realize how important its presence is in Afro-American tradition, she decides to research voodoo because voodoo is closer to Africa--and her roots--than hoodoo. As far as most researchers can tell, voodoo originated among the ancient tribes of Africa before spreading to other parts of the world, especially Haiti and Jamaica. Voodoo is not, however, strictly African but more of a synthesis of the pieces that each culture adds as voodoo extends to different lands. Hurston finds intriguing the idea of numerous groups adopting a combination of traditions from different cultures as their own heritage. In the years 1936 through 1938, then, she travels in both Jamaica and Haiti to live among the native people. There she can unobtrusively learn their customs and participate in

their voodoo ceremonies (Hemenway 229).

According to historian Alfred Metraux, voodoo was extended through the exportation of slaves from Africa. In the 1700s the French were conquering and ruling foreign territories, among them Haiti (once called Hispaniola or Santo Domingo). The French destroyed all the native Indians of Haiti and then brought in and ruled African slaves (10-13). These slaves took with them the only things from their homeland that they could carry: their memories and values. And their religious beliefs were lodged within their values and became one link to their traditional past. Therefore, voodoo thrived in Haiti because it gave the African slaves a sense of difference and, thus, a sense of identity.

Another important aspect of Haitian voodoo is that only members of the lower-class believe and participate in the rituals. Haiti has a discernible division between middle- and upper-class citizens and then the lower-class citizens. The higher classes, generally composed of light-skinned Haitians, consider themselves to be the "chosen elite," so they opt for following a Western way of life and reject voodoo. They, however, form a minority group. Most Haitians live in a rural environment; they are usually also very dark-skinned and poor. These are the people who delve into the world of voodoo and who try to keep in contact with the Africa of their roots (Metraux 10). Though the poorer classes are

usually uneducated, education seldom matters when people decide whether or not to practice voodoo. Voodoo provides a way to stay attuned to the past without creating an imprisoning nostalgia for that past. Voodoo, therefore, surpasses all educational boundaries because even the educated masses may need a powerful force toward which they can direct their faith. Also, voodoo is a religion that has believers and requires faith, just like hoodoo. Maya Deren, a renowned dancer and observer of voodoo traditions, says that voodoo fuses African, American Indian, European, and Christian elements (56). These elements work together to form one strong identity for voodoo practitioners, an identity that gives them a sense of purpose and of position inside and outside the community. This strong sense of identity attracts Hurston to voodoo, for she hopes to gain her own identity through a recontact with her cultural heritage. And she sees folklore and voodoo as comprising her heritage.

Deren, however, argues that voodoo does more than fuse these elements, for voodoo borrows elements from Christianity that are then incorporated into the context of voodoo religion. She puts the voodoo-Christian relationship in clear terms:

Where, at first glance, it might seem that Christianity had triumphed over (voodoo), it becomes clear, on closer study, that

(voodoo) has merely been receptive to compatible elements from a sister faith and has integrated these into its basic structure, subtly transfiguring and adjusting their meaning, where necessary, to the African tradition. (56)

The pictures of Christian saints, for example, usually decorate voodoo altars, but the pictures represent loa, male or female spirits, not saints. In some cases St. Patrick represents Damballah, the great serpent deity, because pictures of St. Patrick commonly portray him as chasing serpents into the sea (Deren 56).

Voodoo practitioners find nothing wrong with borrowing Christian terms, for these terms are more familiar than voodoo terms and can create a sense of security for non-voodoo practitioners. In this way voodoo becomes a real and identifiable religion to people who otherwise might be unfamiliar with words such as loa, houngan, and esprit. Besides, violence stems from fear and fear rests on the unfamiliar. In a way the use of Christian terms can be viewed as a protective device for voodoo practitioners.

When forming explanations of voodoo, scholars and other interested observers have to remember that voodoo is a religion that is not easily transferable into familiar, understandable terms. But many times voodoo practitioners change voodoo beliefs into Christian terms

without realizing that the two are not equivalent. They call a houn gan, for example, a priest, and in certain ways they are correct. Deren explains that a houn gan is like a Catholic priest because he performs regular religious rituals. But a houn gan has no central authority figures backing him, so he acts more like a minister in that he acts independently of official dogma. Finally, one of a houn gan's major areas of responsibility is in the herbalistic treatment of disease, making him more like a doctor. The same goes for calling the voodoo word gros/bon/ange (esprit) the soul. The gros/bon/ange means "the invisible, non-material self or character of an individual, as distinguished from his physical body." To a Christian the word soul is steeped in moral and mystical undertones, but to a voodoo practitioner it just means the concept of a person when separated from the physical body (Deren 17-18). Trouble arises when non-voodoo practitioners view the Christian translation of voodoo principles in a connotative way. Most non-voodoo practitioners have no idea what voodoo consists of either literally or figuratively and so are biased in their opinions. Because voodoo is so complicated, then, my main concern is to stress how it relates to Hurston.

One important fact to remember about voodoo is that it is not a "centralized religion," so details differ from region to region (Deren 18). It is not unusual to

find voodoo practitioners in one town performing different rites than practitioners in a town situated only twenty miles away. This regionalization can also be seen in the act of storytelling, which Hurston practices herself and also has her protagonist do in Moses. The folklore that she collects is regionalized in the same way, for one town may have a story about a man who walked forty miles to church every day while a nearby town may change the details from a church to a school and from forty miles to sixty miles. Hurston finds regionalization inherent in folklore, voodoo, and Afro-American life and incorporates it into her own story in keeping with Afro-American tradition.

A common bond that exists in all voodoo, however, is the relationship that voodoo shares with dance. Voodoo can, in fact, be called a dance religion. During most voodoo ceremonies there will be a drummer who participates and keeps a beat going for as long as the ceremony lasts. The drummer needs to be familiar with a wide range of ceremonial songs. While all the drumming is going on, the other voodoo practitioners dance around in intricate patterns depending on what ceremony they are celebrating. The dancers follow the pace that the drummer sets. The atmosphere is so emotionally intoxicating that sometimes the drummer becomes so intent upon her task that she acts as if she is in a trance. Many observers mistake this trance for a common

voodoo occurrence called a possession, but in reality the drummer's body remains free from outside inhabitation. A god, however, might possess the dancers at some time during the ceremony; the dancing lasts the whole night, leaving the dancers physically exhausted yet spiritually uplifted (Metraux 70).

All the energy that is present in voodoo dancers can be transferred to Hurston, the woman with an exuberant personality. She relies so heavily on voodoo because she knows that she reflects the ceremony's unreserved and vital qualities that people need to acknowledge. Because she was rather outspoken and blunt in her conversations, her fellow writers were sometimes distressed by her tone. Hurston, however, did not let other people's opinions bother her. The ceremonial dancing is the perfect medium in which she shows her own personality: energy abounds in Hurston and in the dances.

Because a drummer sometimes looks like he is possessed, it is important to note that though he usually is not possessed, a possession is a very common and normal experience among the voodoo practitioners. Deren explains it in terms of the physical body versus the soul:

Man has a material body animated by an esprit or gros/bon/ange--the soul, spirit, psyche or self--which, being

non-material, does not share the death of the body. This soul may achieve... the status of a loa, a divinity, and become the archetypal representative of some natural or moral principle. As such, it has the power to displace temporarily the gros/bon/ange of a living person and become the animating force of his physical body. This psychic phenomenon is known as 'possession.' (15-16)

Once the loa enters a person's body, that person is no longer herself but conveys the god's personality. Observers of this person should not blame the person for anything that she does, for the person is not in control of her own body.

The best known symptom of possession is the trembling or convulsions that overtake the person due to the displacement of the gros/bon/ange. After the trembling stops the possessed person dresses up to represent the god within (Metraux 85-87). The person, for example, will wind rags around his head and wear an apron if a female god inhabits the person's body. And, the gods are not picky when they choose a person to possess. A male god may inhabit a male or female body; the god does not take the gender of the person into consideration before possession. Possession takes place so that a god can enter a person's body and vicariously

share in joy, wreak vengeance, or express a multitude of other strong emotions or actions (Mettraux 84). Once the god leaves the person's body, the person returns to normal.

It is unfortunate that hoodoo and voodoo, at least in American, have the reputation of being comprised of secret, ominous, and frightening rituals that place mass murderers in charge of getting their hands on either humans to be sacrificed or humans to be brain-washed so they will join the already much too large cult. After all, Americans think that voodoo consists of sticking needles in a rag doll's body and turning other people into zombies. My intention has been to erase these false images and to help people understand voodoo and its relationship with Hurston. Since people have misunderstood it from the very beginning of its existence in American society, though, the mystery that surrounds its origins and practices remains. Hurston sees this mystery and exploits it--by making Moses human yet giving him the ability to perform inexplicable feats--to help in her creation of Moses, the great hoodoo master.

MOSES: FOLKLORE AND VOODOO TO ACHIEVE IDENTITY

In this final section I concentrate on the

portrayal of Moses in Hurston's book, Moses, Man of the Mountain. A parallel exists between Moses, who searches for his identity, and Hurston, who searches for her own. She continues the Biblical tradition of Moses as a powerful leader but adds and changes some of the details. She includes human frailties with hoodoo qualities to devise Moses's personality; Moses is a preacher willing to lead the Hebrews to a land free from persecution, yet he still has doubts as to his own capabilities and at times would like to give up the struggle and let the Hebrews fend for themselves. Hurston feels the same way. Therefore, she creates Moses and shows his wanderings so that she can arrive at an acceptance of her own life and of her own identity. Writing acts as a catharsis for Hurston; as her characters struggle for their niche in society, she struggles for her own.

Hurston published Moses in 1939, four years after Mules and Men (her collection of folklore) and a year after Voodoo Gods (her book about Haitian and Jamaican voodoo). She had explored hoodoo, explored voodoo, and then returned to hoodoo, probably because hoodoo was more easily identifiable with Afro-Americans (hoodoo existed in the United States) than voodoo was. In some ways 1939 can even be seen as the end of her artistic search for an identity, for with the completion of Moses, she had truly found her position in the literary

field. All her novels that were to gain her the critical attention she most assuredly deserved had already been written by this time. During the last two decades of her life, she concentrated on writing only three more books: her autobiography, a novel depicting Southern white folks, and an unfinished novel about Herod the Great. Since she had already gained her literary reputation, she was free to explore different approaches and techniques in the writing of these works.

The timing of Moses, then, right after successfully exploring the world of voodoo and after receiving praise for her writings about Afro-Americans, points to Moses as being the culmination of Hurston's search for an identity. She has already established confidence in her quest for identity, but now she connects hoodoo practices as a part of Afro-American culture with herself as a woman and a novelist when she tries to formulate her own identity. And, Hurston's sense of self and sense of community grows stronger when the element of hoodoo is introduced, so she consciously weaves it among the characters in Moses. Finally, she sees herself as a Moses-like character, using her talent to lead Afro-Americans to a higher level of social, political, and artistic freedom.

Hurston creates Moses because he represents an Afro-American cultural tradition that links him with Hurston's image of the Afro-American folk. Throughout

Haiti and the United States, for example, the Biblical story of Moses is well-known, and voodoo practitioners have come to associate Moses with a voodoo god.

Hurston, in Voodoo Gods, explains the voodoo connection with Moses:

Damballah Ouedo (pronounced way-doe) is the supreme (loa) and his signature is the serpent....All over Haiti it is well established that Damballah is identified as Moses, whose symbol was the serpent. This worship of Moses recalls the hard-to-explain fact that wherever the negro is found, there are traditional tales of Moses and his supernatural powers that are not in the Bible, nor can they be found in any written life of Moses. The rod of Moses is said to have been a subtle serpent, and hence came his great powers....It is probable that there is a tradition of Moses as the great father of magic scattered all over Africa and Asia. (121)

The connection between Moses and voodoo leads to the connection between voodoo and Afro-American culture; therefore, an unending circle exists to fuse voodoo, Afro-Americans, and Moses.

Hurston chose to write about the story of Moses partly because Moses's powers are so common among

Haitian legends and partly because she related so well to the idea of Moses as a leader of an oppressed people. She saw herself fulfilling the same type of role. According to critic Ruthe Sheffey, Hurston agreed with major historians in citing the story of Moses as correct: a man called Moses did exist, and he did lead a great Exodus from Egypt. Sheffey says that Hurston also concurred with Freud who was researching the premise that Moses was Egyptian rather than Hebrew and had come to the conclusion that this premise was accurate. It is difficult to tell whether they were right or not in judging Moses's nationality, but Sheffey clearly states that both Freud and Hurston "concluded that Moses was a leader who was needed by--nay, more willed by--an oppressed people into being one of their own nationality" (206-9). Hurston suggests that Moses is from an African background so that she can help the people in her major audience, the Afro-Americans, identify more closely with the notions in her book. Once that link is established, Hurston can mold Moses into a figure representing her own hopes and failures. In essence, Moses guides the Hebrews and Hurston guides the Afro-Americans to a better understanding of themselves and of their position in society.

Hurston's version of the story of Moses follows the Biblical version except for two major differences: one, no one ever knows if Moses is an Egyptian or Hebrew, but

an obvious difference; and two, Moses relies more on hoodoo than on God for his powers. Hurston begins her story with an interesting twist. Moses, the Hebrew, is born secretly and hidden for three months; if he is found, he will certainly be killed since Pharaoh's (the ruler of Egypt) guards have orders to kill all the male babies. Moses's parents, wanting to give their baby a chance in life, put Moses in a basket adrift on the river. Moses's sister Miriam is told to watch the basket and make sure that it is safe. Miriam, however, falls asleep, loses sight of the basket, and then makes up a story about Moses to please her questioning mother. Miriam says that the Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and decided to adopt him. Every time she tells the story, though, it grows more elaborate. She has everyone, even herself, believing that a Hebrew will be living in the Pharaoh's palace and will even be a king one day. Thus, Miriam starts the myth of Moses.

Hurston, while collecting folklore in the South, found that the process of expansion and hyperbole is a major factor in the way that Afro-Americans tell their own folk stories. This process is what makes their stories unique (Hemenway 51). Hurston, then, takes this process and adapts it to fit into her book. She writes in Moses, for instance, that "It [Miriam's story] grew with being handled....Others conceived and added details at their pleasure and the legends grew like grass" (51).

Hurston knows that if she wants to have her novel capture and express Afro-American traditions, then she has to incorporate as many Afro-American cultural principles as possible into her work.

Hurston has stronger motives, though, than just exploring Moses, the man, as a legend; she creates Moses as a shadow of herself. She gives him feelings, actions, and sentiments. She gives him power. All the qualities that Hurston bestows on Moses represent qualities that Hurston either possesses or for which she strives. In a way Hurston hopes her life will end where she starts Moses's life. She creates a mythical man with human characteristics, and she wants to turn her humanness into an everlasting myth. But she is extraordinary, and she knows it and wants others to know it, also. She perceives her struggle to overcome prejudice and oppression as a way to establish her own leadership qualities. She wants Afro-Americans to see her as a leader like Moses, able to guide the masses to cultural, social, and artistic freedom.

The second difference, then, between Hurston's Moses and the Biblical Moses rests on the idea of how Moses gets his powers to lead and to control. In the Biblical version Moses becomes God's vessel; Moses can do what God commands because God gives him the strength and the ability to perform miracles. The Biblical Moses has no power except that which God gives him to use.

Hurston's Moses, on the other hand, has Pharaoh's priests, the horse tender Mentu, and then Jethro to help him gain knowledge and power. His ultimate and greatest power, however, comes when he conquers the immortal serpent at Koptos who guards the book that, if read, "will bring you to the gods" (73). He reads the book and becomes more powerful than any of the other priests. Furthermore, he uses this power to help free the Hebrews and eventually to take them into the land of Canaan. Jethro and God tell him what to do, but most of his power comes from his knowledge of hoodoo. Of course, God does give Moses the sacred staff that changes into a snake and is useful during Moses's magic feats, but Moses is never powerless without it.

Moses's powers range all the way from those of a simple man who has good leadership qualities to those of a man who brings plagues upon whole populations. Hurston's Moses exudes charm and charisma, and he has the ability to command. He spends his early years in Egypt as a great military leader in charge of the Egyptian forces. In this position he conquers other countries and wins the respect of the men he commands. But he is also human and one day decides to leave the pain and death of warfare behind him. He never, however, loses his powers of leading men. The other side of him, the side that thirsts for the knowledge that will make him more powerful than any of the

Pharaoh's priests, shows his hoodoo abilities. He performs the same feats as the Bible records Moses as doing: he turns water into blood; he brings forth the plagues of lice, boils, hail, locust, flies, and darkness upon the Egyptians; he produces manna and quail for the Hebrews out of the barren desert. The Moses in the Bible, though, receives all his help from God while the Moses in Hurston's book receives help from magical or hoodoo potions and actions. When he wants fresh water, for instance, he does not call upon God for help. While thinking about what to do, he remembers meeting a traveler who "had gone to a tree, broken off a branch and thrust it into the spring" (245) where, miraculously, the undrinkable water turned fresh. Moses repeats this trick to provide for the Hebrews.

Hurston not only intends for us to view Moses as the greatest hoodoo master who ever lived, but she also wants us to view Moses as holding a culturally, economically, and socially significant position that an ordinary person can obtain when he shows enough persistence in trying to acquire knowledge. Because of Moses's story, no one knows for sure whether Moses is Egyptian (technically, the ruling upper-class) or Hebrew (the poor, slave class). Either way, Moses works his way up from a coddled child to a learned youth who loves to read books for the knowledge that they bring him. He basically starts out with nothing but cunning, strength,

and kindness and ends up with the power to change people's lives.

In addition, Moses can lead people out of physical and spiritual death and despair, and Hurston, or anyone willing to tackle the responsibility, can do the same. Both the protagonist Moses and Hurston see the lack of cultural freedom as a detriment, because, Hurston believed, people can best assert themselves by acknowledging their own heritage. She, however, goes further in her beliefs and sees the lack of creativity, especially the loss of writing that includes portraits of the Afro-American masses, as cultural death and the nonchalance of Afro-Americans and whites alike concerning this lack of creativity as despair that infects the whole deprived culture. She suggests that Afro-Americans learn to act on their own and to elevate their positions in society by sharing their creative abilities with each other and with different races. With these thoughts she is following DuBois's esthetic principles almost exactly. He was the one who said that Afro-Americans "must do for themselves" and also must remember that the best way for them to achieve cultural elevation was through their own abilities (Rudwick 77).

Hurston makes clear, however, that the road to achieving elevation--whether social, cultural, or creative--is difficult to attain because members of one race are often wary of members of another race. It

takes a powerful leader to overcome racial fears, and Moses once again shows his worthiness in this situation. When he first decides to leave his home after he is accused of being a Hebrew, for example, he muses over searching for a new nation:

He was wishing for a country he had never seen. He was seeing visions of a nation he had never heard of where there would be more equality of opportunity and less difference between top and bottom. (100)

From the very beginning Moses hopes to crush class rankings and divisions. He wants to be part of a nation that has only one economically, culturally, and socially equal class. Once again DuBois's esthetic principles show up in Moses's beliefs, but this time Locke's principles also coincide. Both men believed in destroying the caste system; they did not believe in the superiority of one race over another.

When Moses's wish for a nation based on equality becomes known to all, however, the Egyptians and the Hebrews question his motives. Pharaoh calls him a radical who stirs up the common people into talking about equality (190). Sometimes the Hebrews think he is trying to rule over them. When Moses kills the Egyptian who is beating the Hebrew, the Hebrews turn on Moses and accuse him of trying to become their boss. They think

that Moses is pretending to be their friend, and as soon as some of the Hebrews become uncooperative, Moses will kill them (95).

All along Moses denies that he is out to be king, but no one believes him. Even during the few times when he considers how easy it would be to rule the Hebrews, he never takes any action. His purpose is to lead the Hebrews to freedom. Since he sees so many instances of one race suppressing another race, he rebels against the existing system; he wants a physically free race that is also free from class divisions. It is true that Pharaoh captures Egyptian aristocratic support with the statement that "The majority of the ruling class saw ruin in social change" (209), but that is because the Egyptian ruling class will suffer economic collapse without free labor. The Egyptians think they need lower-class beings to do the hard, dirty work that they disdain. Moses, however, is out to create social change by destroying the caste system, just as Afro-American leaders want to destroy the American caste system so they can live culturally equal to whites.

The Egyptians and Hebrews put Moses through the same rigors that Afro-Americans and whites put Afro-American leaders through. The masses are notorious for questioning the motives of an individual, for they think that too much power in one man is dangerous for the good of all. DuBois, Locke, and Hurston probably had to deal

with the grumblings from a dissatisfied few who thought that each was acquiring a little too much power and might start forgetting the masses as he tried to obtain even more. Jealousy can cloud people's minds when they think that one person is receiving much more attention than he deserves. If the leader is strong enough, however, as in the case of DuBois, Locke, Hurston, and Moses, then he forgets the nasty remarks that some people may make and concentrates on fulfilling his job of guide to the masses.

Moses and his people are connected with Hurston and Afro-Americans because, in reality, Hurston presents Moses as an allegory depicting the plight of Afro-Americans through the slavery years and beyond. A distinct clue lies in the dialect that Hurston creates: it ranges from the formal Egyptian court talk to the informal Afro-American slave dialect. When Moses is with Pharaoh and with anyone connected with his early life (such as Mentu), he talks concisely and leaves out common phrases; his language is almost stilted. He tells the illiterate Mentu, for example, that "If it were not for the feasts and the entertainments, and the announcements of the promotions in the army, I would start out for Koptos tomorrow..." (74). His words sound very dignified. During his early life Moses keeps class positions in mind and realizes that he is powerful, thus his speech reflects this fact. By the time he reaches

Jethro, however, he has lost his belief in positions, so he adapts his language to suit his needs. And even Jethro, a prince, changes his speech to reach the largest audience. Moses describes Jethro as having self-confidence along with a bit of simplicity:

He (Jethro) looked as if he could understand and talk with shepherds as well as Kings. So Moses was not surprised when he spoke to hear him dropping into idiom of the simple people....Moses was constrained to meet him on his level as they talked. (117)

But Moses is not the only one who talks in a specific dialect, for most of the Hebrews use a dialect similar to Afro-American speech. One of the most pleasurable parts about Moses is the way that the characters' language reflects their personalities. At the beginning of the book when Moses is born, the Hebrews converse in Afro-American idiom. They use expressions such as "plug-uglies" (21), "high on the hog" (16), and "you stupid dunce" (44). These phrases would sound even more unnatural than they do coming from Egyptian mouths. The Hebrews even have problems with their verb tenses and say things like "I done talked..." (28) and "...nobody ain't thanked him yet. We was so excited..." (241). Moses, though he uses the Afro-

American dialect since Jethro tells him that "it's always a great advantage when you're managing people to be able to speak their kind of language" (122), is leading the Hebrews (who speak like Afro-American slaves) out of exile. The parallel between the Hebrews and the Afro-American masses is undeniably present.

Moses rescues the Hebrews and guides them away from physical, emotional, and spiritual death and towards Canaan and to a rebirth. He is in charge of leading the people from a land of bondage to a land that is free from persecution. Hurston's Moses, however, knows by the end that even though people may be physically free from oppression, they still may not be emotionally and spiritually free. For this feat to occur, the people have to act on their own:

He (Moses) had found out that no man may make another free. Freedom was something internal. The outside signs were just signs and symbols of the man inside.

All you could do was to give the opportunity for freedom and the man

himself must make his own emancipation. (345)

This feeling also runs over to the Afro-American masses. Hurston tries to create Afro-American art so that she and all Afro-Americans will be accepted in a society that does not want change though it needs change. She realizes that she can stir others into reacting against

social and artistic inequality, but that is all she can do: Afro-Americans have to react in a manner they think appropriate to accomplish their goals. Hurston, of course, wants them to develop their connection with their cultural heritage more fully so that they can gain a better understanding of themselves as Afro-Americans in a predominantly white, upper-class society.

Because Moses possesses so many human qualities, then, he can be viewed as a demystified legend existing on the same level as the Hebrews. Moses suffers pangs of guilt, fits of jealousy and rage, and moments of doubt. A few times he even thinks about leaving the Hebrews. A tiny voice in his mind tells him to go:

Moses, you can go back to Egypt and be King. You can do even better than that. You can control the army which controls the King. The Voice told you to lead out with a high hand. You have done your duty....If they fall into slavery again somewhere else that's none of your business. (240)

Of course he does not listen to this tiny voice, but he shows a side of himself that is susceptible to human weaknesses and failings. Afro-Americans can recognize Moses as a real person with a connection to their past more easily now than they could before he was given some of the same emotions that they themselves have.

Hurston, therefore, places Moses at the top of the social scale because his hoodoo is so powerful, yet she then hints that his place in society may not be as desirable as Afro-Americans may think. Even though Moses is powerful, he has some human qualities that can lead to his downfall, just like any person who is situated high on the social scale.

Moses has a responsibility to himself and to the people he leads that is not always easy to fulfill. Hurston wonderfully depicts the chosen people as sometimes gossiping snobs, sometimes riotous dissenters, and sometimes meek followers. The Hebrews do have a personality, but it is more of a group personality than any individual with a personality: we rarely glimpse Hebrews separate from the group unless we see a glimpse of either Aaron or Miriam, supposedly Moses's brother and sister. Aaron and Miriam become a silent voice of the people; they stir up unrestful emotions among the Hebrews and then watch as Moses has to deal with the resentment. The Hebrew masses, blindly letting Aaron and Miriam lead them, make Moses's job difficult. While Hurston stresses the importance of Moses and of his position in society, she also cautions against the problems that people in high positions have.

Moses's attempts at preaching earn him the recognition of trying to unite the Hebrews into a strong, intertwined group that watches out for the good of all.

Sheffey connects Moses with the image of the Afro-American preacher in modern times:

...there is no denying the centrality of the black preacher as a unifying force, often as an agent of protest. Moreover, he has often been a force in the community which traditionally imparted hope, which has helped the community to seek communal strategies and tactics, and which has urged endurance amid hardship and despair.

(212)

To Sheffey Moses represents a core or center around which the community grows: the preacher as the basic building block. While I agree with Sheffey's observations, I think that she misreads part of Moses's purpose. Moses is, of course, a preacher (though a limited one in terms of spouting religious doctrine), and he does try to unite his people. Hurston, however, never really portrays Moses as a person that the Hebrews flock around and look toward for love, unity, or a sense of honor or duty. They may accept his presence, but they never quite understand that his purpose is to deliver them from bondage by uniting their spirits. If the Hebrews cannot grasp Moses's motivations and desires, then it is hard for us to assign him the position of being the core around which a great society is to be built. Moses tries to unify the people--and at times

even succeeds--yet without the Hebrews' recognition of this fact, he is almost defeated before he begins. Hurston wants to stress that the key to unity is in a person's recognition of the forces working together for that unity, not in a specific individual who says he wants unity. The acts are important, not the people carrying out the acts.

At some points in the novel Moses is a reluctant leader and hero, for in helping the Hebrews, he loses part of his own identity and has to struggle to regain it. Hurston creates this confusion in Moses to parallel her own confusion when she lost and then had to regain her identity. Moses, though, is unhappy with being a military leader and with controlling the lives of the Hebrews when they are in bondage. Consequently, he "crosses over," both literally and figuratively, in search of a meaning for his life:

He had crossed over. He felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he once had been. He was a man sitting on a rock. He had crossed over. (104)

Hemenway points out that humor exists in this passage because Hurston is creating a pun playing off the word passing. In this case passing means "crossing over the color line." Moses, however, is crossing over the wrong way, for usually a person passes as white and here he is

leaving "white" Egypt for "black" Asia (270). With all humor aside, though, Moses symbolically crosses over and reaches the conclusion that he has no true identity since he just relinquished everything that he was and knew. But then his luck turns, for he meets Jethro and learns that this man wants Moses to help in starting a great exodus.

Jethro, in one sense, becomes Moses's savior, and even takes on the role of a houngan, for Jethro gives him a mission to perform and then guides him along the way. One critic says that Jethro is an important figure because he teaches Moses "to follow his intuition." She goes on to say that the "lure of the mountain in Jethro's land suggests the affinity between the two priests (Moses and Jethro)" (Joyce, "Myth and Reality" 10). Since Moses becomes so attached to Jethro, he follows Jethro's advice and helps the Hebrews. Without the closeness between the two men, Moses would never have consented to be the leader of such an undertaking. Jethro, not God, is mostly responsible for the success of Moses's mission, and through that success, Moses finds his identity. He is satisfied with the direction in which his life moves, and though he still shows human weaknesses, he fits into the role of a powerful leader. He has found his niche in society; the people finally accept him.

Hurston is in the same position as Moses, for she

also has a mission to perform that will help her gain a sense of her identity. Hurston's mission, however, is to capture Afro-Americans in her writing and show how appropriately Afro-American culture reflects the artistic beauty of the masses. Moses and Hurston are the same on one level, though, for Moses has a difficult time finding out who he is and what he should do, and so does Hurston. Hurston lets Moses complete his mission and regain his identity because she has to complete her mission and regain her identity through the writing of the novel. If Moses fails, then the purpose of Hurston's book fails: she gains her success by writing a message of success.

Hurston and, subsequently, Moses have difficulty finding their identities, and in a way identities in general get twisted and lost through the description of the Hebrews as animals. Animal imagery exists throughout literature that deals with Afro-Americans, especially in works written during or taking place during slavery times. Animal stories also exist throughout African, Haitian, and hoodoo stories. Hurston, in Mules and Men, cites different cases of the uses of animals: one woman was hexed so that a live gopher appeared in her stomach (232) and one hoodoo man entombed a chicken and a cat, for these animals were to call a man to his grave (260). The actual animal imagery, though, serves as a way to suggest that the Afro-Americans/Hebrews are

regarded as being somewhere below the level of human beings. In Moses, for example, the Hebrews, living under the psychological horrors of slavery, refer to themselves as feeling like mules (18). The narrator adds to this animal imagery when describing scenes: "Amram and Caleb got off and plodded on home..." (18); "Instantly the woman and her husband became hunted beasts" (29). The Hebrews are always described as the lowly animals and are treated as such. After many years of this treatment, they probably start to believe it themselves. Their identity as human beings begins to get blurred.

To Hurston, however, the word mule meant more than just a symbol representing the degradation of Afro-Americans: it was a word that also had positive qualities attached to it. She chose the word mule quite often, the two most obvious uses being in the title of her folklore collection Mules and Men and in the title of "Mule Bone," the play on which Hurston and Langston Hughes supposedly collaborated. Hemenway explains Hurston's use of a title linking mules to men:

The phrase meant not only that black people were treated as mules, but also that they were defiantly human--mules and men. The identification itself demonstrated how a negative relationship (slave : mule : beast of burden) could

be transformed into a positive identity

(beast of burden : mule : slave : man)...(222)

Since Hurston wrote Mules and Men before Moses, she had already formed the notion that the term mule could reflect the stubbornness that would cause a slave to reject his conditions and fight out against the system. In Moses, then, she shows that the Hebrews have not only lost their identity as human beings, but also that they can regain it by rejecting their oppressor and following Moses to a free land.

Hurston, moreover, has Moses call himself an animal to defy the stereotype that says Afro-Americans are lowly beings. Moses tells Pharaoh that when he comes to look for him, Moses will be there "exulting like a stallion" (219). Moses does not allow himself the disgrace of being called a mule or donkey; he beats Pharaoh and says that he is stallion-like: strong, vigorous, healthy, proud. Moses may not be able to help all the Hebrews in this way, but he certainly stands up for his own rights.

Moses's identity grows and becomes deeply ingrained within himself as the book progresses. He is a hoodoo man and leader. He creates a community in which his existence is essential. Also with the progression of the book, however, Hurston's identity grows. She uses Moses as a figure representing herself. Moses goes on a journey in search of freedom for the Hebrews and in

search of the basis for his own identity. Hurston transfers Moses's movements into her own life: she goes on a journey in search of artistic and social freedom for the Afro-Americans and in search of the basis of her own identity. They both, then, find their identity by helping the masses and by developing a close contact with their culture.

Zora Neale Hurston was caught in an era that was not kind to women, to Afro-Americans, or to writers. She struggled to overcome the prejudices that threatened to destroy her work by creating her own principles in which to live and by which to write. Her writing stands as a testament to her success. Through her studies in folklore and voodoo, and her numerous novels, she recorded elements from her African past, elements that would strengthen in her a bond between her cultural heritage and her own sense of identity. Though she was sometimes uncertain about her directions and gained clarity by people such as Franz Boas, the outcome was always the same: she collected folklore, voodoo, and hoodoo, and she gained a greater sense of her identity than she had had before her fieldwork.

Folklore, voodoo, and hoodoo are the elements that anchor Hurston in her African background and that help her establish her Afro-American identity which leads to

the establishment of her identity as author. As for her quest for an identity as a woman, she also found that on her journeys. She was a woman traveling into a male society, yet she successfully gathered cultural material. The boundaries that shut her out because of her gender, however, are too numerous and complicated to explain. She had, though, made a good start in defeating opinionated males who thought that women should be married and bear children, not traverse swamps and put themselves in danger just to collect stories. But Hurston did as she pleased and did not let public sentiment stop her from performing the tasks that she felt she was called to do. One of these tasks was researching; another was writing.

Moses is probably Hurston's greatest achievement in gaining an artistic identity. She skillfully blends the mythological yet real character of Moses with the real yet mythological figure of herself. It is almost as if she creates a side of herself that she wants others to see in the metaphor of Moses. For example, Hurston's Moses might very well be Egyptian, making him closer to the Afro-American people. He also uses hoodoo as a way to express himself more fully and to be more culturally aware and active. Finally, he leads the people on a journey to a land free from oppression. Hurston thinks that Moses is a great man who feels strongly about leading but not ruling; she hopes that she has the same

quality and can accomplish the same goals with Afro-American masses. She wants to set them free, artistically and culturally free, and will even take on the characteristics of a powerful hoodoo man.

Hurston was an Afro-American woman novelist fighting for a voice in a male-dominated society. She produced, therefore, a novel depicting this strong male character. Through Moses's achievement of self-identity and a subsequent sense of belonging to a community, Hurston achieved her own identity and her own community. Her anthropological research under the tutelage of Franz Boas and her explorations into voodoo and hoodoo helped to create Moses; she learned about Afro-American traditions and endowed her protagonist with them so that he could stand as a beacon for culturally and artistically deprived Afro-Americans to emulate as a model. Moses had reached out to the Hebrews and, allegorically, to the Afro-American races because he knew he had strong cultural values to offer to them.

So, taking into consideration Hurston's wild, outgoing personality, it is not surprising that she envisioned and captured a story about the life and times of Moses, the great leader. She could turn out stories as fantastically and experimentally manipulated as this one is because of her own creative and experimental capabilities in seeking her identity. She made her knowledge work for the good of the people and of herself.

Moses, Man of the Mountain, finally receiving the attention from modern scholars that it so immensely deserves, shows a view of the life that Hurston knew well: the life of the poor, rural Afro-American masses.

WORKS CITED

- Bennett, Lerone. Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America. 3rd. ed. Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co., 1966.
- Deren, Maya. The Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti. New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1970.
- DuBois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology. Ed. Richard Bachsdale and Keneth Kinnomon. New York: Macmillan, 1972. 369-373.
- Hemenway, Robert E. Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography. Urbana: Univ. of Il. Press, 1980.
- Hughes, Langston. The Big Sea. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979.
- . "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." The Nation. 122 (1926): 692-694.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." Negro: An Anthology. Ed. Nancy Cunard. New York: Ungar, 1970. 24-31.
- . Dust Tracks on a Road. 2nd. ed. Chicago: Univ. of Il. Press, 1984.
- . Moses, Man of the Mountain. Urbana: Univ. of Il. Press, 1984.
- . Mules and Men. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.
- . Voodoo Gods: An Inquiry into Native Myths and

Magic in Jamaica and Haiti. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1938.

Joyce, Joyce Ann. "Change, Chance, and God in Zora Neale Hurston's `Their Eyes Were Watching God.'" ---. "Zora Neale Hurston's `Moses Man of the Mountain': Myth and Reality." ZNH Conference, Univ. of Il., Champaign, 21 Sept. 1985.

Locke, Alain. "The New Negro." The New Negro. Ed. Alain Locke. New York: Atheneum, 1969. 3-16.

Metraux, Alfred. Haiti: Black Peasants and Voodoo. New York: 1960.

Rudwick, Elliott. "W.E.B. DuBois: Protagonist of the Afro-American Protest." Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century. Eds. John Hope Franklin and August Meier. Urbana: Univ. of Il. Press, 1982. 62-83.

Sheffey, Ruthe T. "Zora Neale Hurston's `Moses, Man of the Mountain': A Fictionalized Manifesto on the Imperatives of Black Leadership." College Language Association Journal. 29 (1985): 206-220.