

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

November 26. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (3).

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<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~ag978/355/>

Housekeeping

Paper 2 due today by 4 p.m.

Sakai Drop Box. PDF if possible.

Number pages.

Last-minute hard copy: AG in Murray 031

Office hours today 3:00–4:30

Starting the synthesis

Blog assignment: A historical line

By Wednesday at 8 p.m.

Write a blog entry with short notations (a few words) about **four** works we have read in relation to a single specific theme, device, problem, or pattern. Note the dates of the works as well. Then write at least two sentences about the **literary-historical trajectory** you see: continuity? sudden change? gradual evolution? opposing tendencies?

Review

Responses to Hurston

Wright: Hurston continues minstrelsy

Locke: Hurston is a good folk writer, but no depth

Question of “the folk”: primitivism

celebrate energies of allegedly uncivilized people

or adopt allegedly “savage” styles and philosophies

But: Hurston isn't playing

Review

Thurman: problems of representation

- burden of having to have correct politics

- burden of racial representativeness (“butter side up”)

- refusal to cater to middle-class aspirations

- Hurston’s novel is not “respectable”: so there

Review

The misfit minority novel

Question: can the novel be political in other ways than being representative, respectable, aspirational, affirmative?

Misfit novel: reject uplift, individualism, communal good feeling, good romance, happy endings

These “good” things can be an oppressive double bind for minority writing specifically

Review

Is *Their Eyes* a misfit minority novel?

happy mythologizing of self-sufficient black community
or critique of gender/class fractures?

affirmation of Janie's ultimate autonomy
or unsparing account of limitation?

Apparent stance of novel varies with reader's *field position*
e.g. Older generation (Locke) vs. "Negro youth" (Hughes)

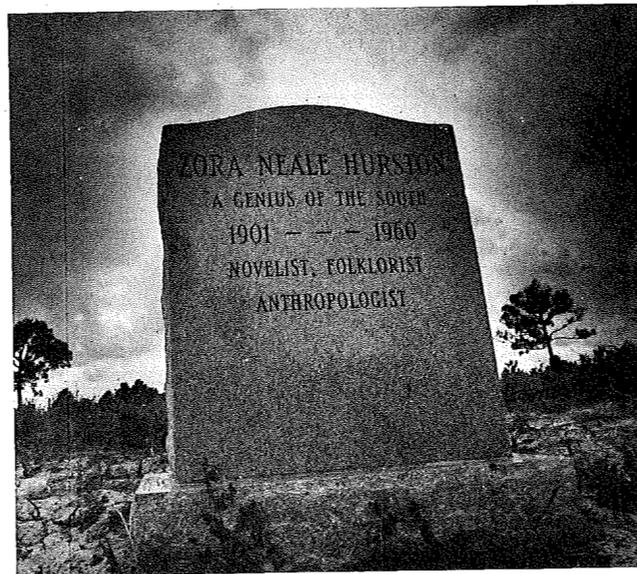
Reader's position

74/Ms.

I N S E A R C H O F

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

BY ALICE WALKER



On January 16, 1959, Zora Neale Hurston, suffering from the effects of a stroke and writing painfully in long-hand, composed a letter to the "editorial department" of Harper & Brothers inquir-

three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jailhouse." Of course I cannot see the guavas, but the five lakes are still there, and it is the lakes I

if they would be interested in seeing "the book I am | count as the plane prepares to land in Orlando.

Ms. 3 (March, 1975): 74. Page image: Douglass Library, Rutgers

Reader's position

“I am Zora Neale Hurston's niece, and I would like to have a marker put on her grave...”

By this time I am, of course, completely into being Zora's niece, and the lie comes with perfect naturalness to my lips. Besides, as far as I'm concerned, she *is* my aunt—and that of all black people as well.

Alice Walker, “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston”
(Ms., 1975): 78

Reader's position

But the “circle” [on the mortician’s map of the gravesite] is over an acre large and looks more like an abandoned field. Tall weeds choke the dirt road and scrape against the sides of the car....

“I don’t know about y’all,” I say, “but I don’t even believe this.”... This neglect is staggering.

Walker, “In Search,” 79

Reader's position

“She *didn't* have a pauper's funeral!” he [Dr. Benton, who knew ZNH] says with great heat. “Everybody around here *loved* Zora.”

“We just came back from ordering a headstone,” I say quietly... “but to tell the truth I can't be positive what I found is the grave. All I know is the spot I found was the only grave-size hole in the area.”

... “Do the weeds still come up to your knees?”

“And beyond,” I murmur. This time there isn't any doubt. Dr. Benton feels ashamed.

Walker, “In Search,” 87

Reader's position

BOOKS IN PRINT

Zora's papers can be found in the library at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and in the James Weldon Johnson Collection, Bienecke Library, Yale University. (A biography of Zora, by Robert Hemmenway of the University of Kentucky, will be published late this year.)

Jonah's Gourd Vine, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971: hardcover, \$5.95; paperback, \$2.95. (A novel, originally published in 1934.)

Their Eyes Were Watching God, a Fawcett Premier Book, Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1972: paperback, 95 cents. (Originally published in 1937, this novel is Hurston's masterpiece.)

Mules and Men, Harper & Row Perennial Library, Harper & Row Publishers, 1970: paperback, \$1.50. (Originally published in 1935, this book is a folklore classic.)

Dust Tracks on a Road, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971: hardcover, \$5.95; paperback, \$2.95. (Originally published in 1942, this is Hurston's autobiography.)

BOOKS NOT IN PRINT

(but check public libraries)

Moses, Man of the Mountain (novel), J. B. Lippincott Co., 1939.

Tell My Horse (folklore), J. B. Lippincott Co., 1938.

Seraph on the Suwanee (novel), Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

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Reader's position

Hurston's **hypercanonization** in American studies, African American studies, and women's studies beginning in the late 1970s...

Martyn Bone, "The (Extended) South of Black Folk" (2007)

Reader's position

“Lawd!” Pheoby breathed out heavily, “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin’.”

“Now, Pheoby, don’t feel too mean wid de rest of ’em ’cause dey’s parched up from not knowin’ things.” (192)

Embedded critique

The thing made itself into pictures and hung around Janie's bedside all night long. Anyhow, she wasn't going back to Eatonville to be laughed at and pitied. She had ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank. But oh God, don't let Tea Cake be off somewhere hurt and Ah not know nothing about it. And God, please suh, don't let him love nobody else but me. (120)

Embedded critique

Please, Jesus, don't let them nasty niggers hurt her boy. If they do, Master Jesus, grant her a good gun and a chance to shoot 'em. Tea Cake had a knife it was true, but that was only to protect hisself. God knows, Tea Cake wouldn't harm a fly. (126)

Embedded critique

Real gods require blood. (145)

No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (147)

“Ah beat her to show dem Turners who is boss.” (148)

Discussion (write for 5 minutes, then talk)

1. How should we interpret the violence of Tea Cake towards Janie? Consider her self-defense as well. What is the feminist reading?

Feminist?

Discussion (Bildungsroman)

2. Compare Janie's narrative arc to a normative arc of female development. How is the arc a misfit? Is this feminist?

Feminist?

Discussion (Bildungsroman)

2. Compare Janie's narrative arc to a normative arc of female development. How is the arc a misfit? Is this feminist?

re-marriage

no reproductivity

property—a social loop-the-loop instead of a rise or fall

extended middle age

Another social vision

September 16, 1928

Okeechobee Hurricane, having already hit the Caribbean, killing 300 in Puerto Rico, hits Florida

Another social vision

Known dead in Florida, from 1,500 to 3,000, with no possibility of an accurate check ever being made. In Porto Rico, 210 reported dead. In St. Croix, Virgin Islands, six reported dead.

Homeless: In Florida, 15,000; in Porto Rico, 400,000.

Injured: In Florida, 185; in Porto Rico, 2,771.

Ill: In Florida, 191; in Porto Rico, 20,000.

In the seven counties in Florida where the storm caused great damage, 17,500 persons have registered with the Red Cross as desiring assistance in some form to rehabilitate themselves.

The number of persons under Red Cross care in these seven counties follows: Palm Beach 12,822, Martin 800, Okeechobee 110, Dade 375, Broward 1,125. Total, 15,232.

Another social vision

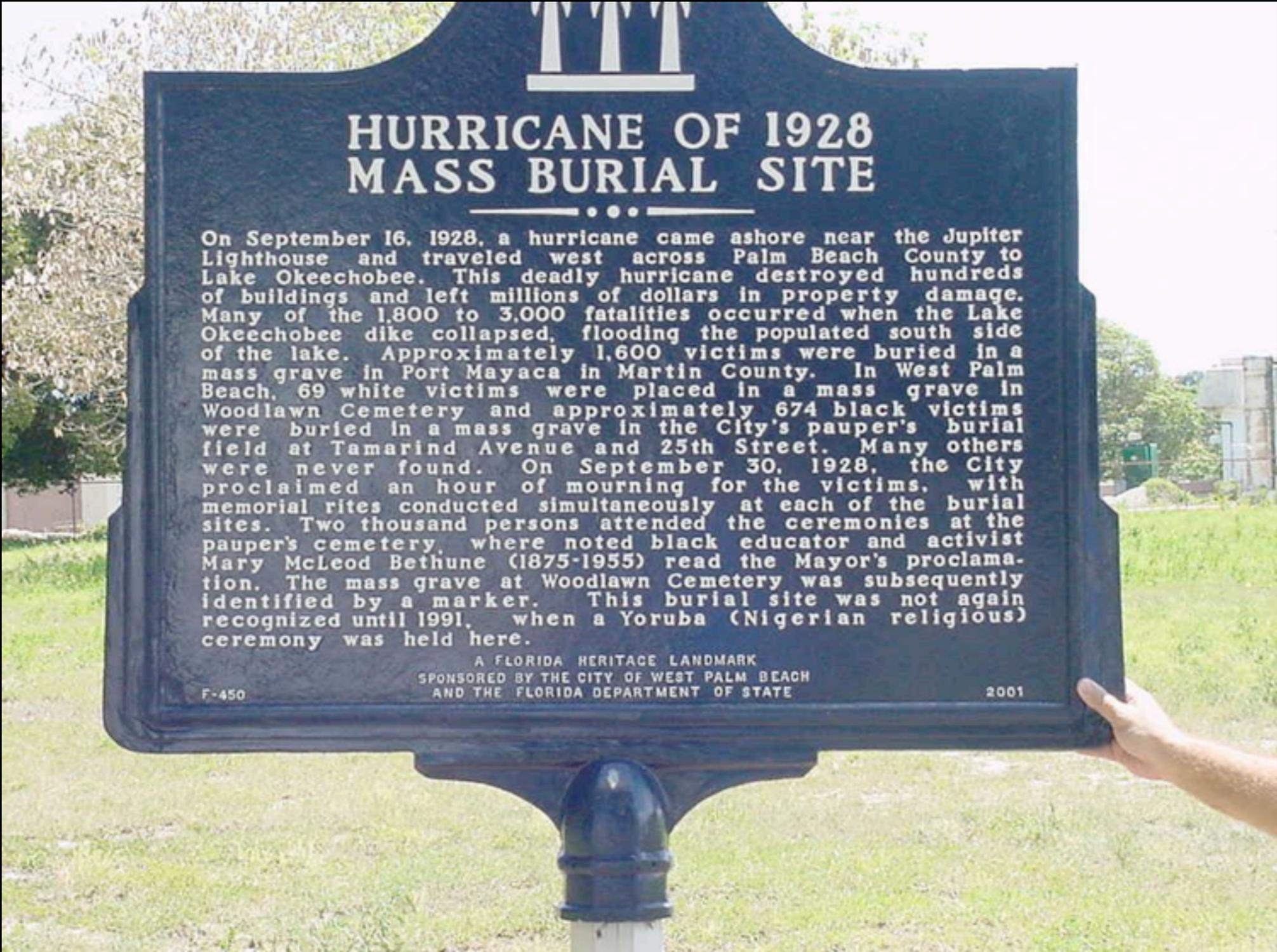
BIG HURRICANE TOLL LAID TO DROWNINGS

Miami Mayor, Here, Says Wind
Alone Killed Less Than 12%
of 1,500 Florida Victims.

LAKE OKEECHOBEE BLAMED

Government Will Be Asked to Build
\$5,000,000 Canal to Control
Waters of "Death Trap."

Of the toll of 1,500 deaths in the recent Florida hurricane, less than a dozen were actually killed by the storm itself, and the others were drowned by the overflowing of Lake Okeechobee, according to Everest G. Sewell, Mayor of Miami, who is stopping at the Waldorf, where he arrived yesterday. The Mayor characterized the lake as a "death trap," and said that had proper precautions been taken, the loss of life from the storm would have been negligible.



HURRICANE OF 1928 MASS BURIAL SITE

On September 16, 1928, a hurricane came ashore near the Jupiter Lighthouse and traveled west across Palm Beach County to Lake Okeechobee. This deadly hurricane destroyed hundreds of buildings and left millions of dollars in property damage. Many of the 1,800 to 3,000 fatalities occurred when the Lake Okeechobee dike collapsed, flooding the populated south side of the lake. Approximately 1,600 victims were buried in a mass grave in Port Mayaca in Martin County. In West Palm Beach, 69 white victims were placed in a mass grave in Woodlawn Cemetery and approximately 674 black victims were buried in a mass grave in the City's pauper's burial field at Tamarind Avenue and 25th Street. Many others were never found. On September 30, 1928, the City proclaimed an hour of mourning for the victims, with memorial rites conducted simultaneously at each of the burial sites. Two thousand persons attended the ceremonies at the pauper's cemetery, where noted black educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) read the Mayor's proclamation. The mass grave at Woodlawn Cemetery was subsequently identified by a marker. This burial site was not again recognized until 1991, when a Yoruba (Nigerian religious) ceremony was held here.

A FLORIDA HERITAGE LANDMARK
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AND THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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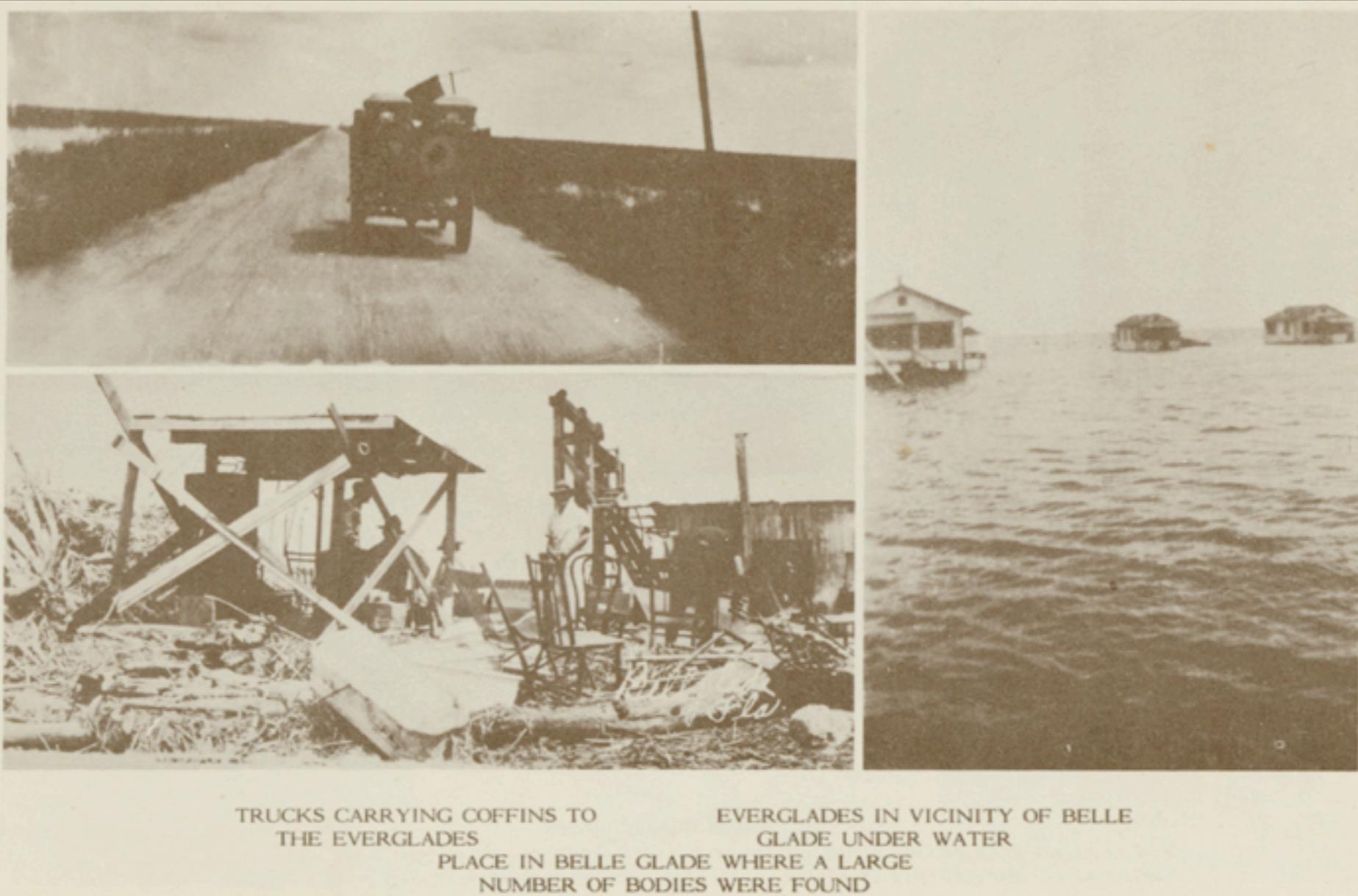
NOAA Okeechobee hurricane memorial,
<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/mfl/?n=okeechobee>



SCENES AT PALM BEACH

GUS' BATHS
NEAR ALBA HOTEL
FLAGLER DRIVE AT PENNSYLVANIA
HOTEL

ROYAL POINCIANA GROUNDS
AUSTRALIAN PINE WALK
ROYAL PALM WAY



NOAA Okeechobee hurricane memorial,
<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/mfl/?n=okeechobee>

Another social vision

“Don’t dump no white folks in de hole jus’ so.”

“Whut tuh do ’bout de colored folks? Got boxes fuh dem too?” (171)

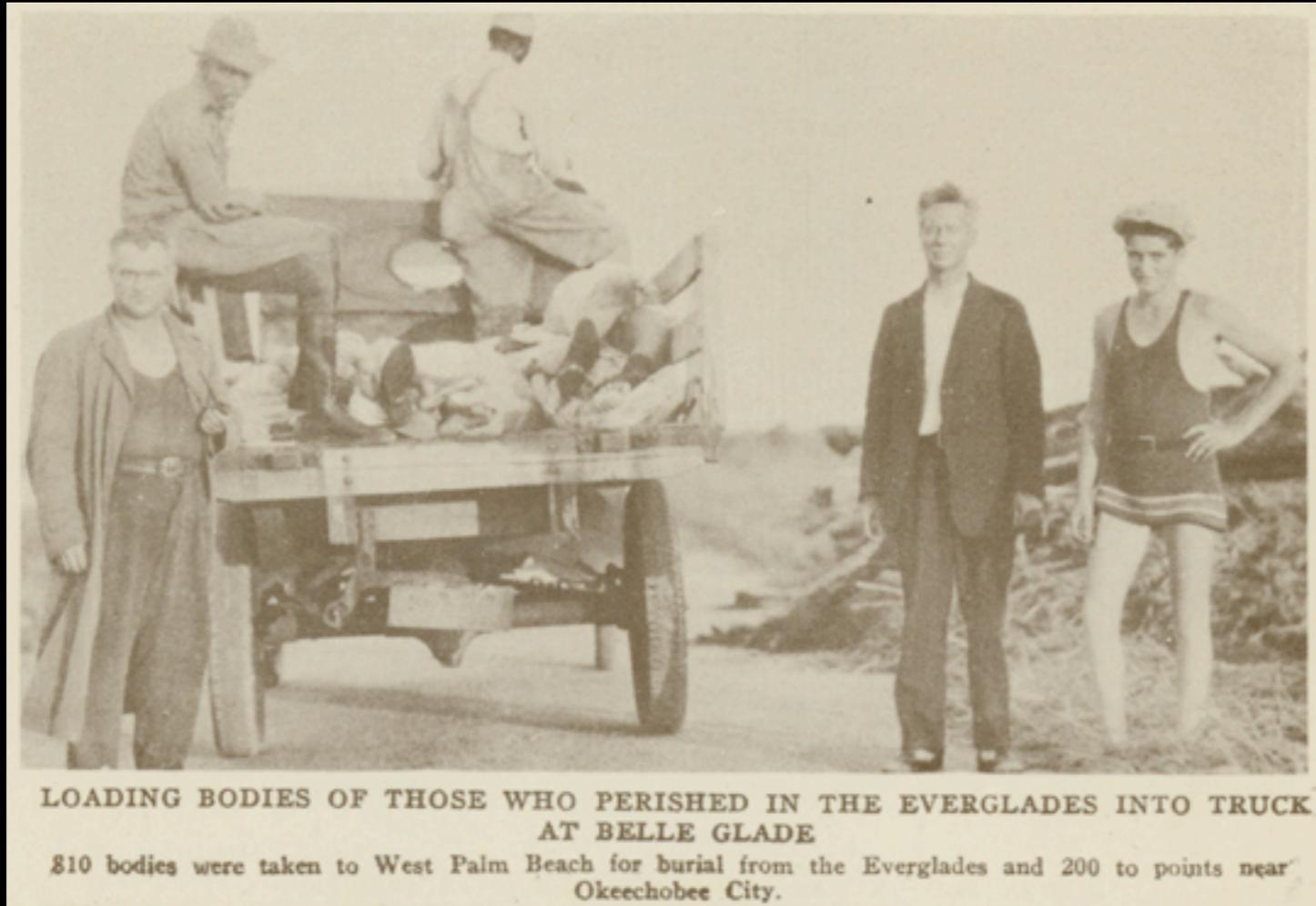
69 whites buried in Palm Beach’s Woodland Cemetery

674 blacks buried en masse in vacant lot in W. Palm Beach

Perhaps 6000 dead, of whom 80% were black field workers

Corpses were not just found in wrecked houses. They were under houses, tangled in shrubbery... (170)

NOAA Okeechobee hurricane memorial,
<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/mfl/?n=okeechobee>



“Don’t dump no white folks in de hole jus’ so.”

“Whut tuh do ’bout de colored folks? Got boxes fuh dem too?” (171)

Social vision

Since Tea Cake and Janie had friended with the Bahaman workers in the 'Glades, they, the "Saws," [i.e., Nassaus], had been gradually drawn into the American crowd. (155)

One of the Bahaman boys stopped by Tea Cake's house in a car and hollered....

“De crow gahn up, man.” ...

“If Ah never see you no mo' on earth, Ah'll meet you in Africa.” (156)

Comparative moment

They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God. (160)

Discussion

Compare the social vision of environmental catastrophe in *As I Lay Dying* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. What happens to the social world in the flood?

Social vision

The novel maps south Florida's powerful economic position within an extended Caribbean—or alternatively, an extended South—characterized by transnational migrant labor.

Martyn Bone, “The (Extended) South of Black Folk” (2007)

Social vision

In short: another periphery?
peripheries within peripheries...
or recentering the margins (Janie's *nostos*)

Next

Nightwood

Read at least to 83

Historical line blog entry by Wednesday evening